

Disconnect to reconnect?

Towards a healthier relationship with personal technologies.



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WHO AM I?



Ba in Psych, Ma & PhD in Communication Sciences (KUL)

2012-2021 Tilburg U, the Netherlands

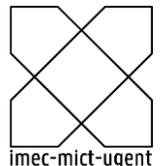
2021-current Associate Professor Digital Culture @Ghent U

Mobile Media

Media Psychology | Media Sociology | Media Studies



DISCONNECT





1. What is the problem?

2. How can we understand the problem?

3. Why is the problem difficult to solve?

4. Is digital disconnection the answer?



DISCONNECT



Autonomy

Loss of control



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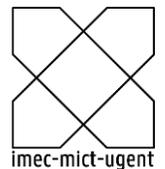


Photo by [LARS KAIZER](#) on [Unsplash](#)

*technoference | zoom fatigue | digital
stress | availability stress | online
vigilance | cognitive overload | FoMO*



More Time on Technology, Less Happiness? Associations Between Digital-Media Use and Psychological Well-Being

Jean M. Twenge 

Department of Psychology, San Diego State University

Abstract

Studies using large samples consistently find that more frequent users of digital media are lower in psychological well-being than less frequent users; even data sets used as evidence for weak effects show that twice as many heavy users (vs. light users) are low in well-being. Differences in perspective may stem from the statistics used; I argue that comparing well-being across levels of digital-media use is more useful than the percentage of variance explained, as most studies on digital-media use do not measure other influences on well-being (e.g., genetics, trauma), and these other influences, unlike frequency of digital-media use, are rarely controllable. Nonusers are generally lower in well-being than light users of digital media, however, suggesting that limited use may be beneficial. Longitudinal and experimental studies suggest that at least some of the causation moves from digital-media use to lower well-being. Mechanisms may include the displacement of activities more beneficial to well-being (sleep, face-to-face social interaction), upward social comparison, and cyberbullying.

Keywords

digital media, well-being, happiness, depression, social media, electronic devices

Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?

More comfortable online than out partying, people have never been. But they're on the brink of a mental-health crisis.

Empirical Article

Increase
Suicide-
Rates A
and Lin
Time

Jean M. Twenge
Gabrielle N.
¹San Diego State U

Abstract

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Keywords

depression, soc

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Short Communication/Co

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Yaakov Ophir^{1,2} ,
Hananel Rosenberg
¹Seymour Fox School of Educati
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Abstract

In this commentary, we r
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and inadequate statistical
between screen activities ;
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results and could be misle

Short Communication/Commentary

Considering All of the Data on
Digital-Media Use and Depressive
Symptoms: Response to Ophir,
Lipshits-Braziler, and Rosenberg (2020)

Jean M. Twenge¹ , Thomas E. Joiner², Megan L. Rogers²,
and Gabrielle N. Martin¹

¹Department of Psychology, San Diego State University, and ²Department of Psychology, Florida State University

Abstract

We have documented increases since 2012 in depressive symptoms, suicide-related outcomes, and suicide and identified associations between digital-media use and depressive symptoms and suicide-related outcomes across two data sets: Monitoring the Future (MtF) and the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS). Ophir, Lipshits-Braziler, and Rosenberg's criticisms of the MtF data (this issue; pp. 374–378) are addressed by the YRBSS data, which included a measure of digital-media use in hours. Ophir et al. assumed that the displacement of nonscreen activities by screen activities occurs only at the individual level, whereas in fact, time displacement at the group or cohort level may be more important. Some discrepancies in the literature can be traced to the use of percentage variance explained; in fact, heavy (vs. light) digital-media users are considerably more likely (often twice as likely) to be depressed or low in well-being across several large data sets.

Keywords

depression, mass media, well-being, adolescent peer relations

Underestimating digital media harm

Amy Orben^{1,2} and Andrew K. Przybylski^{3,4}

Jean M. Twenge¹, Jonathan Haidt², T...

