

## Gender and Digital Disconnection: Experiences in Norway

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This survey-based study examines digital disconnection experiences among 1,142 respondents in Norway, focusing on self-reported behaviors and opinions regarding digital media non-use in everyday life. Specifically, it highlights gender differences, along with other sociodemographic variations, found in the responses of 552 women and 590 men. The results show that both genders reported spending ‘too much’ time on their smartphones, with women reporting this more frequently. Yet notably, there is no significant difference in self-reported screen time estimates between the two genders. Moreover, women reported imposing more frequent smartphone restrictions in various scenarios, whereas men expressed greater opposition to authorities interfering with Internet and smartphone use. Still, while these differences are significant, the quantitative description reveals them to be rather minor. This study seeks to advance the field of digital disconnection studies by integrating a gender perspective, thereby contributing to its interdisciplinary scope. Furthermore, it aims to establish a foundation for future research, potentially expanding beyond comparative analyses and the gender binary, and fostering more critical perspectives.

*Keywords: Digital disconnection, digital media, gender, quantitative description, Norway*

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## Introduction

Recent scholarship in media and communication research is increasingly devoted to not only examine the intricacies of digital connection but also its inversion, *digital disconnection*. While resistance to media predates the Internet (Syvertsen, 2017), the proliferation of digital media has brought renewed attention to voluntary practices of non-use (Nassen et al., 2023; Ross et al., 2024). This surge of interest has catalyzed the emergence of a robust body of research, with *disconnection studies* now garnering recognition as an independent field of study (Altmaier et al., 2024; Nassen et al., 2023). Central to understanding digital connection and disconnection is the insight that, while they may initially appear as opposites, they are not mutually exclusive. Instead, they exist along a spectrum that media users navigate. Within this spectrum, digital disconnection can take on various shapes and forms, ranging from restricted use during holidays (Floros et al., 2021; Syvertsen, 2022) to only minor adjustments in daily routines (Mols & Pridmore, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2022). Consequently, what Altmaier et al. (2024) describe as the object of digital disconnection can also vary; it may manifest as disengagement from digital devices such as smartphones, platforms like Instagram, the Internet more broadly, or entirely different categories of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Moreover, digital disconnection can be observed on different scales, ranging from individuals (e.g., Nguyen et al., 2022; Schwarzenegger & Menke, 2020) to larger organizations (e.g., Guyard & Kaun, 2018) and authorities (e.g., Hesselberth, 2018). In this context, Ross et al. (2024) argue that digital disconnection research operates along a continuum, spanning from being individually functional, focused on the personal behaviors and opinions of media users, to being socially meaningful, which emphasizes broader societal implications.

This brief overview of research interests already indicates that digital disconnection is far from being a uniform phenomenon. In this regard, Treré (2021) argues that “universalistic and taken-for-granted assumptions regarding the meanings and motivations of dis/connection” (p. 1674) are unsettled. He advocates expanding the research scope by scrutinizing the social and economic factors influencing digital disconnection. This study emphasizes sociodemographics in disconnection studies by centering on gender, a perspective gaining increasing attention in this field. For

instance, researchers contend that both women's use and non-use of digital media are substantially shaped by societal expectations regarding caregiving (Bozan & Tréré, 2023; Fast, 2021; Mannell et al., 2024; Portwood-Stacer, 2013; Van Bruyssel et al., 2023). In contrast, men are often understood as more independent in their relationship with digital media (Beattie, 2020; Portwood-Stacer, 2013). However, these arguments frequently remain conceptual, and initial empirical data is predominantly confined to singular cases.

