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'A MIX OF PARANOIA AND REBELLIOUSNESS' —MANIFESTATIONS, MOTIVES, AND CONSEQUENCES OF RESISTANCE TO DIGITAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

Internet use is the norm in Western societies and only few people consciously abstain. This article explores manifestations of digital resistance, motives for resisting, and consequences thereof. It sets out to map digital resistance through thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with 16 Swiss adult internet users. Our findings show that a central motive for resistance is viewing services as problematic because of surveillance practices, lack of privacy, data-monetizing practices, or monopoly position. Digital resisters are characterized by low trust in digital corporations, a wish for more regulation, and high internet skills. Unless digital resisters have an understanding social circle, a consequence can be social exclusion. Mostly, digital resistance can lead to heightened self-empowerment and thus greater subjective well-being. This article contributes to a more in-depth understanding of digital resistance in a highly digitized society and lays the ground for appropriate regulatory practices that addresses individuals' needs.

Keywords: digital media resistance ▪ disconnection ▪ non-use ▪ dataveillance ▪ well-being

1.   INTRODUCTION

As long as there have been media, there have been persons not using them. When television first came into private households, traditional factors of social inequality correlated with owning a television and the more privileged were more likely to have one (Syvertsen, 2017). The same was true for digital media. When the internet first spread to private use in the Western world in the late 1990s and early 2000s, individuals with higher level of educational background and income, as well as younger persons and men were most likely to be among users (NTIA, 1995; van Dijk, 2005).

Over time, this digital divide in access to the internet has narrowed and more people across socioeconomic groups have gained access to the internet (Chia et al., 2006). With the increasing internet penetration in our society, our everyday life became increasingly digitized. Today's everyday life entails the widespread and common use of online services: Google for information seeking, Amazon for buying things, Netflix and YouTube for entertainment, and services like Facebook or Instagram for socializing (Reiss et al., 2021).

However, in countries that have high internet penetration rates, a new group of internet non-users emerged. Rather than so-called *have-nots*, who did not have access to the internet, they were *want-nots*, consciously deciding against using these services (Kappeler et al., 2021; van Dijk, 2020). In a society where using such services is the norm, not doing so entails severe consequences like social exclusion (Baumer et al., 2015; Melton et al., 2019). This article aims to explore this group of want-nots that we refer to as *digital resisters*, i.e., individuals who consciously do not use certain digital tools or services as an act of resistance to the increasingly digitized and datafied world they live in. We ask: How does resistance to digital media among internet users manifest, and what are the motives and consequences of such digital resistance? To answer this research question, we thematically analyze data from semi-structured interviews conducted in 2022 in Switzerland, a country with an internet use rate of 96% (Latzer et al., 2021b). By doing so, we identify 1) the ways in which digital resistance manifests, 2) digital resisters' motives for digital resistance, and 3) consequences thereof. Hence, this article contributes to a deeper understanding of a group that copes with the highly digital everyday life in a way that differs from the norm.

2.   THEORETICAL BASIS AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH

2.1.   Manifestations of Internet Non-Use

Today, the internet is an integral part of our everyday life. In Switzerland, 95% of the population use it on a personal device like a smartphone, tablet, laptop, or computer (Latzer et al., 2021b). In addition, the average daily usage time has increased over the past decade from 1.8 to 4.5 hours per day (Latzer et al., 2021a). At the same time, the gain in importance and normalization of internet use has given rise to conscious forms of internet non-use. It is relevant to study the non-use of digital media (Baumer et al., 2015), be it the involuntary form, lived by the so-called have-nots or the voluntary form, applied by the want-nots (van Dijk, 2020). This article concentrates on the latter group.

The term *(digital) media non-use* is the most neutral term that is used in this research field. At the core, it refers to intentionally not using (certain) digital media, without specifying a time frame in or the extent to which this non-use occurs and without any specific value attribution to it (Hesselberth, 2018; Woodstock, 2014). Such non-use or non-participation can be understood as passively lived or actively