REPLYING TO J. M. Twenge et al. *Nature Human Behaviour* <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-020-0839-4> (2020)

Research Article

Screens, Teens, and Well-Being: Time-Use-Diary



Amy Orben¹ and Andrew K. Przybylski^{3,4}

¹Department of Experimental Psychology, University of Cambridge

Abstract

The notion that digital technology use is harmful to well-being, and most psychological self-report measures of digital technology use are based on large-scale data sets from diary designs to introduce methodological bias. Little evidence for substantial harm, particularly before bedtime.

Keywords

large-scale social data, digital technology use, adolescents, well-being, time-use diary, specification-curve analysis, open materials, preregistered

Our findings contribute to a growing scholarly consensus that time spent on smartphones tells us little about young people's well-being. (Bradley & Howard, 2021)

Results are consistent with trivial effects detected in large cross-sectional research, and call into question the causal relationship between social media and well-being on the daily level. (Hall et al., 2021)

Our analyses do not establish causality and the small effect sizes observed suggest that increased screen time is unlikely to be directly harmful to 9-and-10-year-old children. (Paulich et al., 2021)

The authors conclude that the association of screen time with well-being is negative but "too small to warrant policy change." Orben and Przybylski made six analytical decisions that reduced effect sizes, and their conclusions are in stark contrast to the practically important differences identified in other analyses of the same datasets, especially for social media use among young people. For example, Kelly et al.² used the Millennium Cohort Study to find that screen time predicted depressive symptoms as well as standard demographic controls, linear $r=0.06$ (or 0.36% of the variance), but

information of the original paper, we re-ran our analyses by providing additional analyses based on the study data.

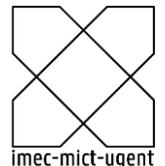
Twenge et al.¹ rightly identified that specification curve analysis (SCA)³ is a powerful tool for exploratory research. SCA highlights how seemingly inconsequential, albeit equally valid, decisions taken during secondary data analysis can yield divergent results⁴; its value is rooted in providing transparency and context. That being said, in their critique, Twenge et al. incorrectly concluded that the small

However, these measures were included in an alternate SCA, which indicates, we re-ran our SCA (see Methods). The results (Fig. 1 and Table 1) show that the median association and effect size ($\beta=-0.051$ (95% confidence interval: -0.072 to -0.031), percentage variance explained=0.3% (0.2–0.6%)) are not significantly different from those in our original SCA (median $\beta=-0.032$, percentage variance explained=0.4%). Wearing glasses was still more negatively associated with well-being in adolescents than use of digital technology use predicted nearly 0.5% of the variance of girls. Furthermore, the measure did not produce a significantly more negative association than males (females, median $\beta=-0.065$; males, median $\beta=-0.037$ (-0.041 to -0.033)).

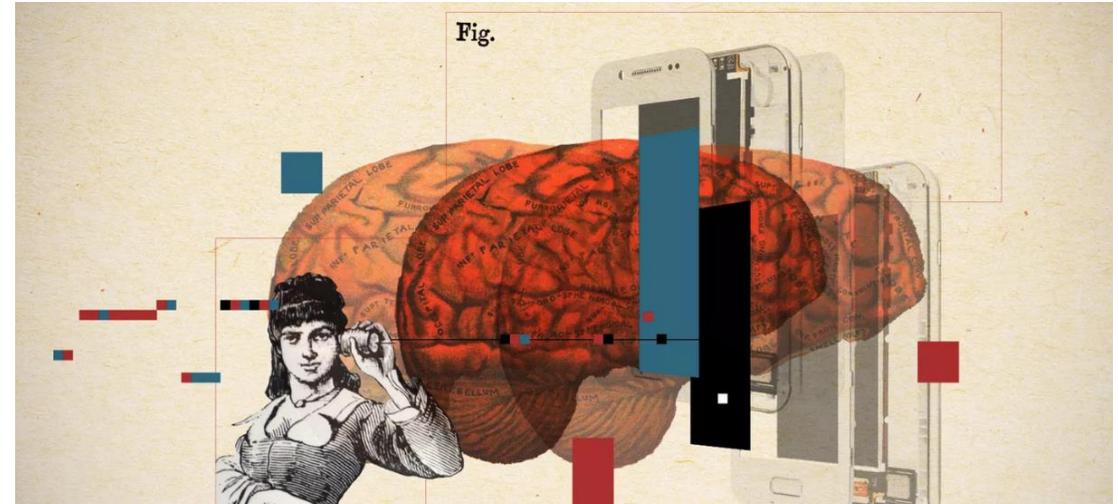
furthermore, by applying nonlinear modelling methodology as suggested by Twenge et al.¹ (Table 1), we found that the average association between the use of digital technology and well-being was slightly positive for low-intensity users (median effect=0.018,