Since a comprehensive investigation into the role of gender in digital disconnection has not yet been conducted, this study aims to address this gap by examining gender differences between men and women in survey data from 1,142 individuals in Norway. This dataset comprises self-reported evaluations and estimates of time spent across various screens, reports on smartphone restrictions in different situations, and opinions toward responsibilities associated with Internet and smartphone use. Consequently, regarding the object of disconnection, this study focuses predominantly on the smartphone, but also integrates other devices such as computers, tablets, and the Internet in general. The survey questions explored digital disconnection not only as the absence of digital media use but also by examining digital media use from a complementary perspective. Hence, while digital disconnection is largely characterized as non-action and is therefore not easily quantifiable (Ross et al., 2024), incorporating measurements of use—specifically, evaluations and estimates of time spent online—provides a robust entry point. It is also important to note that the focus on digital disconnection in this study does not pertain to temporary periods of abstention, such as digital detoxes (e.g., Syvertsen, 2020; Syvertsen & Enli, 2020), or complete abstention, such as media refusal (e.g., Portwood-Stacer, 2013; Syvertsen, 2017). Instead, it centers on an everyday perspective of regular digital media users in Norway. Accordingly, this study adopts the concept of digital disconnection as individually functional, prioritizing individual perceptions of media users. At the same time, by addressing responsibilities associated with Internet and smartphone use, this study responds to Ross et al.'s (2024) call to bridge the gap between individual practices of digital disconnection and its broader social significance. Following the authentic process of data analysis, the study employs a descriptive methodology to present its

findings. It is guided by the research question: *How do men and women experience digital disconnection differently within the context of Norway?*

The reports reveal gender differences in the evaluation of time spent online, the frequency of smartphone restrictions in social situations, holidays, and in nature, as well as opinions toward the role of authorities. Through these results, this study highlights the nuanced dynamics involved, encouraging further exploration through future research. Moreover, this study integrates digital disconnection studies with gender studies, thereby seeking to actively contribute to the interdisciplinary scope of both fields.

### **Gender in digital disconnection studies**

Previous publications in digital disconnection studies increasingly address potential gender links, particularly examining different prerequisites for men and women. For instance, in a qualitative interview study, Portwood-Stacer (2013) discusses a report from a man who bonded with other men over not needing Facebook, specifically in opposition to their wives. She contends that this instance illustrates “that masculine norms of rugged independence and seriousness — in contrast to the implicit femininity of playfulness and dependence — were bound up in the men’s vocal disidentification with social networking activities” (p. 1050). In a similar vein, Beattie (2020) considers how gender norms affect the ability to engage in digital disconnection. He describes the “ideal disconnected subject as one who is male and unencumbered and can cut their social ties at whim, something that is often not available to women and professionals who are socially burdened with relational obligations, such as parenting or managing social connections” (p. 12). Moreover, Fast (2021) introduces the rhetorical figure of the ‘post-digital housewife’, commonly depicting ‘her’ as a woman successfully managing care responsibilities in both the digital and offline realms. This not only includes achieving the right balance between these domains for herself, but also assisting those she typically cares for. An example of this can be found in a study conducted by Mannell et al. (2024) on low-income families in Australia. Their interview data includes a report of a mother who enrolled her children in a program designed to foster digital connection among students, yet she takes the Internet router with her in her handbag while shopping to prevent them from overconsuming online

content. Similarly, in Bozans and Trerés' (2023) interview study on Turkish villagers, mothers believed that reducing their Internet use would grant them more quality time with their children. However, they also feel pressured to remain online to be accessible to their children's teachers.

While the contributions outlined provide compelling arguments regarding gender and digital disconnection, they predominantly focus on women in caretaker roles, such as wives, housewives, and mothers. As a result, women's personal preferences appear to be overlooked. Moreover, many of the previous works tend to be conceptual in nature or often rely on isolated cases. Overall, there remains a significant gap in empirical data on the relationship between digital disconnection and gender. In their systematic mapping review of empirical studies on digital disconnection, Altmaier et al. (2024) identified gender primarily as a control variable, with little deeper consideration given to its particularities. Other publications discerning trends in digital disconnection research, such as Ross et al. (2024) and Nassen et al. (2023), did not highlight gender as a prominent aspect either. Hence, there are only a few studies in digital disconnection research paying closer attention to this dimension. One of these exceptions is a qualitative investigation made by Franks et al. (2018), which focused on the reconnection behavior of individuals following Facebook sabbaticals. The study discovered that men tended to revert to their previous usage patterns more readily, whereas women demonstrated a more deliberate and intentional process of reconnection. Rather contrarily, Turel and Vaghefi (2019) found in their experimental study that women were twice as likely as men to fail to abstain from social networking sites for a whole week. Another study by Van Bruyssel et al. (2023) examined gendered aspects in the marketing of disconnection workshops and retreats. They found that products directed toward women often advertise digital disconnection as a way to reallocate time to social reproductive tasks. In contrast, campaigns aimed at men emphasize disconnected time for improving professional skills. Examining the impact of different sociodemographics, Nguyen and Hargittai's (2023) quantitative study, found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, men in the USA tended to engage in digital disconnection more frequently than women. Overall, the women were less likely to have rules about limiting their digital media use. A different quantitative survey from Sweden, revealed that women experienced stronger moral dissonance regarding

