

Entering the world of

DIGITAL WELLBEING

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Welcome to this introductory online publication

Please take note of the following when navigating through this resource:

- This is an integrated text consisting of links to different webpages, videos and other third-party resources.
- Look out for the following icons:
 - To enrich your learning experience, we suggest that you keep a journal reflecting on your own knowledge and experience while engaging with the resource.
 - Remember this is not an exhaustive resource – please feel free to add your own strategies.
 - This is not a once-off read and should form part of your overarching strategy in managing your digital wellbeing.



Video



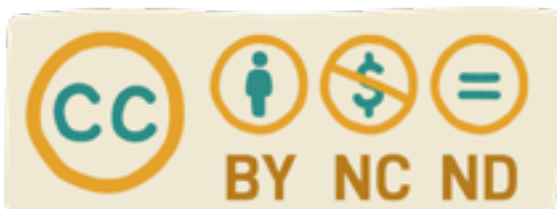
Webpage / blog



Self-reflective activities



“The purpose of this publication is to encourage you to be continuously cognisant of the importance of our relationship with our digital devices. It is only by critically reflecting on the positive and negative aspects associated with the status of digital devices in our lives that we will be able to adapt to a rapidly changing world.”



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Entering the World of Digital Wellbeing: An Introduction

Introduction

Human beings have been searching for the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow for many centuries. Philosophers such as Aristotle and Confucius have published numerous writings about 'the good life' and what it is supposed to consist of. Experts are still conducting extensive research with the hope to create the perfect model for ultimate happiness and success. However, it seems that this is a never-ending exercise with frequently inconclusive results.

Ed Diener, the world's number one researcher of *subjective wellbeing* – aka *happiness* – declares that there are no exact prescriptions or recipes for how to experience 'the good life'. He is of the opinion that everyone should be able to make cognitive and affective judgements about their own life in order to determine the level of their own perceived happiness, and, based on that, design their own pathway to happiness (Diener, 2009; Diener, Shigehiro & Tay, 2018).



Subjective wellbeing: your appraisal of your own level of happiness and life satisfaction (VandenBos, 2015).

Cognitive judgements: your thoughts and beliefs about the quality of your life.

Affective judgements: the feelings and emotions that you experience related to the quality of your life.

(VandenBos, 2015:1154)

Adding to the challenge of establishing what 'the good life' or 'happiness' entails and how to attain it is the fact that you must constantly adapt to the demands of the rapidly evolving world that you live in. With each new development in your world, you need to learn new skills to adjust to it. This will ensure that you do not only survive but that you also flourish and thus experience higher levels of wellbeing.

The rapid growth of digital technologies is an example of a development that can promote your wellbeing, but it may also pose several risks. It is imperative that you acquire insight into and knowledge about the effect of these technologies on your own wellbeing and that you continuously develop skills to manage yourself effectively in the digitalised realm that you live in. In the rest of this chapter, we will explore the concept 'digital wellbeing', how technology and digitisation can complement your wellbeing and how it can interfere with your wellbeing.

We will introduce the concept 'digital flourishing', and you will be able to complete your own digital flourishing profile.

Digital wellbeing

The Jisc digital capabilities framework (2019, p.8) defines digital wellbeing as follows:

- The capacity to look after personal health, safety, relationships and work-life balance in digital settings.
- The use of digital tools in the pursuit of personal goals (e.g. health and fitness) and to participate in social and community activities, act safely and responsibly in digital environments, negotiate and resolve conflict, and manage digital workload, overload and distraction.
- Concern for the human and natural environment when using digital tools.
- Understanding of the benefits and risks of digital participation in relation to health and wellbeing outcomes.

Digital technology and digitisation, however, also pose a risk to your wellbeing and it is therefore imperative that you be aware of digital wellbeing in order to manage your own wellbeing optimally.

For instance, Kushlev (2018) suggests that technology and digitisation can *complement* or *interfere with* your wellbeing by referring to the following examples:

How digital technology can *complement* your wellbeing includes the following:

- **A source of positive emotions:**

Watching an uplifting video and reading inspiring texts are sources of positive emotions.

- **A source of basic needs satisfaction:**

Using text messages or phone calls to communicate with friends and family can improve your sense of connectedness.

- **Efficiency and convenience:**

One of the primary goals of technology is to make your life easier, for example using the internet to answer intricate questions or using your smartphone's GPS to reach an unfamiliar destination.


How does digital technology currently complement your wellbeing?

Technology and digitisation can *interfere* with our wellbeing in the following ways:

- **Concurrent attention costs:**


People have limited cognitive capacities. This implies that if you carry out more than one activity at the same time, for example attending a lecture, surfing the internet and checking Instagram all at once, you can limit the cognitive resources that should be dedicated to a specific task. You will use the same cognitive resources, namely attention and working memory when you perform these activities.





Attention is a “state in which cognitive resources are focussed on certain aspects of the environment rather than on others and the central nervous system is in a state of readiness to respond to stimuli”
(VandenBos, 2015, p.87).

Your working memory is “the short term maintenance and manipulation of information necessary for performing complex cognitive tasks such as learning, reasoning and comprehension”
(VandenBos, 2015, p.1162).



Although you may believe that you can successfully perform all three activities at once, it is impossible. According to Napier (2014), research has proven that the phenomenon of **multitasking** does not exist. What happens is that you switch from one activity to the other in a very short time span. Each switch, however, needs to utilise your working memory and attention. This puts your cognitive resources under increased stress.

Limited research is available about the exact impact of distraction caused by digital technology and digitisation on your wellbeing. Kushlev, Proulx and Dunn (2017) instructed research participants to spend one week with their smartphones within their immediate reach and with notification alerts switched on. During another week, the same participants were asked to put their smartphones away where they could not reach them easily and they were also instructed to switch the notifications off. Can you guess the results and findings of this study? The participants indeed reported that they experienced higher levels of inattention when the alerts were turned on and when it was quite easy for them to reach their phones. The higher levels of inattention correlated with lower levels of psychological wellbeing.

A challenge for you

1. Switch off all notifications on your cell phone for one week
2. Place your cell phone somewhere where it is not immediately accessible to you – at home but also when you are socializing
3. After the week, reflect on your levels of attention and mindful living during this week

In another study by Lepp, Barkley and Karpinski (2014), the usage of digital technology was linked with negative academic outcomes in university students. This low academic performance had a negative impact on their subjective wellbeing, and they reported high levels of anxiety.

● Delayed attention costs:

Digital technology can limit your attention span even when you are busy with activities that do not involve using such technology. This implies that due to your prolonged exposure to technology, your ability to pay and sustain attention for longer periods of time even while you have switched off all technology may be significantly affected. An example is when you need to pay attention during a 50-minute lecture. Bhat (2017, n.p.) explains it as follows:

In the current age of fast-paced modern technology and social media, it's no wonder that adults—let alone children—are unable to focus their attention easily. Think about how much stimulation we're exposed to daily, and how much it impacts your world. Between smartphones, iPods, email, TV, DVRs, the internet, social media and more, our brain's neurons are firing on all cylinders all day long.



Another example is a very thought-provoking article titled "[Is Google making us stupid?](#)" by Nicholas Carr, published in the July/August 2008 issue of The Atlantic, in which he laments unexpected changes in his ability to concentrate and read complex written work. He attributes these challenges to his daily activities on the internet. What do you think about Carr's accusation against the internet?



Also [watch](#) this video by Nicolas Carr (2011):

We acknowledge that researchers still do not know what the exact effect of the prolonged exposure to different forms of digital technology and digitisation is on our brains, but arguments about the possible link to problems with attention do exist. Maybe you should consider becoming involved in some exciting research about this phenomenon in the future!

● **Substitution:**

People may pay an emotional price when they substitute happiness and wellbeing activities that involve interaction with other people with digitalised interactions. An example is when you substitute socialising with friends on a Saturday evening with online gaming or when you substitute enough quality sleep with binge-watching television series.

Reflective Activity

How does digital technology currently interfere with your wellbeing? Can you recall any specific examples?

A dilemma or opportunities to flourish?

Google, one of the largest and most popular technology companies, has the following credo: "[Focus on the user, and all else will follow](#)" (<https://www.google.com/about/philosophy.html>). From a business perspective, this makes sense because it highlights the importance of always keeping the consumer in mind when you develop a product. In the digital realm, this manifests in algorithms, machine learning and artificial intelligence being utilised to tweak every individual user's digital experience according to his/her needs, interests and unique behaviour.

In the recent documentary-drama *The Social Dilemma* (Rhodes & Orlowski, 2020), the rise of social media and its potential damage to society is explored. The movie paints a picture of doom and gloom in which the financial exploitation of users, the rise of addiction, the role of social

media in the distribution of false news and its deleterious effect on mental health are discussed by people who are or were employed by social media giants.

Reflective Activity

Watch the trailer of the movie [The Social Dilemma](#) (Rhodes & Orlowski, 2020).

In your own words, explain what you understand as 'the social dilemma'. Do you agree with the producer and the participants in the movie?



The Digital Wellness Institute hosted a panel discussion after the release of *The Social Dilemma* and asked Jeff Orlowski, the director of the movie, to explain this so-called dilemma in his own words. His response was as follows:

“Industrial capitalism figured how to turn nature into a raw resource to be exploited and extracted and this new era of technology that we have built – the surveillance capitalism – has figured out how to turn humans into a raw resource for extraction. We don't recognize it. We don't see it. We just think it is this innocent interaction with this rectangular device that we keep in our pockets, but behind it is this machine that is programmatically designed to extract from us, different things from different people, but it is that fundamental mechanism – this business model – that is kind of this umbrella over the entire experience that we have online that I think that is the biggest dilemma we are wrestling with.”

You can watch the panel discussion with the title *A digital flourishing dialogue* (Digital Wellness Institute, 2020) [here](#).