Przybylski? Kelly et al.² used the standard, validated measure of depressive symptoms as well as standard demographic controls, linear $r=0.06$ (or 0.36% of the variance), but

pre, they questioned our selection of a wide range and combination of outcome variables. Supplementary Table 6 of ref. ² demonstrates that doing so is prudent because researchers (including the commentators⁶) routinely treat novel combinations of individual survey



~~Technology is good~~
~~Technology is bad~~
Our relationship with
technology is
complex
and ambivalent



**Have smartphones really
destroyed a generation? We
don't know.**

But here's how to find out: Scientists need to ask better questions — and big tech needs to help.

By Brian Resnick | @B_resnick | brian@vox.com | Updated May 16, 2019, 12:22pm EDT



DISCONNECT



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- 2. How can we understand the problem?**
3. Why is the problem difficult to solve?
4. Is digital disconnection the answer?



DISCONNECT



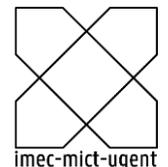
Digital Media as Drugs?



Vanden Abeele, M. M. P., Halfmann, A., & Lee, E. W. (2022). Drug, Demon, or Donut? Theorizing the Relationship Between Social Media Use, Digital well-being and Digital Disconnection. *Current Opinion in Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsy.2021.12.007>



DISCONNECT



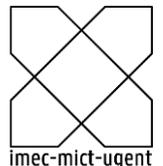
Digital Media as Demon?



<https://www.freepik.com/vectors/halloween>
created by upklyak



DISCONNECT



Digital media as Donut?

→ Quantity & Quality matter

Appkins Digital Health Pyramid



Source: <https://techdzone.wordpress.com/2018/05/29/zenscreen-created-an-appkins-digital-health-pyramid/>

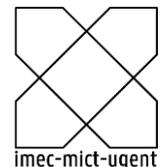
Sutton, T. (2017). Disconnect to reconnect: The food/technology metaphor in digital detoxing. *First Monday*, 22(6).

Orben, A. (2021). Digital Diet: A 21st century approach to understanding digital technologies and development. *Infant and Child Development*, e2228.

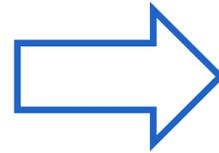
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DISCONNECT



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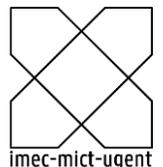


Digital Wellbeing

Finding the right **balance between the benefits and drawbacks** accrued from mobile connectivity



DISCONNECT



How can we maximize benefits, while minimizing drawbacks?

Controlled pleasure and **entertainment...**
without **loss of control**.

Instrumental and **meaningful use...**
that does not cause **functional
impairment** or **conflict**.