smartphone use than men. They encountered both the rewards and problems associated with the smartphone to a greater extent (Fast et al., 2023). Accordingly, the previous state of research on gender and digital disconnection can be summarized as highly fragmented, with few studies giving deliberate attention to the matter.

### *Integrating gender studies into digital disconnection studies*

In examining the societal dimension of gender regarding digital disconnection, this study is located at the intersection of gender studies with media and communication studies. Previous research at this juncture has its origins in dissecting the portrayal of gender in media and gendered dynamics in media production (Gadzepko & Smith, 2020; Mendes & Carter, 2008). Moreover, with the diffusion of digital media, research began to closely examine the role of gender in accessing media across communities and populations (Kemp, 2024; OECD, 2018; Robinson et al., 2015). This study, as further illustrated below, builds on such data and aims to broaden the scope of inquiry beyond media consumption to include the digital disconnection at a national scale.

When reviewing the existing literature on gender and media use, a complex and often contradictory picture emerges. A recurring argument about women's media use, also found in some of the studies cited above, suggests that they are tethered to digital devices as they engage in relational labor online (Beattie, 2020; Bozan & Tréré, 2023; Fast, 2021; Jarrett, 2016; Mannell et al., 2024; Portwood-Stacer, 2013). However, this argument can also be flipped, as media can provide women with space to detach from offline caregiving responsibilities and experience moments of solitude, aligning with the concept of escapism (Herzog, 1941; Thorhauge & Gregersen, 2019). For men, the dynamics are equally complex. While some authors suggest that digital disconnection is more accessible to them (Beattie, 2020; Portwood-Stacer, 2013), men are also significantly affected by online dependencies, such as problematic gaming (Nogueira-López et al., 2023; Winds et al., 2024). Thus, integrating gender studies into digital disconnection studies may offer greater clarity in understanding these intricacies.

### *Study Context: Norway*

Norway represents a digital society, resembled by Internet access being available in 99 percent of households (OECD, 2024), with the average Norwegian spending 4 hours and 9 minutes per day online (Statistics Norway, 2024a). As a welfare state, Norway's media system is designed to ensure equal access to information for all citizens through public broadcasting services and ongoing efforts to expand digital infrastructure (Syvertsen et al., 2014). Correspondingly, news media, public administration, and other civic organizations increasingly adopt digital services (Skogerbø & Karlsen, 2021). Still, Norwegian society also takes on critical stances toward digital media. Like many other European countries (e.g., Adu, 2024; Hunt, 2024), Norway engages in debates regarding the role of smartphones in learning environments. As part of this discourse, in February 2024, the Norwegian government officially recommended keeping smartphones out of classrooms (Norwegian Government Security and Service Organisation, 2024). Moreover, Norwegians highly value outdoor activities, despite the landscape's topography often disrupting digital connectivity. While some experience this as frustrating, there's a steadfast appreciation for Norwegian nature as a domain untouched by ubiquitous mobile coverage (Syvertsen, 2022).