After watching the movie trailer and the panel discussion, you have the choice to accept things as they are, to become anti-digital technology or to engage in a responsible way with digital technology while keeping your digital wellbeing in mind. The digital wellbeing approach encourages the users of digital devices to strive for “a way of life, while using technology, that promotes optimal health and wellbeing in which body, mind and spirit are integrated by the individual to live more fully within the human, natural and digital communities” (Hersher, Janicke-Bowles & Lomanowska, 2020, p. 16). This can also be referred to as striving for digital flourishing.

Flourishing

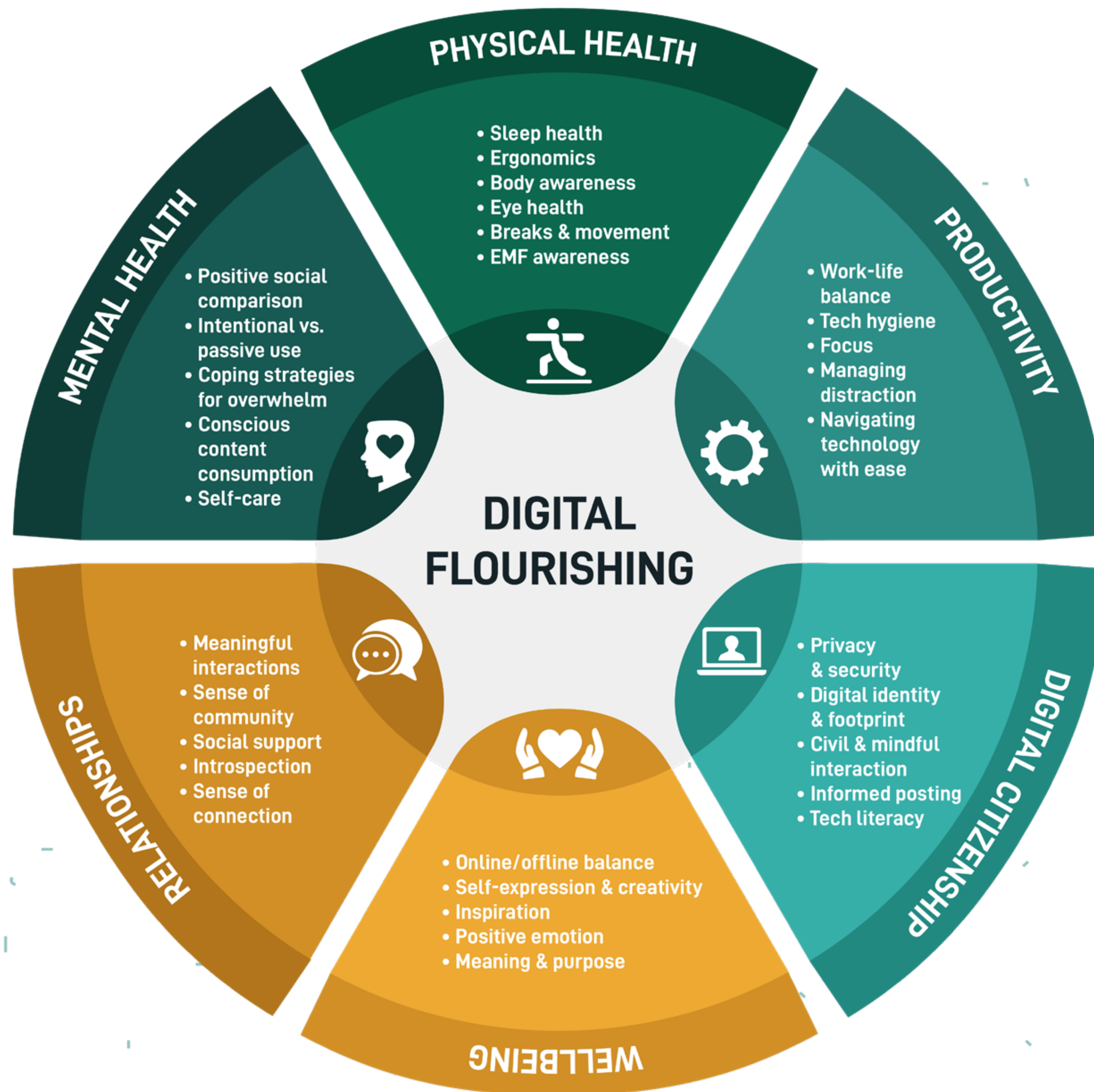
Flourishing refers to a state of optimal wellbeing and denotes good mental and physical health. It is “a state of being free from illness and distress and, more important, of being filled with vitality and functioning well in one's personal and social life” (VandenBos, 2015, p. 427).

Digital flourishing

According to the digital flourishing wheel (Figure 1), we need to continuously and proactively address six different domains to ensure that we flourish during the digital age. These domains are the following:

- Mental health
- Physical health
- Productivity
- Relationships
- General wellbeing
- Digital citizenship





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Figure 1: Digital flourishing wheel

Source: Reprinted from Hersher, Janicke-Bowles, & Lomanowska (2020, p. 21).

Icon source: www.flaticon.com

¹The primary resource for this section is Hersher, N., Janicke-Bowles, S., & Lomanowska, A. (2020). Digital wellness toolkit. Digital Wellness Collective. [Online]. Retrieved: <https://screentimenetwork.org/resource/digital-wellness-toolkit-2020>

Reflective Activity

Before we discuss each one of the domains, we would like to invite you to complete the [Digital Flourishing Survey](#) (Hersher et al., 2020, p. 23):

Are you flourishing or are you languishing?



Read further to see how you can adjust your practices from languishing to flourishing, and/or maintain your current flourishing wellbeing.

Mental health

Excessive use of digital technology and social media can have a debilitating effect on your mental health. It can potentially aggravate the symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress, and it can cause mood and anxiety disorders.

Professor Larry Rosen (2012), an expert on the psychology of technology, coined the notion of 'iDisorder'. He argues that the constant and excessive influx of information via our

digital devices is more than what our human minds can handle. Because of this information overload, an increasing number of people present with debilitating symptoms such as obsessive-compulsive behaviour, difficulty with maintaining focus or hyperfocusing, distractibility and addiction.

Reflective Activity

How has social media affected your happiness during the past week?

People who are flourishing in the mental health domain of the digital flourishing wheel are controlled and intentional in their use of digital devices, applications and social media. They do not expose themselves to negative social online comparisons, and they do not experience an almost constant fear of missing out. These individuals do not use digital technology to escape reality.



Tips to protect and promote your mental health:

- Identify and befriend people on social media who support you and whose social media posts generate positive and constructive experiences.

- Unfollow those who can potentially harm your mental health.
- Actively reinforce feelings of self-worth by posting about positive experiences and achievements.
- Contribute to others' wellbeing by sharing words of encouragement, gratitude and praise.
- Join an online mental health support group.
- Take active control of the time that you spend with technology. Remember that it is not only about the amount of time that you spend interacting with technology. How you spend this time is also an important predictor of the influence of technology on your mental health.
- We are receiving news faster than ever, and we consume more news than ever. There can be pressure to be up to date on all the current tragedies all around the world. This of course can weigh on your mind and make you feel very anxious or depressed. There is a distinction between being well-informed and constantly on edge due to the state of the world.
- Avoid [outrage media](#).
- Can you think of any apps that can help you to monitor your screen time?



Physical health

People who spend many hours with their digital devices can experience worrying physical symptoms, an indication that their physical health may be at risk. Carpal tunnel syndrome, neck and back pain, eye strain and sleep problems are positively related to digital overuse (Loos, 2017).

Have you heard about 'tech neck'? Watch this [video clip](#) by Bridget Carey (2017) to learn more about it, including how to prevent it.

People who are flourishing in the **physical health domain** of digital wellness are aware of the importance of a healthy body posture while they are using their digital devices. They also take special care of their eye and sleep health.



Tips to promote your physical health:

- Always observe good body posture.
- If you often experience aches and pains in your body, it may help to
- hold your phone or tablet at eye level when you are reading a text;
- use a standing desk when you work on your computer or laptop;
- alternate between standing and sitting in front of your computer or laptop; and

- do body stretches or go for a walk after 90 minutes of sitting behind a screen.
- Take regular screen breaks.
- Switch digital devices off at least 30 minutes before bedtime.
- Are you inclined to check your cell phone just after you wake up? Rather have a charging station in a separate room (e.g. kitchen) so that you can start your morning with a positive waking-up routine that excludes looking at your digital devices for at least the first 15 to 30 minutes of screen, look for 20 seconds at something that is 20 meters away from you.
- Do not take your digital devices on a lunch date. It is much more fun to enjoy nice food with friends and family around the table.
- For those who have to spend extensive periods of time working at a desk, it is beneficial to consider the ergonomics of your desk setup. For example, invest in a chair that will support your back, if you work on a laptop consider getting a laptop stand and a separate keyboard, so that you can keep your hands on your desk, while keeping your head upright.

Productivity

People who can focus for longer periods of time on one specific task or project, who can limit distractions and interruptions and who

can maintain a work-life balance flourish in the **domain of productivity**.

Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone, once said, "Concentrate all your thoughts upon the work in hand. The Sun's rays do not burn until brought to a focus." Although digital technology has evolved over the years to improve individuals' and companies' productivity significantly, it also poses a direct threat to it. One of the main reasons is that it is becoming increasingly difficult to focus on a single task while emails, texts and push notifications are constantly the day. Rather write in your journal or go for a walk in nature.

- Use the 20-20-20 rule to care for your eyes: After every 20 minutes spent looking at a being delivered on our devices. It is also often more exciting and takes less effort to surf on the internet or play an online game than to complete a difficult assignment.



Tips to promote your productivity:

- Turn off all nonessential notification alerts on your laptop and other digital devices.
- Close your email browser and switch off the sound of your cell phone applications while you are working on an assignment or project.