chosen (Casemajor et al., 2015). Today, using the internet and digital media is the norm and individuals can be seen as connected all the time. The term *digital disconnection* signifies a behavior that breaks with this norm (Melton et al., 2019). It has gained increasing prominence in recent research in the field. As a response to this societal change of being always-on, individuals take steps to actively break with this omnipresent connection by not using certain services or technologies (Lomborg & Ytre-Arne, 2021; Nguyen, 2021). In this way, disconnection can help navigating an everyday life that is increasingly characterized by digital media (Light, 2014). A periodic form of disconnection from digital media has recently increasingly been referred to as a *digital detox*, be it in scholarly or popular contexts. This can be understood as a strategy that is applied to reduce involvement with digital media, especially social media platforms. The term digital detox is often used in the context of social media and a temporary disconnection, for instance a week without Instagram or Facebook (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020). The notion detox echoes the purifying aspect that is hoped for and reflects the view that the digital norm is considered as something bad or harmful that needs to be managed (Syvertsen, 2020). In addition to the direct impact on an individual, behaviors of disconnection can be viewed as a political practice rooted in technology push-back and media refusal that affect the social sphere as well (Kaun & Treré, 2020; Syvertsen, 2017). Rejecting (digital) media (Ribak & Rosenthal, 2015), abstaining from using them, disengaging with them (Lomborg & Ytre-Arne, 2021), or quitting digital media use (Mullaney, 2005) can be understood as political non-participation that has an active component (Casemajor et al., 2015). In line with this, the term *digital resistance* is based on the concept of media resistance. This concept refers to the conscious and active non-use of media such as television as a response to their perceived invasiveness in everyday life. As such, resistance can be understood as a self-help strategy to regulate (digital) media use and therefore should be considered as a rational behavior—not lack thereof. What differentiates resistance from other forms of disconnection is that individuals who resist not only do so because of reasons that are situated on the personal or individual level, but also on the collective or societal level (Syvertsen, 2017). The different forms that such digital resistance can manifest in have yet to be mapped.

2.2. Motives for Digital Resistance

In the early 2000s, the lack of internet access and involuntary internet non-use have been associated with social inequalities (van Dijk, 2020). While these digital divides have closed to some extent with increasing penetration rates, stratification of internet non-use has been demonstrated to still be the case, even in highly connected societies (Kappeler et al., 2021). Moreover, digital inequalities in internet use persist (Festic et al., 2021). This also applies to digital disconnection behaviors, the privileged are most likely to consciously disconnect from digital media (Treré et al., 2020). This indicates that considering the possibility of disconnecting from digital media in

a world that is always on is a privilege. The reasons for digital disconnection and digital resistance do not lie in structural inequalities, but rather in discontent with the status quo and the wishes and hopes that individuals associate with their conscious non-use. A central motive for digital disconnection that has been researched in the recent years is perceived digital overuse and connected to this, well-being (Nguyen, 2021; Schmuck, 2020; Syvertsen, 2020). The increasing digitalization of everyday life has been shown to be associated with a feeling of using the internet too much. Such perceived digital overuse is related to a person's subjective well-being (Büchi et al., 2019). Besides perceived digital overuse through non-stop connectivity, feeling that one's personal space is intruded, feeling disconnected from one's authentic offline life and experiencing negative personal impacts can be reasons for discontent with one's digital media use (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020). Our highly mediated everyday lives can lead to technostress for internet users (Enli, 2014). One way in which they can deal with this is through disconnecting from digital services or devices (Nguyen, 2021, 2023; Syvertsen, 2020). Through such practices, internet users regain power over their use of digital media (Bucher, 2020; Syvertsen & Enli, 2020). In this article, we aim to find out whether, besides perceived digital overuse, other motives related to the aspects of the recent digitalization, which is characterized by an increasing datafication, algorithmization and platformization (Latzer, 2022), can be identified as motives for digital resistance as a special form of disconnection. Our world is marked by the societal trends of globalization and a new form of capitalism that relies on the monetization of data, so-called surveillance capitalism (Bennett & Parsons, 2013; Zuboff, 2019). In the course of this development, surveillance through governmental and private actors has come to a new level (Lyon, 2006, 2017). A sub-form of surveillance that is related to this datafication is *dataveillance*, which is characterized by the permanent automated collection and analysis of personal data (Büchi et al., 2022; Clarke & Greenleaf, 2017; Segijn & Strycharz, 2022; van Dijck, 2014). Reacting to a sense of dataveillance, i.e., to feeling watched or listened to online (Segijn et al., 2022), can lead to the self-inhibition of legitimate digital communication behavior, which is referred to as the chilling effects of dataveillance (Büchi et al., 2020, 2022; Penney, 2022; Stoycheff et al., 2019; Strycharz et al., 2022; White & Zimbardo, 1975). Closely connected to tendencies of surveillance and dataveillance is the concept of privacy, i.e., the management of information boundaries (Möller & Nowak, 2018; Trepte, 2016). Privacy protection can be a motive to counter this increasing dataveillance and to react to the threats to privacy that come with it. Behavioral changes in response to dataveillance and motivated by privacy needs need yet to be explored in-depth.