Gender equality is deeply valued in Norway, with a history of government-supported liberal feminism, also referred to as 'state feminism' (Hernes, 1987). In terms of media use, both men and women access the Internet to similar extents (Statistics Norway, 2024b), indicating no gender-based disparities in digital infrastructure access. Still, men and women in Norway demonstrate different preferences in their digital media use. For instance, women show slightly higher activity on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest, whereas men tend to be more prominent users of platforms like X and LinkedIn (Kemp, 2024). Such gendered trends in media use are especially pronounced in gaming among children. Specifically, 73 percent of boys aged 9 to 15 play digital games daily, compared to a smaller proportion of 55 percent among girls in the same age group (Statistics Norway, 2024c). This suggests that although Norwegian society is characterized by gender equality, there are still gender differences worth considering. Moreover, it is important to note that despite Norway's progressive

characteristics, the country continues to grapple with gender issues. An example from the Norwegian media landscape is the underrepresentation of women in news media (Figenschou et al., 2021). Similarly, the pension gap, while gradually closing, still reflects a 23 percent disparity, with differences rooted in the historical division of labor according to gender (Halvorsen & Hetland, 2023). Furthermore, women are disproportionately affected by severe forms of domestic violence (Dale et al., 2023).

### **Methods**

Quantitative surveys serve as a widely adopted method in disconnection studies, spanning from accompanying surveys in targeted interventions among smaller groups to investigations among large sample sizes (Altmaier et al., 2024; Nassen et al., 2023). This study adopts the latter approach as it was created as a collaborative effort within the research project ‘Intrusive media, ambivalent users, digital detox’ (Digitox) to capture given patterns across the diverse research interests within the project. These include various practices, motivations, and situations regarding digital disconnection, as well as opinions and other related facets. The questionnaire primarily consisted of close-ended questions, alongside Likert-style inquiries concerning self-reported behavior and opinions toward digital disconnection. Notably, in designing the study, gender was not a primary focus and was only considered a control variable. As a result, questions directly addressing potential gender differences were not included. However, upon reviewing the data, discernible gender differences emerged. Consequently, identifying these differences through quantitative description is both the method and the very inspiration of this article.

The survey, conducted by Kantar TNS from February 13 to 21, 2023, took place during a quiet post-COVID period in Norway in the winter, with no national holidays or other notable occasions. The questionnaire prioritized social gender over biological sex, offering respondents the choices ‘kvinne’ (en. woman) and ‘mann’ (en. man). Although the survey extended participation to individuals identifying beyond the gender classifications of men and women, the sampling failed to include such respondents. Accordingly, this presents a limitation of this study, as the scope of social gender extends beyond the categories of men and women.



Using a descriptive approach, this study refrains from testing hypotheses that, at this point in time, lack the descriptive knowledge necessary to inform them. Additionally, the importance of descriptive approaches, particularly in domains such as race and gender, is underscored by Freelon et al. (2023). They argue that, despite offering numerous advantages, statistical complexities can occasionally obscure existing patterns. Instead, the often-dismissed ‘mere description’ can sometimes provide clearer insights. Therefore, the descriptive analysis approach employed in this study facilitates a thorough presentation and subsequent discussion of the identified gender differences. The analysis involved determining mean scores and frequencies, along with conducting logistic binary regression and multiple regression analyses. For the regression analysis, the first model incorporates demographic variables such as age, education, household size, and income. The second model builds on this by also including gender as a variable. This approach shows whether the explanatory power of the models improves with the addition of gender, while also providing insights into gender within the context of other variables, and shedding light on those variables themselves. Leveraging the latter, the other sociodemographics are briefly discussed in the results and discussion section, while maintaining the primary focus on gender.

In total, 1,142 individuals residing in Norway participated in the survey. Table 1 details the age, gender, and living situations of the respondents, whose ages ranged from 19 to 88 years ( $M = 55$ ,  $SD = 16.6$ ).