- Check your email at specific times of the day.
- Put your phone away while you are working on an assignment or project.
- Set special times to check your social media feeds.
- Can you think of any apps that could assist you in managing your productivity and encourage you to take regular breaks?

Relationships

Introducing social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram greatly affected the **world of relationships**. Social media usage can have positive and negative influences on the quality of relationships. One of the positive outcomes of social media is that it allows us to establish relationships with people who do not live near us and with whom face-to-face interactions are not always possible. Social media makes it easy to connect with people at almost any time of the day without having to make the effort to meet in person. However, researchers (Butler & Matook, 2015; Sherrel & Lambie, 2016) found that social media could also impact relationships negatively in a variety of ways. Conflict, jealousy and bullying can be the result of destructive behaviour on social media networks.

Remember that individuals who experience flourishing relationships usually try to pay uninterrupted attention to others during face-to-face interactions. Their online interactions are also characterised by meaningful and positive reflective content.



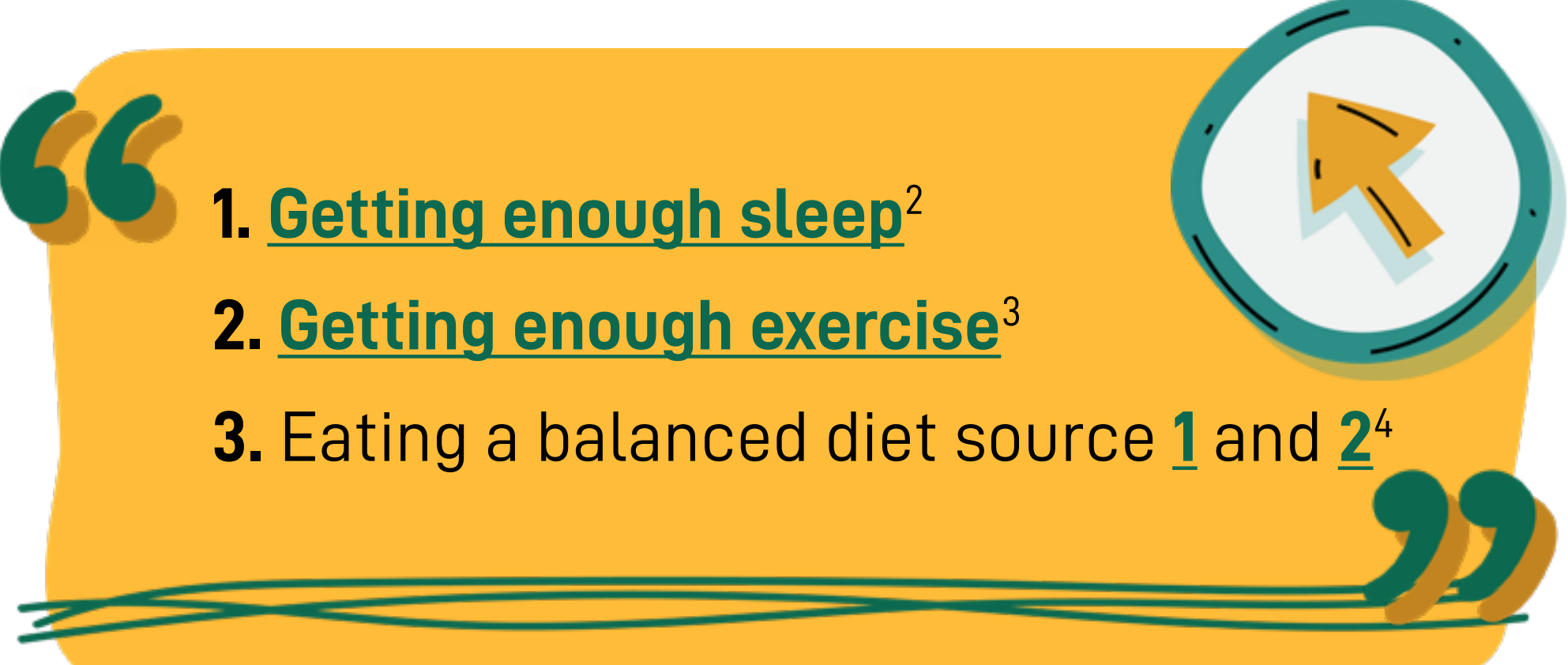
Tips to improve your online relationships:

- Be authentic and positive in your online interactions.
- Join friends online whom you can trust and share interests with.
- Unsubscribe from or unfollow online friends, groups or pages that are not conducive to your quality of life.
- Start a family or friend gratitude practice by daily posting and sharing with each other three things that you are grateful for.

General wellbeing

People who flourish in the **general wellbeing domain** reflect joy, meaning, growth, self-expression and inspiration in their online behaviour.

Getting enough quality sleep, exercising regularly and following a balanced diet are important components of general wellbeing. Here are some interesting blogs about these topics that you can read:



1. [Getting enough sleep](#)²
2. [Getting enough exercise](#)³
3. Eating a balanced diet source [1](#) and [2](#)⁴

You can use technology to enrich each of these wellbeing activities. Applications that help you to practise mindfulness activities can improve the general quality of your sleep. Fitness devices help with motivation and to reach specific exercising targets. Joining a social media group that provides information about healthy nutrition can encourage you to follow a balanced diet.

²(Furber, 2020), ³(True Fitness, 2020), ⁴(University of Waterloo, n.d. & The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa, 2020)



Tips to improve your general wellbeing:

- Do a digital detox by unplugging once a week for a certain amount of time.
- Use an app to learn a new skill or language.
- Read inspiring blogs.
- Join an online advocacy campaign.
- Capture the moment with a photo and post it on Instagram.

Digital citizenship

Digital citizenship "teaches you how to live in the digital world safely, responsibly, and ethically" (Digital Wellbeing Educators, 2020, slide 8). The principles 'safety', 'savvy' and 'social' provide guidance for developing digital citizenship.

- Safety focuses on protecting yourself and protecting others and creates the base of digital citizenship.
- Savvy focuses on educating yourself and connecting with others.
- Social focuses on guiding yourself and others to make decisions that exemplify your commitment to respect yourself and others (Digital Wellbeing Educators, 2020, slide 9).

People who are flourishing **digital citizens** have well-developed skills in online communication etiquette, privacy and information/news literacy.



More tips to improve your digital citizenship:

- Always think and reflect before you comment or post images online. Ask yourself, "Is it appropriate?"
- Keep passwords secure. Read the blog *Password security best practices in 2020* by Rakesh Soni [here](#) for more information about security in today's digital age.
- Always check the source of the information that you access online. Is it reputable?
- Ask yourself before you post something would you be ok with a prospective employer or your parent seeing what you have posted?

Conclusion

Each of us has a responsibility to take care of our own wellbeing and to strive towards promoting the wellbeing of the community. Our digital selves cannot be separated from the rest of our lives. If we are not taking care of our digital wellbeing, the quality of our lives will be at risk. In this section, we looked at the six different domains of digital wellbeing and we explored different ways to promote wellbeing in each domain.



Finding Yourself in the Digital Space: Self-image, Identities and Online Relationships

Setting the scene

Erikson (1968), a well-respected theorist on identity formation, explains that identity development is a lifelong process. It is seen as a universal development task and serves as the foundation for forming healthy relationships and a general sense of wellbeing. Erikson highlights that adolescence (age 12–19) is an especially critical time when young people tend to explore and try out different identities. While trying out these identities, they also strongly seek affirmation from their peers. During early adulthood (20–25), the focus and need shift to developing intimate, strong and loving relationships with others. In developing an identity, we generally strive towards being aware of ourselves, meaning how we think about, evaluate and perceive ourselves. For example, we think about what attributes we can identify about ourselves and try to answer the questions, “Who am I?” or “What am I like?”.

While reflecting on how we think about ourselves, we may also realise that we have more than one identity as our identities not only reside in our minds and bodies (e.g. I am friendly, talkative, and tall with short hair) but are also influenced by the various social contexts that we act in (e.g. being a student, sibling, team member, mentor or employee).

Research has shown that the current increased use of the internet can influence the development of identity and self-concept. The internet can assist in strengthening your self-concept and self-esteem, but it has also been indicated that internet overuse could lead to less clarity regarding your identity (Isrealashvili, Kim, Bukobza, 2012).

Whether designing avatars, selecting profile pictures or crafting texts to friends, people have countless opportunities to express themselves through digital media. This section will

encourage further reflection on your identity development and how your online and offline lives have an impact on developing a coherent identity. We will also investigate why people sometimes choose to have different personas and when having different online personas can be harmful or beneficial.



Understanding of self-concept and identity

As mentioned, identity or self-concept is seen as what we think, perceive or evaluate ourselves to be. Is identity then something that is fixed or fluid; in other words, will it remain the same or can it change and develop? Now that we can express ourselves online as well, can we develop an online identity and how does this identity relate to our offline identities?

Internet identity

Internet identity, also online identity or internet persona, is a social identity that an internet user establishes in online communities and on websites. It can also be considered as an actively constructed presentation of yourself.

Offline identity

Offline identity is who you are when you are not connected to the internet, online communities and websites (Self-image and online-offline identities, n.d.).

For both online and offline identities, research has shown that identity is a fluid concept, something that is constantly reworked while striving towards coherence. Identity is multifaceted due to the different roles that we play and the different contexts that influence these roles. Online identity becomes even more multifaceted due to the various platforms that influence online identity development. The most common platforms include the following:

- Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn)
- Blogging
- Membership of an online community
- Gaming
- Streaming sites
- Smartphones

These different platforms can be used for different purposes. On some we can choose to share information within certain limits whereas others offer opportunities to share information on public spaces. Gaming can take place in both individual and socialised (either in person or virtually) settings. With the development of smartphones, the computer need no longer be separate from us but is something that we can always be connected or attached to. These

different platforms thus offer the opportunity to have various online identities, depending on the platform and the purpose that we are using the platform for. Providing only one definition of online identity is therefore challenging (Miller, 2013).