2.3.   Consequences of Digital Resistance

So far, studies have shown that not using digital media or being without one's digital devices can lead to frustration. This is especially the case for younger people (Kaun

& Schwarzenegger, 2014). Also, in some cases, not using digital media can be impossible due to external constraints. Therefore, resistance to digital media might not be an option for some people, even if desired (Hesselberth, 2018; Kaun, 2021). For some people, disconnection can lead to involuntary social exclusion, for instance, if one does not use the digital media that one's social circle uses (Helsper, 2021). However, individuals who successfully disconnect can also feel self-empowered, more authentic to their true selves and display greater well-being (Helsper, 2021; Schmuck, 2020; Syvertsen & Enli, 2020). Building on this background, the (anticipated) consequences of resistance to digital media have to be investigated more thoroughly.

2.4. Research Gap and Aim

In recent studies, disconnection has often been studied in conjunction with (digital) well-being. Here, mostly short-term and narrow-scope disconnection, e.g., in the form of a digital detox, is seen as a response to the perceived overuse of digital services and tools, i.e., the feeling that one is using these too much (Büchi et al., 2019; Syvertsen, 2020). However, there are also individuals who resist digital media not only in terms of a specific period in time but in a broader and deeper sense, i.e., by consciously not using certain tools or services at all. This form of active non-participation has a political dimension to it and therefore, motives for it differ from the firstly mentioned (Casemajor et al., 2015). The group of these digital resisters warrant attention (Woodstock, 2014), especially in a society in which using digital media has become the norm (Melton et al., 2019). Disconnection practices should be regarded on an individual basis because on one hand, persons differ in their perception of their disconnection practices and on the other, these practices can also vary according to contexts (Kania-Lundholm, 2021). Therefore, this article aims at exploring the phenomenon of resistance to digital media more in-depth. To contribute to filling existing gaps in the literature, it seeks to investigate the ways in which resistance manifests, digital resisters' motives, and the consequences that resistance to digital media in a world entails, where using them is the norm. To explore this phenomenon in-depth, we conducted semi-structured interviews, to which we applied thematic analysis.

3. METHOD

This section describes the recruitment process, the composition of the sample, the process of data collection and the data analysis.

3.1. Recruitment and Sample

Participants for this study were recruited among Swiss internet users through the research group's wider social circles to find interested persons who vary in their demographics, interests, and values. The interviewer did not know the participants

personally before conducting the interviews. We advertised the study as an investigation into everyday internet. Interested participants filled out a registration form indicating their gender, age, education level and professional background. Moreover, we asked them to tell us the devices they use to go online, the average time they spend online per day, and how they would evaluate their internet skills. We included these questions because a person's sociodemographic background and internet skills have been demonstrated to explain privacy-related behavior online (Büchi et al., 2017) and we deemed this relevant to practices of resistance as well. Those individuals whose profile was adding to the diversity of our sample were then contacted by the interviewer for participation in the study, since we aimed at variance in these aspects (Tavory, 2020). Participants were recruited in a rolling process. After the first interview was conducted, we started with the analysis and recruited further participants according to the approach of theoretical sampling until no new aspects emerged in the analysis and we reached saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In total, 16 semi-structured qualitative interviews with Swiss internet users were conducted. As the interviews dealt with a clearly focused topic in-depth, we evaluated this number as adequate for the analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The sample was diverse regarding gender (9 female, 7 male), age (24 to 67 years), and educational background (vocational education to tertiary education), as well as regarding internet usage time (1 to 14 hours daily) and self-reported internet skills (sufficient to excellent). Participants lived in urban and more rural areas of Switzerland.

3.2.   Data Collection

The interviews were conducted in summer 2022, between end of March and beginning of July. While part of the interviews took place face-to-face, part was conducted via video conference due to Covid-19-related restrictions and related participants' preferences. The flexible participation from interviewees' homes allowed for a natural conversation situation, which is why we consider the virtual setting to be comparable to the in-person one (Heiselberg & Stępińska, 2022). All interviewees were informed about their rights prior to the interviews and gave informed consent in written form.