**Table 1. Sample characteristics.**

	Percent	M	SD	n	N
Age		55	16.6		1,142
Emerging adulthood (18–29 years)	9.1			104	
Established adulthood (30–44)	21.1			241	
Middle adulthood (45–64)	35.8			409	
Late adulthood ( $\geq 65$ years)	34.0			388	
Gender					1,142
Women	48.3			552	
Men	51.7			590	
Education					1,142
Primary school	4.2			48	
Secondary general education	11.2			128	
Secondary vocational education	12.3			140	
Vocational school	8.7			99	
University education (<4 years)	34.8			398	
University education (>4 years)	28.8			329	
People in home					1,142
1 person	23.1			264	
2 persons	44.9			513	
3 persons	13.1			150	
4 persons	13.5			154	
5 persons or more	5.3			61	
Income					1,142
Under 200.000 NOK	6.2			71	
200.000 to 299.999 NOK	6.8			78	
300.000 to 399.999 NOK	10.9			125	
400.000 to 499.999 NOK	15.4			176	
500.000 to 599.999 NOK	16.9			193	
600.000 to 699.999 NOK	12.7			145	
700.000 to 799.999 NOK	8.2			94	
800.000 to 999.999 NOK	5.8			66	
1.000.000 NOK or more	5.0			57	
I'd rather not say	12.0			137	

*Note.* The age groups are defined according to Arnett et al. (2014) and Mehta et al. (2020).

## Results

### *Gender differences in evaluations of time spent online and screen time estimates*

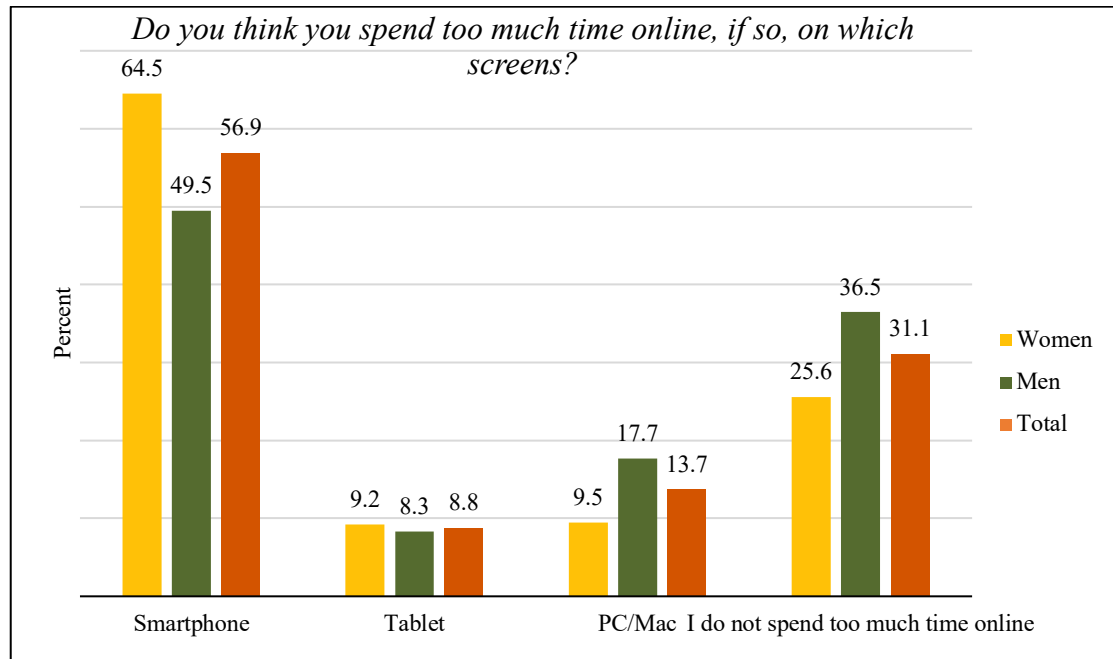
Limiting time spent online to make room for other activities is considered a key driver in adopting various practices of digital disconnection (Guyard & Kaun, 2018; Schwarzenegger & Menke, 2020). Therefore, the survey inquired respondents on whether they spent too much time on various screen devices. To prevent potential leading interpretations, one of the response options deliberately allowed respondents to indicate that they do not feel they spend too much time online. The results (see Table 2) suggest that age and gender were significant factors in self-evaluations of time spent across screens. The second model reveals significant differences between men and women, showing that women were more critical of their smartphone use, with  $\beta = 0.51$  ( $p < 0.001$ ), whereas men were more critical of their PC/Mac use, with  $\beta = -0.87$  ( $p < 0.001$ ). However, men were also more likely to report that they do not spend too much time online in general, with  $\beta = -0.30$ , though this was only borderline significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). Regarding age, older respondents were generally less likely to believe they overuse their smartphones (M1 and M2:  $\beta = -0.06$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) or PCs/Macs (M1 and M2:  $\beta = -0.01$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). In contrast, tablet overuse was slightly more prominent in older individuals ( $\beta = 0.02$ ,  $p < 0.01$  in both models), though the effect was minor.