Watch the following two videos that demonstrate how online activity can influence our identity:

- [The Effects of Social Media on Identity](#)
- [Identity SHORT FILM](#)



These videos illustrate that it can be very easy to turn into someone else while online without even realising that you are becoming less authentic. We need to question what impact our online activity will have on our identity development. You should ask yourself the following questions: "Am I presenting a less authentic image/picture of myself online?", "Is my online image damaging to my self-worth?", "Do I possibly send misleading messages to my network and potential network?" and "Is my online identity perhaps offering me the opportunity to explore certain qualities or characteristics that I would like to portray in my offline identity?"

There are, however, arguments against distinguishing between offline and online identities. Consider Piotr Czerski's (2012)

"[We, the web kids](#)" article in The Atlantic:



We grew up with the Internet and on the Internet. The Internet to us is not something external to reality but a part of it: an invisible yet constantly present layer intertwined with the physical environment. We do not use the Internet, we live on the Internet and along it ... [there is] a natural Internet aspect to every single experience that has shaped us: we made friends and enemies online, we prepared cribs for tests online, we planned parties and studying sessions online, we fell in love and broke up online.



Providing a definition of online identity has been argued to be challenging. This opinion even goes as far as to reject the idea that one should distinguish between or put forward different definitions of online and offline identity but rather suggests that online and offline spaces, experiences and identities are inseparable.

The following section will give you the opportunity to reflect on your own views of identity. We will explore whether you can distinguish within

yourself a difference between your online and offline identities or whether you see these as inseparable, as suggested by Czerski (2012).

Identity map

Let us first start to explore our offline identity. [Watch](#) the following video of Sara Nuru and her story of identity development. Just take note that this video is about 18 minutes long, so make sure that you are in a comfortable space to watch it.



Reflective Activity

Let us reflect on Sara's talk: Can you point out various identities that you associate with or have been able to identify in yourself? Drawing your own identity map will offer you the opportunity to explore how you adopt different identities in different situations and contexts. Use the following prompts and example of an identity map to draw up your own identity map. While drawing up this map, focus only on the various identities that you associate with in your offline life.

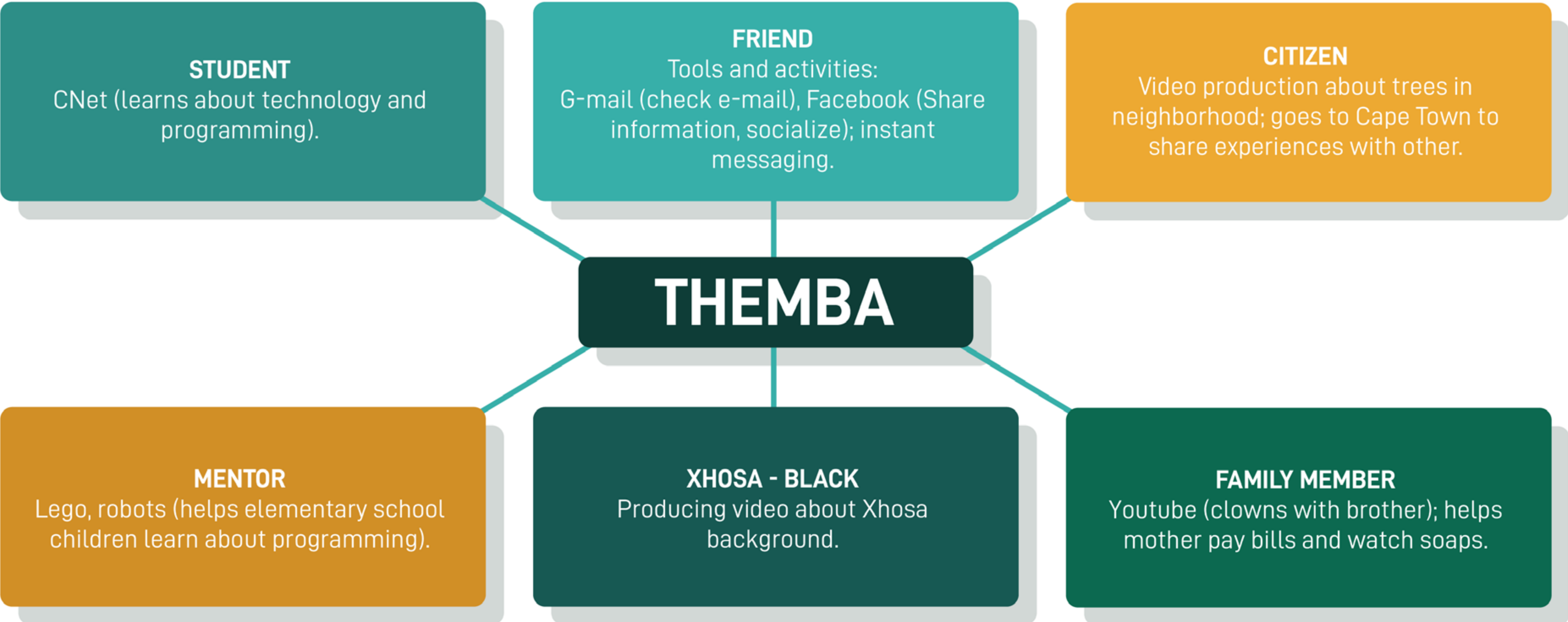


Here are some prompts to help you think about your different identities: ● ● ●

- 1. What name(s) do people call you by at home or at university (in class or during social settings, e.g. residence meetings or interest groups)?
- 2. What do you do in each place?
- 3. What can you not do in each place?
- 4. How do you dress differently?
- 5. What do you get to say (or what can you not say) in each place?

- 6. How do you behave in this place?
- 7. How do you think other people would describe you in this context?
- 8. What responsibilities do you have?
- 9. What activities support your being a particular way?
- 10. What elements of yourself do you carry with you into each of these contexts?
- 11. Are any of these identities 'false', or do they simply represent different aspects of who you are?

Now let us look at your online identity. Start by entering your name into Google. Browse through all your online platforms (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube browse history, even your SUNLearn platform). Do you notice any difference in the personalities and identities that you portray on different online platforms?



Complete the identity map again, but now add for each role the impact that your online life has on your identity. Here is a short example by a blogger (Oddone, 2016) of how her online identity compares to her offline identity:

“So, what is my identity online if you took an overall snapshot? I would like to think it is of an active participant, sharing, remixing and re-distributing knowledge, creating new understandings from the wise people I meet online and quite happy to meet, chat, network with others. This contrasts with my real-life self, where I find small talk challenging and face to face networking a little overwhelming. I am very bubbly and happy, and most people would not say I am shy at all, but when all is said and done, I'd rather send an email than speak with someone face to face if I don't know them!! Social media has given me a platform to share and learn from people all over the world from my little house in Australia; and I intend to take full advantage of it!”

<https://www.linkinglearning.com.au/digitalme/>

Ulrike Schultze (2014, p.94) concluded in one of her studies that in our “current technology landscape, people's digital self-presentations are so enmeshed with their physically embodied selves, that online and offline identities can no longer be separated by who is on and who is in front of the computer screen”.

However, we need to ask ourselves, “How coherently am I presenting myself online and offline?” as this contributes to our sense of wellness and digital wellness. It can also be valuable to ask, “Am I finding it tiring to keep up with portraying these various identities within these various spaces?” or “Can I clearly define each role, attribute or quality about myself and portray these in whichever domain I function, online or offline?”.

Once we have created or developed these various identities, we need to consider how safe it is to portray these identities in different spaces and what impact they will have on our digital as well as general wellbeing. The next section will explore the potential risks and benefits of creating and developing various online identities as well as strategies that could contribute to being yourself not only in your offline life but also in your online life.

Creating and protecting your online identity

We can create and have different personas.

Persona

“‘Persona’ can be described as the aspect of someone's character that is presented or perceived by others.”

The following [video](#) is an example of how we sometimes portray certain image about ourselves online and how these images about ourselves can be perceived differently by others.

The next exercise concerns another example of how we can portray certain persona through the images that we post online but more so how we can easily fall into the trap of creating our own perceptions about others by the images that they post online. Look at these photos of Emma Carey posted online ([Photo 1](#); [Photo 2](#); [Photo 3](#)). Make a note of what you think her daily lifestyle is like from seeing her online persona.



Now watch the following video of Emma posted on YouTube [Watch Emma Carey here](#), and view the next few photos of her posted online: ([Photo 1](#); [Photo 2](#); [Photo 3](#)).



Why are we going straight down? The ground is getting closer and the parachute is below me. I know nothing about skydiving, but I know this isn't right. The next minute, I'm lying face down on the ground with an unconscious man strapped to my back. When I went to roll him off me, I had the most brutal and heart breaking realization of my entire life. I couldn't move my legs. At all.



<https://www.emcarey.com/pages/my-story>

Emma broke her back after a skydiving accident. She had to learn how to walk again, but the injury is of such a nature that she is completely incontinent with both bladder and bowel.

People do not always share their routine or mundane daily activities online. People may

not always post their downs or frustrations but may mainly post their positive experiences or ups. People thus tend to share the best of their offline persona with an online update.

Some people also choose to have multiple online accounts, sharing different information about themselves on these different accounts.

Finsta vs Rinsta

"High degrees of falseness, or in other words, wide and persistent gaps between the true/real self and the false/ideal self, can result in precarious functioning and psychological vulnerability which ultimately can lead to psychological pathologies" (Self-image and online-offline identities, n.d.). Reading this finding, do you think that there are any risks involved in having a 'fake' online profile? Is being fake online similar to filtering what you post online?