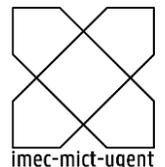


Gijs van der Wal

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/gijsvanderwal/15893868835>



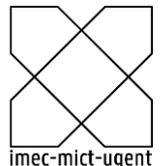
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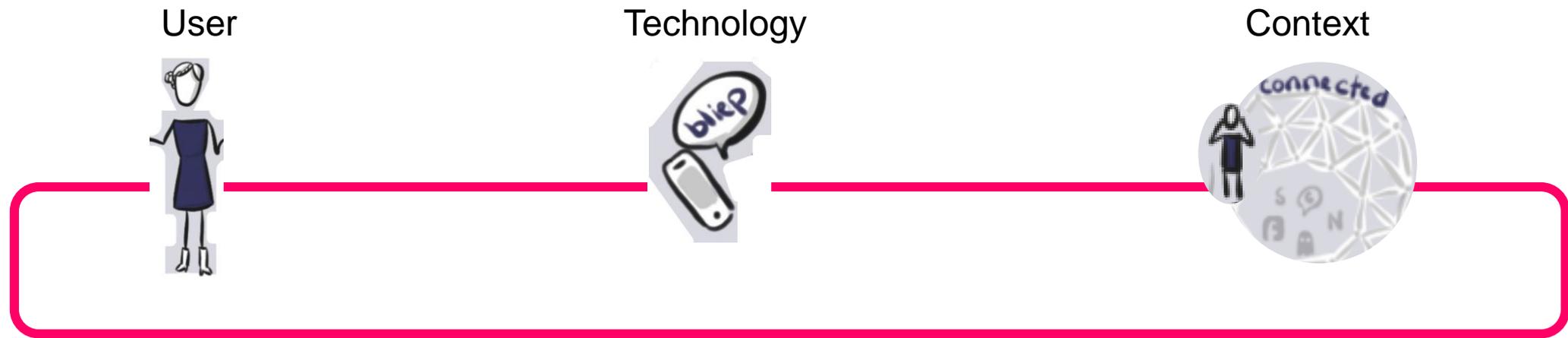
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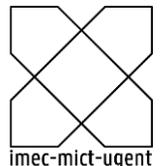
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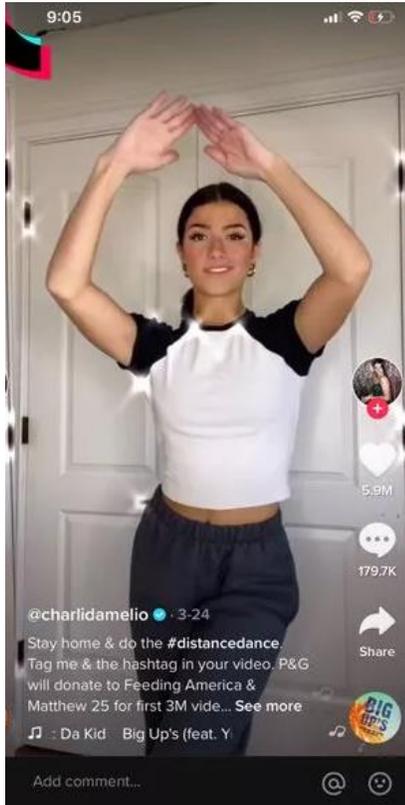


But... Digital wellbeing is difficult to achieve.



DISCONNECT





A Unique User



Who you are (FOMO, impulsive, ...)

What you aim to **achieve**

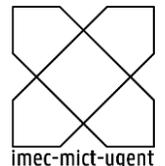
What you **experience**

Acknowledge individual susceptibility & Person-specific manifestations

Acknowledge temporal variability

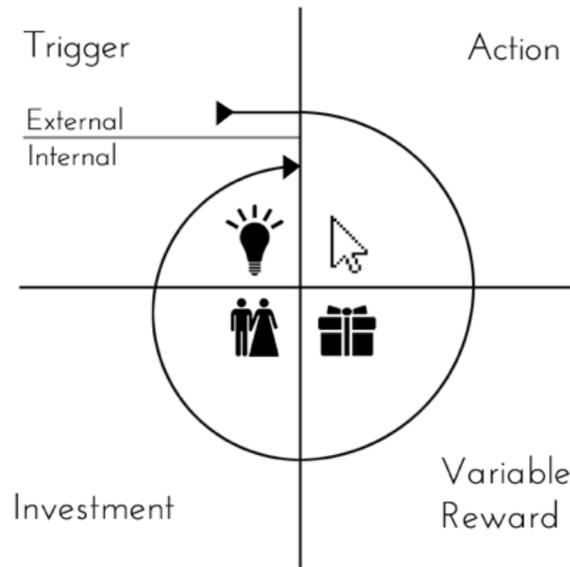


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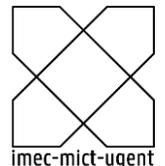