In this study, we aim at exploring digital resistance: its manifestations, motives for resisting and consequences of this behavior. The interviews were semi-structured according to a topic guide, allowing for openness to emerging topics. The interviewer began the conversation by asking the interviewee to tell a little about themselves, who they are and what they do and proceeded to ask about internet use in their everyday life, before asking about a recent search that they conducted online and how that went. During the interview, personal internet use, attitudes and practices were thematized. At the end of the interview, participants had the chance to mention anything that they wanted to discuss that has not been so far. After being debriefed about the study's purpose, interviewees were invited to ask further questions if they

wanted to. In mean, the interviews took 72 minutes. The language spoken was Swiss German or Standard German. All quotes are translated to English and to ensure participants' anonymity, we only state the essential personal information and use pseudonyms.

3.3. Data Analysis

After each interview, the researcher created a memo with the main insights and striking aspects. While the main analysis was conducted using qualitative analysis software, pen-and-paper mind-mapping was central to the iterative coding process (Maher et al., 2018) and the audio files as well as the memos were taken into account to enrich the codes identified through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Clarke & Braun, 2017; Gibbs, 2007). The analysis started with open coding and descriptive codes (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Strauss & Corbin, 1994) that were then rendered more abstract to identify patterns and generate themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Clarke & Braun, 2017; Gibbs, 2007).

4. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

In our analysis, we investigated how the three aspects of our research question, i.e., 1) manifestations of digital resistance, 2) digital resisters' motives for digital resistance, and 3) consequences thereof, look among Swiss internet users. This chapter presents and discusses our findings.

4.1. Manifestations of Digital Resistance

Our findings show that digital resistance can manifest in different ways, ranging from only using certain technologies under specific circumstances to not using any of the default digital media that are widely used in our digital society at all. While the interviewees did not use the word resister to describe themselves, they showed varying forms of digital resistance.

To begin with, some persons were consciously resisting certain services, while still using other service by the same corporation. They can be viewed as *niche resisters*. For instance, Marc, 62, who considered himself having sufficient internet skills, did not use Facebook, but used WhatsApp to stay in touch with people. He mentioned that he had some close friends who resisted using WhatsApp, which he found rather extreme. A person who would fit this description was Joe, who was more thorough about his non-use. He said:

> "WhatsApp was one of the first things I deinstalled [from my phone] and indeed pretty thoroughly."

<div align="right">Joe, 66 years, good internet skills</div>

He then explained that he did not use any service by Microsoft, Google or Meta and instead actively looked for functional alternatives, which he integrated into his everyday practices. Joe can be understood as a prototypical *thorough resister*: he spent a lot of time and energy researching functional alternatives to the services that he did not want to use. Once he had decided on these alternatives, he stuck to them and talked to his social surroundings to let them know where they could find him if needed.

In contrast to this far-reaching resistance, other individuals limited the use of certain technologies to certain situations. For instance, Dan, 26 years, with excellent self-reported internet skills said he would only use the voice assistant Siri on his iPhone to call someone when driving his car. So, while he had activated it generally, he only used it in this specific context and otherwise *situationally implicitly resisted* using it.

Other individuals displayed forms of partial resistance to a certain service due to practical restrictions. For instance, Claire had moved all her private conversations to Signal with everyone who had the app installed. However, the need to participate in group chats that were exclusively on WhatsApp allowed her to partially resist the service:

> "Many people have moved to Signal, but the group chats with different people are still on WhatsApp."
>
> > Claire, 37 years, excellent internet skills

Hence, a total resistance to WhatsApp was not possible for her. Such lock-in-effects showed to be deeply powerful. In a similar way, for Sara, this led to a form of *discontinued resistance*:

> "WhatsApp not being as secure and sharing data was discussed in the media and that was when I thought, I would download it [Signal]. But well, because maybe 20% of my social network or not even that many had downloaded it as well, I found myself constantly going back to WhatsApp and that was when I decided I did not need two things."
>
> > Sara, 29 years, good internet skills

Having read about WhatsApp sharing data she wanted to switch to a safer alternative, but due to network effects, she was not able to uphold her resistance and went back to using WhatsApp after all. So, for her, practicality overrode her initial data-related concerns, which led to discontinued resistance for her.

Our findings thus showed that external constraints potentially impacted the way in which digital resistance manifested. Another reason for these various manifestations lay in the motives that different persons displayed.

4.2.   Motives for Digital Resistance

Our findings show that the motives for digital resistance varied among individuals.