Some risks of having a false identity or persona online could be that you encourage similar behaviour in others; thus, others are following your lead. Other people could be disappointed when they meet you offline when you do not meet their expectations about you based on the online persona that you have created for yourself. Communication with others offline could therefore potentially become more challenging.

There could, however, be some benefits to having a fake profile or different profiles. It can allow you to find and become part of communities that you may not fit into offline. It also allows you time to think before you respond to posts online. Further, you can communicate thoughts or opinions that you may not have felt confident to communicate offline.



Considering the above information, what do you think is important to keep in mind in maintaining your online identity?

When you create an online identity, aim at being the same person online and offline: a person about whom close friends can comment that what you portray online is the same as how they experience you offline. Try to show a meaningful part of your personality online so that others can see that you have substance, what you are passionate about or what provides you with support. You may think that there are gains/benefits to having a fake online persona, but in the long term, you could be unmasked for the pretender that you are. You run the risk of being exposed and your credibility then being severely damaged.

Remember that the internet is a public space and that once you have posted something online, you automatically waive your right to privacy. In sharing information online, a 'digital tattoo' or 'digital footprint' is created as everything that you post can have a permanent record. Keep in mind that online content can also be shared easily by others. Thus, be respectful in your online activity; for example, do not tag others in embarrassing photos or places and before you post controversial opinions, ask yourself whether this is something that you will want to be remembered for, forever. To read more about your digital footprint or tattoo, please click here:



[digital footprint.](#)

Be careful of creating a stereotyped personality because of something that you post online, for example being a party person. Stand by your beliefs and values with what you post online. Do not feel pressured by others to portray a certain persona online; be as authentic as possible. However, be careful not to reveal too much about yourself online. Revealing too much about yourself and sharing every thought, problem or photo taken of you can make you vulnerable to the more sinister types lurking on the internet. It could also damage your reputation, both online and offline. Be careful of confronting others on social media. If you are involved in an argument with someone, rather settle it privately.

Let us highlight two key messages:

1. Use social networking wisely and adjust your privacy settings to your own comfort level. Be cautious.
2. However, the second message is just as important: Enjoy the opportunities that come from having an online life. Do not be afraid to participate and connect. Being able to connect with friends and different communities, sharing thoughts and ideas that can have a positive impact on others and having an additional source of finding a sense of belonging can be extremely gratifying.



Five ways to be yourself online

1. Use your real name: If you use your real name or some variation of it, you will be treated with more respect and this will add credibility to what you are saying.
2. Use a photo: When you put a face to a name, you gain credibility and character.
3. Only say online what you would say in real life: What you say online could really hurt someone in real life, so if you do not have anything useful to add, keep it to yourself.
4. Make real friends: The people whom you talk to online are real people, so having real conversations can lead to your making real friends.
5. Be yourself: Speak up, respond, react, be spontaneous and engaging, and say what is important to you. Not only will this do wonders for your credibility, but it will also help you to stop hiding from and possibly judging others. Being yourself can also help you to brand and promote yourself in situations that could lead to employment, relationships or real world opportunities to back up what you say online

(Self-image and online-offline identities, n.d.).


Here's an example: Let's say John Doe has an Instagram account and a Reddit account. John is very interested in anime, and often shares which animes he's currently watching on his Instagram story. He uses his real name and photos on Instagram, as he has a private account where he only allows people he knows in real life to follow him.

On Reddit, John is part of a subreddit where they discuss certain animes in detail. John does not use his real name or photo, not because what he's doing is sketchy or untoward, but because the people in this subreddit are strangers to him, and it could become a safety concern and he would not want his thoughts on Season 2, Episode 14 of FoodWars to come up when potential employers Google him.

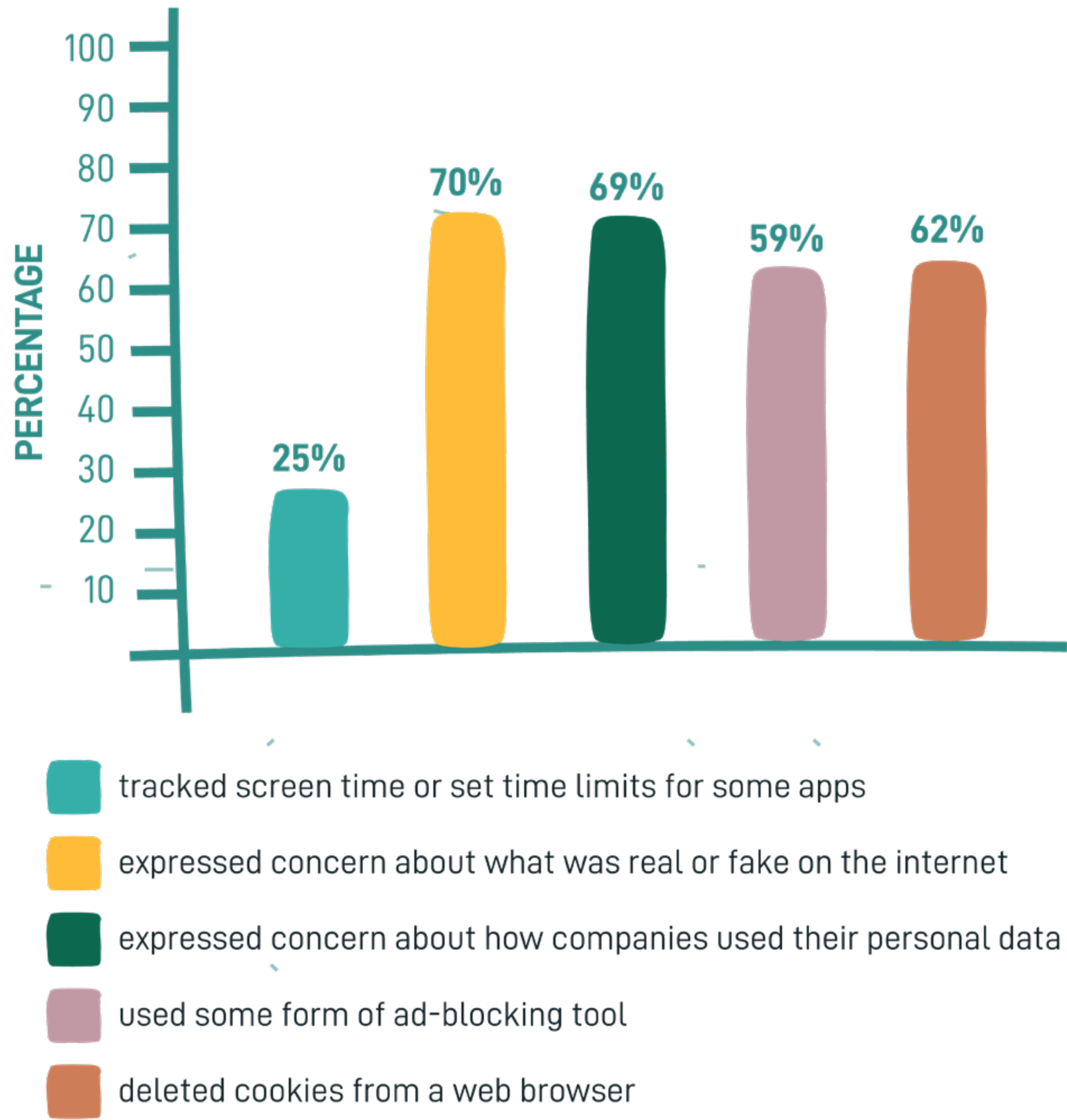
This can also play into the idea of identity being fluid. Just because something was part of who you were at one stage in your life, it doesn't mean you want that attached to you later in life. I am eternally grateful that my teenage twitter account was under a screen name and not my real name, even though there isn't anything controversial about a 15 year old liking One Direction.



What is my purpose in being online?


 Datareportal published the following **interesting data** about South Africans online activity. There were 36.54 million internet users in South Africa in January 2020, which is more than half (62%) of the country's population and an increase of 1.1 million users from 2019 to 2020. Each internet user in South Africa spends 9 hours 22 minutes daily using the internet on any device. It also seems as if South Africans are mainly accessing the internet through mobile phones as 103.5 million mobile connections were recorded in January 2020. In January 2020, 22 million users of social media were recorded, which is 37% of our total population. Social media users also access these platforms mainly from their mobile phones. Currently South Africa's preferred social media platform is WhatsApp. This is followed by a preference for YouTube and then Facebook.

Internet users aged 16 to 64 are concerned about their digital privacy and online wellbeing to the following extent:





You are welcome to follow [these links](#) for more data on the internet use of South Africans as well as people from other countries. Looking at these numbers and especially the number of hours that we tend to spend online daily, we need to ask ourselves, "How am I spending this time online, what is the purpose of my being online and how is it influencing the development of my identity?" Online reports of worldwide internet use have identified that with the Covid-19 pandemic, there were big jumps in digital activity, especially in countries with harder lockdowns. There was a significant increase in social media use, with an increase in video calling specifically. More consumers were doing online shopping, and an increased amount of time was spent playing games or watching esports. Follow [this link](#) for more information. One can thus understand that 2020 shows significant internet use. Nevertheless, if you compare it with reports from previous years, you can see that South Africans do tend to spend a great deal of time online.

Some of the main reasons that people go online is to communicate with others, staying in touch with friends or family (by means of email, social

media, messaging and video calls). They also look for information such as the latest news or information on products that they are interested in. Online statistics, however, show that there tends to be a low sense of trust of online news. People also go online for entertainment, watching videos, streaming programmes/movies, downloading music or doing shopping. There has also been a growth in the number of people working online. Lastly, more and more people are using the internet to develop their skills, thus for educational purposes.