Distracting Devices

The Hook



DISCONNECT



Context: Culture of Connectivity

If I text you at
10:30 PM
I expect a reply at
10:29 PM

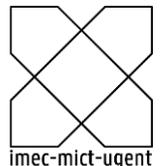
Individual (Goals and values)

Group (Norms, rules, and expectations)

Societal (Acceleration, Commodification,
Responsibilization)



DISCONNECT

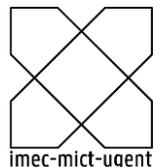


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DISCONNECT

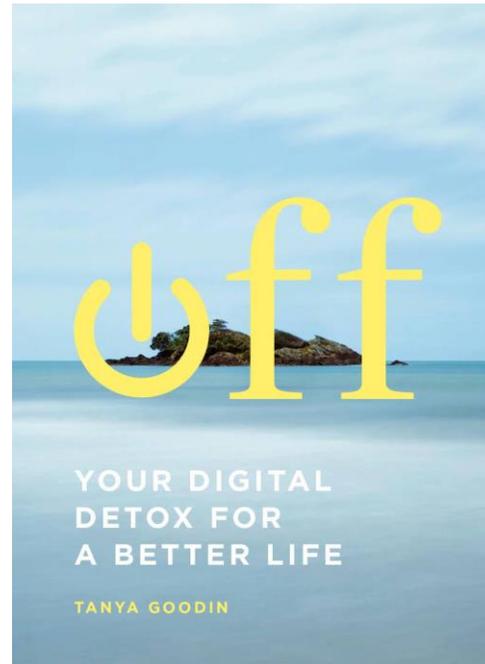


Disconnection as a solution?

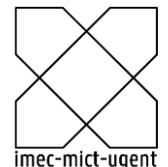
Digital detox
Mobile Apps
Infrastructure



<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-06-22/mobile-phone-lock-and-learn-trial-in-wauchope/11209716>



DISCONNECT



A PROCESS-BASED MODEL OF DISCONNECTION

(1) Time Displacement
Media procrastination, binging



Limits to
Screen Time



(2) Distraction/Interference
Media multitasking, technoference



Limits to
Access



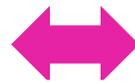
(3) Exposure
Cognitive overload & mood effects



Limits to
Exposure/Content



(4) Boundary blurring
24/7 activation of social roles

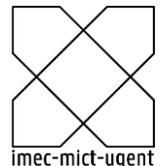


Limits to
Channels



DISCONNECT

Vanden Abeele, M. M. P., Vandebosch, H., ...& Baillien, E. (2022). When, How and Why does Digital Disconnection Work? A Process-Based Model of Mechanisms Linking Digital Disconnection to Improved Well-Being. Etmaal van de Communicatiewetenschap, 10-11 Feb, Brussels.



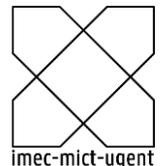
Many questions remain...

Is disconnection a new area of **privilege**?

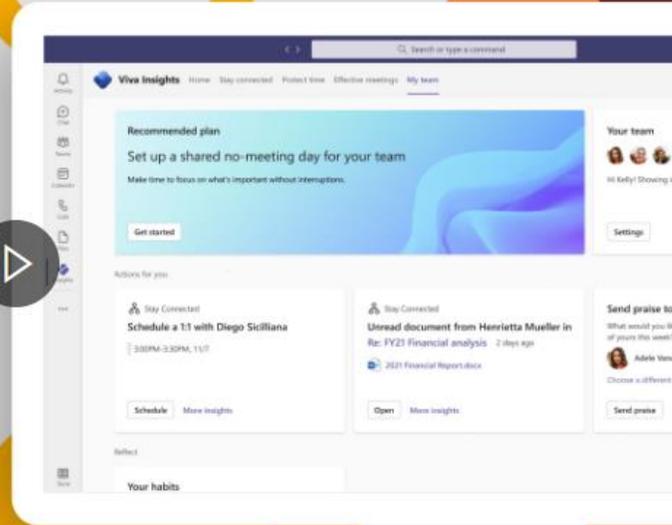
Does disconnection contribute to behavioral **'surveillance' and control**?