4.2.1. Subjective Well-Being

Recently, digital media have entered almost every life domain. With their extended range of use cases, increasingly, individuals feel like they use the internet too much, which can go hand-in-hand with reduced well-being (Büchi et al., 2019; Gui & Büchi, 2019), as well as resignation or irritation (Draper & Turow, 2019; Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021). In addition, not being interested in certain aspects of these technologies can also relate to a person's well-being and lead to conscious non-use of certain digital media. For instance, for Karen lack of interest was the key motive for not using Facebook:

> "For me, the sad thing about Facebook is the self-promotion, appearances do not reflect reality [...] I do not feel the need for this. [...] It can be great for people who want to stay in contact with other people or who want to make new friends. I do not think that this is a bad thing, but personally, I do not use it for myself."
>
> Karen, 55 years, good internet skills

Karen went on to reflect on her internet use and said that she needed to build trust in the different platforms and services, and while she would wish for more transparency regarding data collection and use, she was convinced that the internet added to her everyday life. Therefore, she would not want to miss out on it.

This echoes the findings of a qualitative study indicating that persons disconnected from social media due to a variety of motives like not being interested in using them, feeling that they were using them too much, being concerned about their privacy, overthinking social influences or wanting to ameliorate their work-life balance (Nguyen, 2023). Besides well-being, which has been identified as an important reason for short-term disconnection practices like digital detoxes (Nguyen, 2021), we found that being critical of dataveillance and of data capitalism are major motives for digital resistance.

4.2.2. Surveillance, Dataveillance and Data Capitalism

Our digital everyday life is characterized by increasing dataveillance, i.e., a form of surveillance that is enabled through the constant and automated data collection and analysis online (Büchi et al., 2022; Clarke & Greenleaf, 2017; Segijn & Strycharz, 2022; van Dijck, 2014). Perceiving such surveillance or having a sense of dataveillance, i.e., to feeling watched or listened to online (Segijn et al., 2022), can lead to changes in how one behaves online. As a coping mechanism, individuals can wish for greater privacy protection. According to the privacy calculus approach, changing

the use of digital services or devices can be a way to do so (Kezer et al., 2022). Indeed, research showed that being aware of risks can play a role for applying self-help strategies against privacy-related risks, like adapting one's privacy settings (Kappeler et al., 2023). This echoes with our findings. While persons are conscious about the benefits digital media bring to their everyday life, some users see them as valuable but at the same time problematic because of their data collection and analysis practices. As a consequence, they reflect on ways to circumvent their data being collected. For instance, Zoe said the only way to protect oneself against having one's data collected and analyzed is by not using the internet:

> "Probably simply using the internet less. I think this is the only thing one can do."
>
> Zoe, 27 years, very good internet skills

Limiting data collection is also the reason why she consciously logged out of her Google account and consciously left Facebook to stop using it at all. While Zoe had been using Facebook for a while until she deleted it, Joe deinstalled WhatsApp immediately from the smartphone on which it was pre-installed as a reaction to his critical view of corporate data collection. The origins of such deeply engrained critical evaluation of digital data collection can lie in non-digital spheres. Joe's skepticism towards corporate data collection and use originated in his skepticism towards governmental surveillance, which he felt subjected to in his twenties. Hence, his skepticism had become an important factor of distinction to him:

> "I grew up as an anti-data-trace-being and that is also one of my favorite topics. I marvel at the lightheartedness with which people sell their lives to corporations ideologically."
>
> Joe, 66 years, good internet skills

This quote illustrates that for Joe, being critical of data traces being collected was part of his identity construction. In this way, individuals can view their resistance to digital media as an integral part of their identity, comparable to abstinence in other life domains, like for instance not smoking (Mullaney, 2005). Similarly, disconnection can also be viewed as adding to one's authentic self, for instance in the form of a emporary digital detox (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020).

Closely connected to the notion of surveillance and dataveillance is the idea of data capitalism (West, 2019). For Tim, it was obvious that private actors primarily monetize his data:

> "Corporations just started collecting data and using them. But I think, there are other ways to this, ways where one provides one's data and receives something in return and that is transparent. I think this would change a lot

and render it more positive [...] If I know that I can choose what purposes my data is being used for and decide what I am okay with and what not for a given service, this would increase my trust."

<div align="right">Tim, 35 years, excellent internet skills</div>

While Tim was to some extent okay with his data being used for commercial purposes, he said he would prefer paying for a service and in turn being able to actively decide which of his data could be used for what purpose and by whom. In this sense, he wished for more transparency and agency for individuals to control their data.