Challenge yourself

Challenge yourself to keep a journal of your internet use: the amount of time that you spend on it and the purpose that you use it for (this includes social media sites, Google searches, SUNLearn and YouTube). Ask yourself how purposefully you engaged with the site/platform that you visited and what contribution it made to the development/establishment of your identity. Also reflect in general on how it contributed to your digital wellbeing.



Conclusion

From the reflections in this chapter and from various research studies and opinions, we have learnt that we can have multiple ideas about ourselves and that these thoughts and ideas grow and develop over time. Who we were in the past, who we are in the present and who we will be in future express different ideas about ourselves. Sometimes, our various self-concepts show different dispositions or natures (some positive and others negative) and we can identify with diverse roles, characteristics and traits. It could be argued that the only aspect really limiting our identity development is our imagination. In the development of our identity and the presentation of our personas, we strive to represent our hopes, goals, aspirations, dreams and even fears. Nevertheless, among all these presentations, we are generally highly motivated to present the best image of ourselves, displaying an identity that consists of positive and socially desirable attributes both in our online and offline lives.

In addressing digital wellbeing, it needs to be considered how the world of social media, the internet, the digital society and constant connectivity have influenced the development

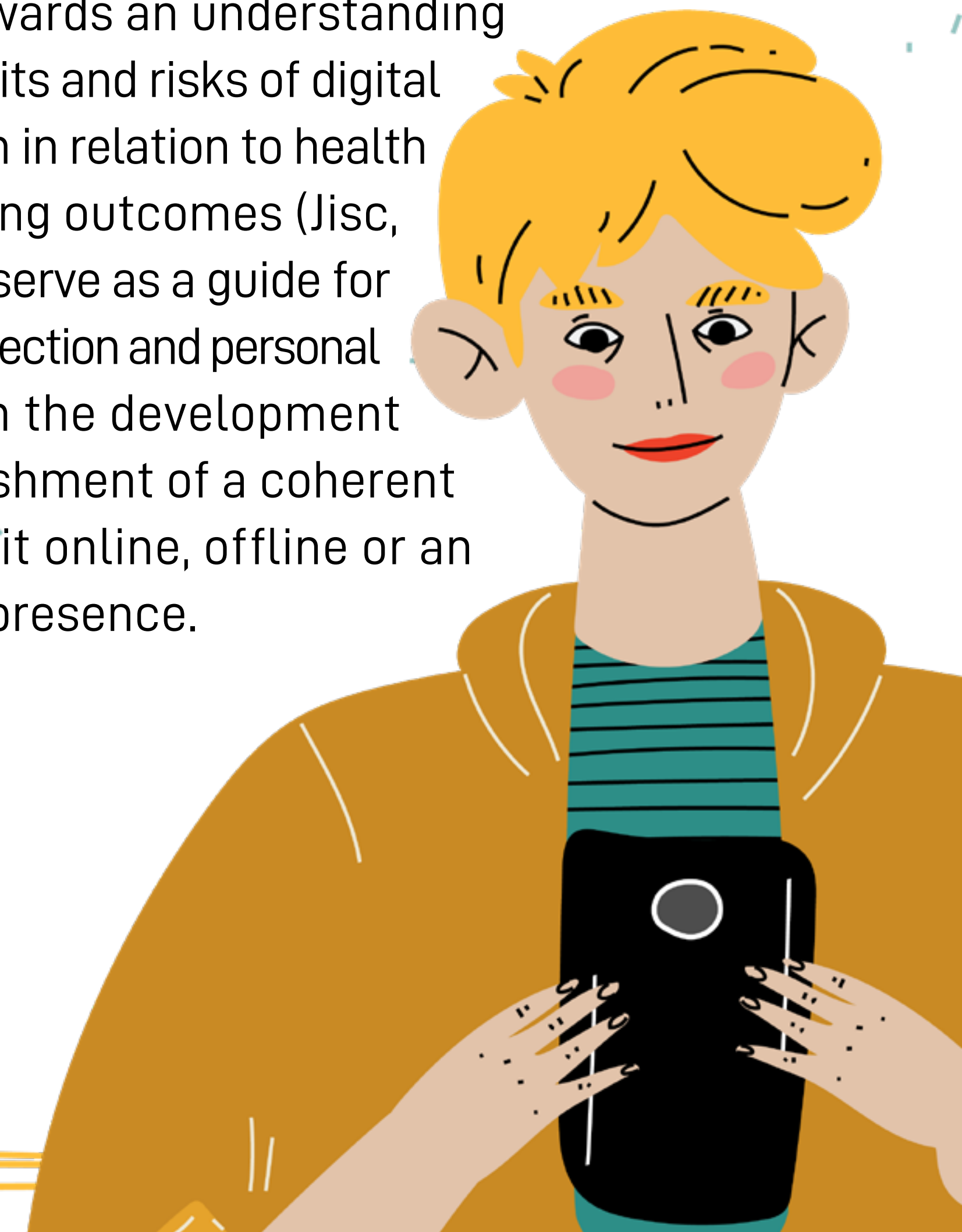
of our self-image and online and offline lives. The internet has created many opportunities for us to explore our identity and to gain exposure to topics, thoughts and ideas that we may not have been introduced to if we only had an offline life. It has even been debated whether a distinction should be made between an online and an offline identity or life. Zimmer (2010) argues that maybe we do not necessarily have multiple identities but that we are rather constantly engaged in a process of managing our identity performance.

This is how we navigate the multiple and increasingly complex spheres of our lives. It is not that you pretend to be someone that you are not; rather, you turn the volume up on some aspects of your identity, and tone down others, all based on the particular context you find yourself.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, establishing an identity and a self-concept has been identified as a universal task and the foundation of forming healthy relationships and a general sense of wellbeing.

Maybe throughout this chapter you have identified various roles, qualities, traits, strengths, weaknesses, preferences and values concerning yourself and could be left wondering what your true identity is. Is it what you portray online or offline, or do you find it difficult to distinguish between an online and an offline identity?

Working towards an understanding of the benefits and risks of digital participation in relation to health and wellbeing outcomes (Jisc, 2019) could serve as a guide for constant reflection and personal check-in on the development and establishment of a coherent identity, be it online, offline or an integrated presence.

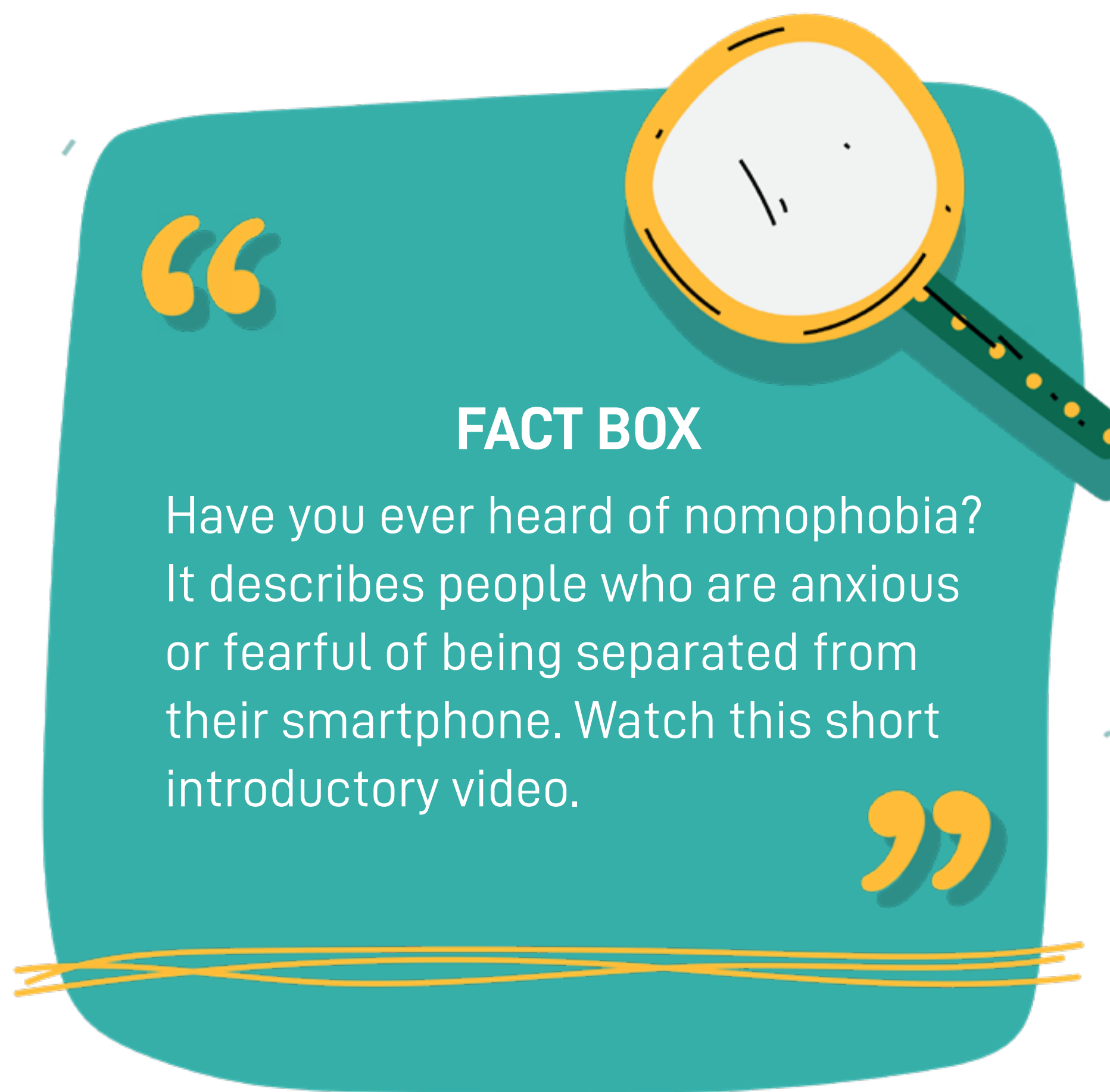


Managing the Role of Digital Technology in Your Life

Introduction

You have read everything in the other sections and may still think that deliberating digital wellbeing is not applicable to you. Yet, you use your digital devices to stay connected and communicate with different people and networks. You may quickly check Instagram while waiting in a queue. Perhaps you need to confirm what the latest assignment is that has been emailed to you. Maybe you communicate with your friends via different apps?