DISCONNECT



Help teams build better work habits such as protecting time for uninterrupted deep work



Help teams balance productivity and wellbeing

Foster productivity and wellbeing for teams large or small, with manager and leader insights. Help managers explore and build personal habits that impact team culture—for example, by scheduling "no-meeting" days.

Get personal insights in the flow of work

Explore ways to build better work habits. Track and improve the effectiveness of your meetings. Prioritize wellbeing with actionable recommendations, such as reserving time for focused work.

Microsoft's My Analytics for instance, claims to enable employees to *"understand and improve [...] work patterns—gaining uninterrupted time to focus, being able to disconnect and recharge, and networking and collaborating effectively—with help from the MyAnalytics dashboard and weekly email digest"* (<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365/business/myanalytics-personal-analytics>).

managers can *"drill down into data on individual employees, to find those who participate less in group chat conversations, send fewer emails, or fail to collaborate in shared documents"* (Alex Hern. The Guardian. 20 Nov 2020).



DISCONNECT



Many questions remain...

Is disconnection an **individual responsibility**, or rather not?

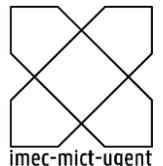
*Les modalités du plein exercice par le salarié de son **droit à la déconnexion** et la mise en place par l'entreprise de dispositifs de régulation de l'utilisation des outils numériques, en vue d'assurer le respect des temps de repos et de congé ainsi que de la vie personnelle et familiale. (French Labor Law, Article 55, implemented on 1 January 2017)*

And why do we disconnect?

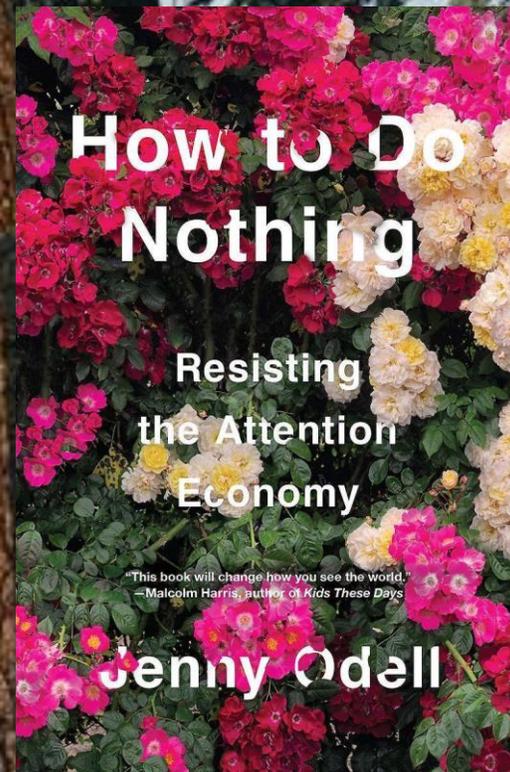
So that we are more productive afterwards?



DISCONNECT



“In a world where value is determined by our productivity, many of us find our every last minute captured, optimized, or appropriated as a financial resource by the technologies we use daily. [...] The point of doing nothing, as I define it, isn’t to return to work refreshed and ready to be more productive, but rather to question what we currently perceive as productive.”



How to Do Nothing

Resisting
the Attention
Economy

"This book will change how you see the world."
—Malcolm Harris, author of *Kids These Days*

Jenny Odell

Want to read more?

Vanden Abeele, M. M. P. (2020). Digital Wellbeing as a Dynamic Construct. *Communication Theory*. doi: [10.1093/ct/qtaa024](https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/qtaa024)

Want to follow the project?

Stay tuned for the project website and the project's web presence on twitter

Contact?

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DISCONNECT