Other individuals displayed a more pronounced negative attitude towards data capitalism. For instance, Claire especially viewed the collection of data for one purpose and it subsequently being used for another one as problematic:

"You know, when data from my supermarket's loyalty program would be shared with my health insurance and they evaluated that you eat too much unhealthy food like chips and this led to an increase in your premium, such things. As far as I know and I hope, this is not the case yet. Like in China, these circumstances that they have there [...] If they [health insurances] really wanted to evaluate everything that you are doing, like when you engage in risky sports and this then leads to an increase in your health insurance premium."

<div align="right">Claire, 37 years, excellent internet skills</div>

For Claire, extended data use beyond the original intent, for instance related to marketing, was what she viewed as most questionable. In a similar fashion, individuals also viewed the algorithmic curation and personalization of content that was aimed at maximizing the time users spend on applications and thus monetizing their attention as problematic. For instance, Barbara who did not use Google for searching for information or any social media platforms like Facebook or Instagram, said, referring to these services:

"This is a huge machinery, where they use data for political purposes and what not, for campaigns and so on [...]. In addition, I just think, it's not necessary that everyone knows everything about everyone. Even though I have nothing to hide, I do think that we should not share everything [...] For certain communities this can become really dangerous, like in Russia, where homosexuality has become forbidden."

<div align="right">Barbara, 39 years, very good internet skills</div>

As a consequence, individuals like Barbara did not want to be affected by these processes or contribute to the increasing monetization and potential misuse of private data. They deemed the collection of increasing amounts of personal data as

problematic, not only for them personally, but even more from a societal perspective. Hence, they decided to resist digital media and used them in a more conscious way (Beattie, 2020; Crogan & Kinsley, 2012; Lanier, 2018; Odell, 2019).

4.3.   Consequences of Digital Resistance

Consequences of digital resistance can be positive and negative. On one hand, not using certain digital media can lead to a feeling of content and freedom. For instance, Barbara did not feel restricted by her resistance:

> "I feel free [...] I use everything that I want, I do not let this limit myself. Whenever there is an alternative for something that I would judge a nasty corporation, I use the alternative."
>
> <div align="right">Barbara, 39 years, very good internet skills</div>

Indeed, a consequence of resisting digital media can be that the disconnection leads to a restriction of choices: As soon as a person has decided against using certain technologies, for instance social media, they can feel liberated and thus, their well-being can increase (see Pojman, 1985 on Kierkegaard's philosophy of freedom). In a similar way, short-term forms of disconnection like periods of digital detox have been shown to lead to greater well-being (Nguyen, 2021). In that sense, digital resistance can be viewed positively.

On the other hand, resisting certain digital media can also lead to negative consequences, like social exclusion. In fact, we found that this anticipated consequence can be a barrier to resistance. Lock-in effects can lead to a person not resisting the use of certain digital media, even if it is wished for. If a person like Claire did not want to use WhatsApp because of dataveillance concerns, but her children's school communication took place in a group chat or a teacher reached out through this channel, she was not able to switch to an alternative service like Signal despite being aware of its existence and preferring to use it. One way to circumvent this was through *proxyuse*, i.e., when another person passed on the information that was shared through certain channels. In this way, one person's resistance was enabled by the means of another person's participation. Hence, when discussing resistance to digital media, we should bear in mind that this practice is not accessible for every individual to the same degree. Ribak and Rosenthal (2015) have pointed out that individuals who resisted digital technologies such as smartphones needed to consciously deal with the pressure of not using a service or device that was the norm. This required determination and strength. Furthermore, if a certain technology became the standard, not using it could signify missing out on information or socializing needs and ultimately, could even have led to social exclusion.