Maybe you argue that you do not post or are not actively involved on social media platforms? This may be true, since there are active and passive social media users. Active users usually create information and communicate with a range of other users while passive users usually feed on information. Passive users usually spend their time scrolling through other users' profiles, updates or newsfeeds (Worsley, 2018). The fact remains, however, that both these approaches require our time and attention.



Do you ever pause to think critically about the value and role of technology in your daily interactions? Do you really know how big a chunk of your day is dedicated to your digital device and digital behaviour? Who knows, maybe the digital world with all its distractions is slowly taking over a large part of your day. This next section introduces potential warning lights, a possible way through the maze of digital overuse and a guide to managing your triggers and distractions.

Raising awareness: Digital overuse and addiction threats

The results of the earlier online quiz may come as a surprise to you, or maybe not...? What we need to be aware of is that we allow the digital world to start to overshadow our material world.

Perceived digital overuse

The internet and the digital devices that we engage with are not harmful per se; it provides us with access to a world full of information and connection. What is needed, however, is that we develop skills in learning to manage our choice of usage and engagement with these digital opportunities crossing our paths daily. The internet and our associated digital device usage can provide us with a myriad of entertainment opportunities, access to all forms of information, social networks and connections, services that we may need and so forth, but there may be a potentially negative impact if we do not carefully consider our approach towards these opportunities (Büchi, Festic & Latzer, 2019). We are all probably in agreement that the positives of the internet and our digital devices outweigh the negatives by far, but as with everything in life, there is also a darker side to consider. The rapid growth of the digital world compels us to consider the potential dangers of internet and smartphone addiction and digital overuse. Digital overuse is not as severe as digital addiction but is more widespread.

Our potential digital overuse is related to the infiltration of the internet and social media of our daily lives, which is often perceived as a new social norm. Many factors play a role here, for instance: our choice in personalised feeds, opportunities for never-ending scrolling to new information, algorithms that predict our interests and hobbies and our fear of missing out on important activities or news events. Even if we do not focus primarily on the content on our devices, push notifications will remind us of what we are missing out on. Social media platforms focus strongly on what interest us and what will draw our attention to their sites. This is to their advantage and profit (Büchi et al., 2019).

We are drawn into the digital world via various routes:

Personalised feeds

We are told that personalised feeds could impact user experiences and encourage our engagement with applications. 'Personalisation' is actually a broad term. What it does suggest is that multiple sources of data are used to create a personalised online experience for an individual.

Let us explore some examples

1. The 'explore' section in Instagram contains suggestions about pictures that may interest you based on your engagement with images on the platform.
2. Machine learning is used by Facebook to prioritise the posts of friends whom you engage with most often.
3. Your search and shopping preferences are used by Etsy to determine what to prioritise in your newsfeed and other sources of information.
4. YouTube channels are no longer the essential building blocks of your user experience but are rather a feed with a list of videos that you will most probably be interested in.

The examples above, and many others, can serve as unconscious drivers to promote, encourage or guide us towards certain actions, thoughts and/or products.


To read more:

- [Click here](#)
- [Click here](#)



Infinite scrolling

One of the behaviours of internet users that has changed over the years is our ability to scroll through vast volumes of information. Newsfeeds, for instance, provide us with an ongoing source of information. We are not able to assimilate all the new information, and therefore we often rely on endless scrolling to provide us with an overview of the content that is available. Such an approach does not afford us the opportunity to critically evaluate or analyse all content, but rather offers quantity over quality.

 Read this British Broadcasting Company [article](#) to see how social media companies are purposefully designing and using endless scrolling so that we can become addicted to a particular site, which will result in financial gains for the social media company.

Algorithms and predictions

Artificial intelligence algorithms already play a huge role in our lives. They could provide us with the shortest route to our destination or offer targeted products that, based on our user data, we would probably engage with. The fact remains that marketing companies and social media platforms have one goal in common:

luring you to their platforms and products. It is through the practice of micro-targeting that users are increasingly drawn into the abyss of the digital world.

To read more:


• [Click here](#)



Push notifications


If you have notifications enabled on your device, companies can communicate with you directly. For instance, think about the 'friendly reminder' of the airline reminding you when check-in will be open. It may seem like good practice and looking after clients, but it is also a method of subconsciously encouraging us to form a close alliance with the brand and to consider using it in future. Building relationships has one purpose: drawing us back to a company.

Not only could companies build a 'relationship' with you, but social media platforms also inform you when people like your posts or updates, who likes your Instagram pictures or when someone has commented on your online activity. Once again you are drawn back to the platforms, the targeted newsfeeds and microtargeted marketing aimed at your interests. Before you know, you are once again infinitely scrolling through chunks of information.

See how companies are using [push notifications](#) to lure us back to them. 

But what do we mean when we refer to 'perceived digital overuse'? And how is it possible to 'overuse' the internet? The question can be asked whether we start to feel overwhelmed by the endless opportunities to engage with online information and activities. How do we manage these activities and the associated social pressures related to digital activities and devices? Büchi et al. (2019, p. 2) define digital overuse as follows:

Digital overuse

"Digital overuse is a general and broad latent phenomenon that occurs when everyday Internet use surpasses an individual standard or vague sense of a personal optimum. This perception crosses different life domains, devices, and applications, and can therefore be seen as an accumulated, abstracted consequence of the interplay between specific usage patterns and technology push". 

What is important to remember is that digital overuse is very person-centered. It means that individuals will differ in their assumption of digital use (and overuse). What is overuse for one person could be a necessity (e.g., based on his/her work) for someone else. What is important to understand is that 'perceived' overuse cannot be measured exactly. It is rather a sense within us that we are starting to feel overwhelmed by the ever-increasing demands that the internet makes on our time and actions.

There are, however, some indicators that could assist us in raising awareness of the potential of digital overuse in our lives:

- The most straight-forward indicator is that you feel within yourself that you are spending too much 'absolute' time online.
- You sense that your time spent on the internet and digital devices results in more important aspects of your life being sidelined.
- You may also feel that you are attempting to multitask too much online (Büchi et al., 2019, p. 2).

Let us find out whether you are spending too much time online. Click on the link and answer the **multiple-choice questions** to gain a sense of your online behaviour.

Reminder: If you have real concerns about this issue, please contact a knowledgeable professional who could assist you further.

Digital addiction

As more and more people gain access to the internet and digital devices, we can expect an increase in digital addiction.

Digital addiction

"Digital addiction is an umbrella term to indicate that we tend to have an extreme engagement with digital technologies that threatens to absorb all our attention, and which could consequently lead a decrease in our overall wellbeing" (Rugai & Hamilton Ekeke, 2016, p.18).

Two things to remember:

1. The above-mentioned implies that we are increasingly becoming dependent on our digital devices, which could be viewed as compulsive behaviour by those around us. A warning sign could be an observable unhealthy balance between our social interaction and behaviour and our engagement with digital devices (Rugai & Hamilton-Ekeke, 2016).
2. 'Digital addiction' is an umbrella term that includes different forms of addiction such as online gaming addiction, internet addiction and smartphone addiction.

Internet and smartphone addiction

Smartphones have become a critical part of our daily lives. For instance, a study done in 2015 with a United States of America sample, 46% of respondents commented that they were not able to live without their smartphone (Samaha & Hawi, 2016). Such statements are not surprising since smartphones have a direct impact on people's daily routine through, for example, the following:

- Social contact with family and friends
- Work- and study-related communication
- Shopping
- Travel
- Entertainment

Our smartphones provide us with an ever-growing world of online services and opportunities. The applications that we use are targeted at a specific need and audience. However, despite all the wonderful opportunities created via these digital devices, our smartphones could also disrupt our work and social interaction with others.

Think back: How many times do you use your smartphone during the day?

This [blog](#) by Jorey MacKay provides us with interesting (and perhaps frightening) statistics. What is the problem then? What can happen is that our in-person interaction is impacted by our digital devices so that our face-to-face conversations shift from vertical interactions in which long-term commitment and attention are needed, to horizontal commitment that is characterised by an extended network of shallow interactions and relationships (Monge Roffarello & De Russis, 2019).

FURTHER EXPLORATION

To find out more, read this [blog from Sam Cook](#) explaining the different types of addiction and how it could potentially be treated.

Erwin Lima also offers some interesting [insights](#).

It is not only our relationships that can suffer, but smartphones can also interfere with our daily activities. Think about it:

- Do you use your smartphone while studying (and not for study-related purposes)?
- Do you frequently check your smartphone for messages and emails while working?
- Do you check your smartphone while driving?
- Is your smartphone playing too big a role in your daily life?

Let's have a look: [click here](#).

If you, or someone you know, may be struggling with digital addiction, it is advised that you consult with a professional addiction counsellor. Please contact a local or online counselling service for support.

Social media addiction

Let us start with the difference between social media and social media platforms.

'Social media' refers to our ability to produce, share and collaborate online via the internet (or then Web 2.0). Social media provides us with the opportunity to create and share content generated by the users themselves. Many technologies could be included in our understanding of social media, such as blogs, social networking sites, virtual gaming and collaborative platforms (Worsley, 2018).

Often, our challenge lies specifically with social networking sites. This is still a broad concept that relates to many different services and apps. Some of the well-known social networking sites are Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat, to name only a few. It seems as if social media platforms are the main interface and link with the internet for many users.