4.4.   Digital Resistance in an Always-On Society

In that sense, we can think of disconnection as a paradox (Kuntsman & Miyake, 2019). On one hand, individuals engaging in disconnection attributed hopes and benefits, such as leaving fewer data traces, increasing their privacy, not contributing to data capitalism, an increase in authenticity or autonomy and greater well-being to their behavior. On the other hand, they needed to deal with the costs that this resistance came with, like informing themselves about functional alternatives and talking to their social networks about switching to these. We saw that an individual's personal characteristics, their attitudes, the social context and the expected benefits played a role for weighing the costs and benefits of engaging in a certain behavior—or deciding against doing so (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Katz et al., 1973). This applies especially to individuals' behaviors like digital media resistance that diverge from social norms (Berkowitz, 2004), like the constant connectedness and digital media use in a highly digitized society. At the same time, research indicated that privacy concerns did not necessarily lead to behavioral changes that entailed greater privacy protection, a phenomenon that has been discussed under the term privacy paradox (Barnes, 2006; Barth et al., 2019). Instead, internet skills were crucial (Büchi et al., 2017; Lutz et al., 2020). Our results showed that a prerequisite for resisting was being a highly skilled internet user and being able to employ alternatives to address one's needs. This illustrates that the application of resistance practices should be regarded as easier for individuals who have a higher digital capital. In that sense, social and digital inequalities can be perpetuated (Ragnedda, 2020). In addition, it has been demonstrated that many individuals did not react to risks related to their privacy with increased privacy protection, but rather with privacy pragmatism, cynicism, or resignation as they felt that there was nothing they could do (Draper, 2017; Hoffmann et al., 2016; Khan et al., 2023; Lutz et al., 2020; Lutz & Newlands, 2021; van Ooijen et al., 2022). Also, the notion that persons who were discontent with the role that digital media played in their life could 'just say no' neglects the norms and interwovenness of such tools in our digital everyday life (Karppi et al., 2020). Hence, digital resistance must be seen as a privilege and from a governance-perspective, it should therefore not be considered as the only or preferred way to deal with risks that the living in a highly digitized and datafied society entails.

Hence, on a societal level, digital resistance practices can be viewed critically as their application furthers a shift of responsibility to cope with societal challenges such as increasing dataveillance and debating the role that technology should play in our lives onto individuals: they need to actively opt-out of the norm of connectivity if they are dissatisfied with it (Kaun, 2021). In fact, while digital detox, as a temporarily limited practice, may actually help in keeping the status quo of an increasingly connected everyday life, digital resistance is a practice that aims at breaking with these conditions (Hesselberth, 2018; Odell, 2019). Hence, digital resistance can be understood as a tactic to challenge the existing power structures. In that sense, resistance

to digital media questions the expectation that individuals need to constantly participate online. However, while resistance to digital media or certain social media platforms can be viewed as performative (Portwood-Stacer, 2013) it is questionable, whether individuals' disconnection practices can lead to social change (Karppi et al., 2021) or if they lead to the perpetuation of the status quo by serving the neo-liberal self-optimization narratives.

5. CONCLUSION

This article set out to explore resistance to digital media, i.e., manifestations of digital resistance, motives for resisting, and the consequences thereof, among internet users in a highly connected society, where using digital media in everyday life is the norm. We applied thematic analysis to semi-structured interviews with 16 Swiss adult internet users to investigate digital resistance. Our findings showed that resistance to digital media manifested in not using certain services (e.g., Google Search), not using any service by a certain corporation (e.g., Meta), or not using a certain type of tool (e.g., fitness watch, voice assistant). The extent of such resistance practices varied: it ranged from partial to total and even discontinued resistance and included niche as well as thorough resistance. Also, it took on explicit but also implicit forms, by only using certain applications in certain situations. This conscious non-use was accompanied by functional substitution (e.g., switching from WhatsApp to Signal) or renouncing from obtaining certain benefits (e.g., by not using a smartphone at all). A central motive for resisting was viewing services as problematic due to their surveillance practices, lack of privacy, data-monetizing practices, or monopoly position. Digital resisters were unhappy about these side effects of our digitized everyday lives. In addition, they had low trust in these services and the respective private corporations and wished for more (governmental) regulation. Digital resistance is an active behavioral choice with which individuals cope with aspects of their digital life. Hence, it can be understood as an active form of non-participation and refusal to digital norms. At the same time, this choice was highly contingent on personal characteristics and contexts, like a person's level of internet skills and their social circle. Indeed, an understanding group of close people was crucial, as without it, resisters would have been excluded from their social network. As a consequence, digital resisters could feel excluded from certain contexts. At the same time, however, they felt self-empowered as they perceived themselves doing something against the status quo that they found problematic, like increasing surveillance capitalism.

This article explored the phenomenon of resistance to digital media from an individual-centered-perspective. By doing so, it deepens our understanding of conscious non-use of digital media as an act of resistance in a society that operates heavily digitally. This exploration identified individuals' perceptions and wishes and hence can inspire regulation that suits these needs.

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