But what are some of the possible reasons why social media is so important to us? There are many complex explanations for the value that we place on social networking, but let us have a look at two concepts, namely FOMO (fear of missing out) and FOBI (fear of being irrelevant).

Fear of missing out

One of the many reasons why we struggle to unplug is FOMO. This is a belief system whereby we are convinced that something that is more worthwhile or exciting is taking place elsewhere. It means that we believe that others are having more fun, have more fulfilling experiences or have better lives than us.

Elizabeth Scott (2020, n.p.) goes as far as to describe FOMO as follows:

“FOMO is not just the sense that there might be better things that you could be doing at this moment, but it is the feeling that you are missing out on something fundamentally important that others are experiencing right now.”

<https://www.verywellmind.com>

Research suggests that FOMO often results in our wanting to use social media more frequently (Adams, Williford, Vaccaro, Kisler, Francis & Newman, 2017). These fears could lead to increased stress in our lives.

How do I know whether I suffer from FOMO?

Let us have a look at this online indicator. Before you start, just a reminder that this is not a professional assessment or standardised instrument that has been validated via numerous studies. It does, however, provide you with some insights and introductory suggestions related to FOMO.

Reminder: If you have real concerns about this issue, please contact a knowledgeable professional who could assist you further.

But how can we deal with FOMO? Is it not easier said than done..?

The following [short article](#) will explain to you some of the basic considerations in relation to FOMO.

To summarise Eric Baker's (2016) article:

- FOMO is often rooted in our own unhappiness.
- The 'perfect' and 'happy' lives of others on social networking platforms are often an illusion and not the truth.
- Find your 'real world' and start paying attention to that.
- Try to think differently – why not try gratitude for what you already have?

Fear of being irrelevant

We make use of social media for various reasons which could be personal, cultural, social and work-related. One of the main drivers of social media use is our need to share what we are busy with, and to feel noticed and appreciated by this. However, because of these needs, it may become increasingly worrying if we are not attracting the level of attention that we perhaps crave. Our worries and fears can result in what is called the 'fear of being irrelevant', or FOBI.



It is not only FOMO that could impact our behaviour, but also our deeper-rooted FOBI. Although it may sound like something that does not impact us personally, it could (consciously or subconsciously) motivate us to engage in specific online behaviours.

 Read the following extract from a [blog post by Mike Abel](#).

Why do we feel the need to Tweet? To have a Facebook page? To be on LinkedIn? Sure, part of it is for connection, to share and exchange ideas and opportunities. But we believe, as great is the human need, or craving, for interaction, equally great is the fear of being unnoticed, unremarkable, uninteresting, unimportant – irrelevant.

20 years ago, teenagers wanted to grow up to be doctors, lawyers, engineers, and teachers. Today, according to UK research, they strive to be celebrities. They seek fame and fortune over being useful to society. This is an age where talking about money is no longer dirty. All reality TV shows focus

on “more and better” – how to be prettier, be younger, have a nicer house, win a big job, a hot bride, get a full makeover, win a million bucks.

In fact, they could all use the Survivor line, “Outwit. Outlast. Outplay”.

Combine hedonism and competitiveness with instant gratification, and you create a toxic mix of “anything you can do, I can do better”.

FOBI – think about your motivation in what you do these days. I see people at restaurants, movies, shows, work with their eyes glued to their phones. Fingers like woodpeckers, tapping away. Why?

Where would you rather be?

FOBI is a far bigger fear than FOMO. Missing out is small time compared to Irrelevance. It's hard-wired into us through societal shifts.

This simple observation is a great new angle to drive demand. Terrible as that is (I hear a Dr Evil “bwaaahaha” in the background).

But how amazing to strive to be personally liberated from it. Note to self.

Looking forward: introducing digital mindfulness

There are ways by which we can sensibly manage the influence of the internet and devices on our lives. One such approach is to consider digital mindfulness. You have probably heard about the ‘mindfulness’ movement whereby we are encouraged to live ‘in the moment’ and to remain consciously aware of everything that we are busy with. The idea of mindfulness has been with us for more than 2500 years! Although this is not the focus of the section, digital mindfulness is rooted in many of the principles of the mindfulness movement.


So, where do we start?

What is digital mindfulness?



Digital mindfulness

Digital mindfulness is about using your digital devices in a more conscious manner. It means that we strive to be constantly aware of our relationship with digital technologies and the internet and to reflect on this in a non-judgmental way. It means that we start to think responsibly about our relationship with digital technologies and that we do not fall into the trap of being responsive (that is what all the different social media companies and apps strive for!).

 Kathleen Sweeney in her blog [Digital mindfulness: Slow media in a fast media landscape](#), shares some interesting ideas on how to become digitally mindful.

Quickly reflect: We do not even think about it when we flick or scroll through our digital devices. Can you recall how many times you

have accessed your smartphone during the day or how many times you flicked through Instagram?

We are so used to our digital devices – they have almost become an extension of ourselves – that using them continuously has started to become a habit. It has evolved into an increasingly mindless activity that we engage with countless times during the day.

Quickly reflect: How many times do you sit alone in a public place such as a coffee shop or wait for a friend without reaching for your device? It is becoming increasingly rare to see people actually 'people watching' or even reading a book or magazine. Test this statement when you are alone in public again.

As we all know, there is a wonderful world of new information and social connection locked up in our devices but what are we missing out on in the physical world? This is the reason why digital mindfulness should be a priority for all of us.

The necessity of digital mindfulness

Digital mindfulness affords us the opportunity to think deeply about our attachment to our digital devices. But why is it important to even think about our relationship with the internet and digital devices?

The fact remains that our world is increasingly changing and evolving. **Alex Soojung-Kim Pang points out four important facts that we need to acknowledge:**

1. We have a deeply rooted relationship with digital technologies and the digital world that showcases some unique capabilities and capacities.
2. Our world is becoming increasingly a space of distraction where our attention is diverted in many different directions.
3. It is important that we reflect on our relationship with technology since it is present at all levels of our lives.
4. We can make changes where necessary and start to think differently about the world that we choose to live in.

Starting with digital mindfulness 🕒 🕒 🕒

We can follow many approaches when considering digital mindfulness. What we would like to suggest is that you first attempt the following:

- Address your distractions differently.
- Learn to 'unplug'.
- Consider a digital detox or sabbatical. In the next section, we will look closely at each of these suggestions.

Managing challenges: distractions and digital detox

We have covered many topics in this publication. You were introduced to the idea of digital wellbeing and the impact of technology on our physical, mental and social wellbeing. We also started to explore how the way that we feel about ourselves (i.e., our self-image and identity) translates into our online behaviour. Lastly, we have started to uncover and understand the role of technology in our own personal lives. Although all the above probably makes sense, the key question remains, "How do we address and manage our digital behaviour"? We need to learn to act differently in a world filled with distractions, to unplug, and to do things differently.

Manage distractions differently 🕒 🕒 🕒

Our world is filled with information overload, constant distractions and a struggle for your attention. We offer some advice on how to think and act differently towards such distractions:

1. Log out of or delete social networking apps.
2. Consider wearing an analogue wristwatch and do not use your smartphone as an alarm clock in the bedroom.
3. Do not allow smartphones in the bedroom; otherwise, probably your first and last interaction may be with your phone.
4. Manage distractions by closing all social media and emails when you need to do focused work. If you are constantly distracted, it is highly unlikely that you will ever experience a state of flow.
5. Manage your email responses. Which emails can you respond to immediately? Which ones need more time, and when will you pay attention to them?

5. By continuously dipping into emails and other social media, your state of flow and deep concentration is interrupted, and you will encounter a fragmented work experience.
6. As human beings, we have a need for social interaction. Remember that engaging with others is like exercise. The more we 'exercise', the more our muscles will develop. This is the same for face-to-face social interaction. We can lose the ability to interact socially with others if we do not 'practise' on a regular basis. This is then the time not to depend on your smartphone.
7. When you travel by taxi, train or bus, use the opportunity to enjoy the view, to daydream, or to allow your mind to wander. It is during these times that we become more creative and experience a sense of calm (Montag & Walla, 2016).

Consider digital detox

Danielle Friedman provides us with some practical suggestions on how to get started with a [digital detox](#). We have also added some food for thought.

Many of these suggestions are small changes that we can repeat so that they eventually become a habit.

Digital detox

1. Convert your screen/sto black and white – it is less appealing than the bright colours used on our home screens and apps.
2. Put your phone away during mealtimes – that includes when you are going out for a meal.
3. Identify tech-free time periods every day when you mindfully and thoughtfully engage with other experiences.
4. Ensure that your bedroom is free from technology – do not use your phone as an alarm or a digital device to play games, watch series /movies or communicate with your social network.

5. Rediscover the magic of the written page.
6. Limit your digital engagement to only one screen at a time – with this approach, you will draw attention to one activity and increase your mindful engagement.
7. Reconsider your social media accounts and think carefully about what and who makes you feel good and what and who do not – do not be afraid to delete, mute or unfollow.
8. Consider apps that could help you with your detox process.
9. Think about your physical health and how to improve it without a digital device.
10. Think about a digital sabbatical – you can start small with one day or perhaps a weekend.
11. Rethink and redesign your smartphone home screen to only include the apps that truly help you, for example camera, maps, and WhatsApp.

Conclusion

Digital wellbeing is perhaps a novel concept. Many of us believe that we have 'control' over our digital use, and many of us may even think that there is no need to consider our wellbeing in relation to digital devices and the internet. Irrespective of our views or private thoughts, our relationship with digital technologies will increasingly be amplified by the rapidly evolving nature of the digital world. It remains our own responsibility to make an informed decision on how we would like to manage this relationship. We hope that this introductory guide will provide you with some aspects to reconsider and to re-evaluate.

“

In my view, the new digital literacy is not using a computer or being on the internet, but understanding and evaluating the consequences of an always-plugged-in lifestyle.

”

Anjana Susaria (2019)



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