Zooming in on gender, the frequencies depicted in Figure 1 further highlight distinct differences. 64.5 percent of women believed they spent too much time on smartphones, contrasting with a lower 49.5 percent of men. Inverting the perspective, 36.5 percent of men indicated they were not spending too much time on any screen, compared to 25.6 percent of women. Although no clear gender difference was evident in tablet use, the data revealed a different scenario for PC and Mac use. In detail, 17.7 percent of men compared to 9.5 percent of women found themselves spending too much time on these devices. Despite these percentages being visibly lower than those related to smartphones, they suggest a small, albeit persistent divergence in device preferences among genders.

**Table 2. Binary logistic regression summary of screen time evaluation.**

	Independent variables	Smartphone	PC/Mac	Tablets	I do not spend too much time online
Model 1	Intercept	3.07***	-1.15*	-3.33***	-3.20***
	Age	-.06***	-.01*	.02**	.05***
	Education	.05	.09	-.05	-.10
	N People in Home	.04	-.08	.04	-.02
	Income	-.04	-.06	.02	.06
	<b>Cox &amp; Snell R2</b>	.18	.01	.01	.13
	<b>Nagelkerke R2</b>	.25	.02	.02	.19
Model 2	Intercept	2.35***	.01*	-3.62***	-2.74***
	Age	-.06***	-.01*	.02**	.05***
	Education	.02	.14	-.06	-.08
	N People in Home	.03	-.05	.04	-.01
	Income	-.01	-.11*	.03	.04
	Gender (1=men, 2=women)	.51***	-.87***	.18	-.30*
	<b>Cox &amp; Snell R2</b>	.19	.03	.01	.14
<b>Nagelkerke R2</b>	.26	.05	.02	.19	

Standardized Beta values presented. Significance levels are reported at the \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \* =  $p < .05$  respectively.



**Figure 1. Self-evaluation of time spent online according to gender.**

N=1,142.

Moreover, the survey prompted respondents to self-estimate their daily time spent online. As shown in Table 3, the multiple regression analysis reveals age and education as significant factors.  $\beta = -0.02$  ( $p < 0.001$ ) in both models indicates that older respondents were more likely to report lower screen time estimates. As for education,  $\beta = 0.06$  ( $p < 0.01$ ) suggests that individuals with higher levels of education reported spending more time online. When gender is included in the second model, the value of  $\beta = 0.09$  is the largest in the model but remains statistically insignificant.

**Table 3. Multiple regression summary of screen time estimates.**

	Independent variables	Screen time estimates
Model 1	Intercept	5.38***
	Age	-.02***
	Education	.06**
	N People in Home	.04
	Income	.01
	<b>R (R2)</b>	<b>.42 (.18)</b>
Model 2	Intercept	5.24***
	Age	-.02***
	Education	.06**
	N People in Home	.03
	Income	.01
	Gender (1=men, 2=women)	.09
<b>R (R2)</b>	<b>.42 (.18)</b>	

Standardized Beta values presented. Significance levels are reported at the \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \* =  $p < .05$  respectively.

### *Situational gender differences*

The reports revealed further gender differences regarding smartphone restrictions in various situations. To ascertain the implementation of restrictions within these settings, the survey included the question: ‘How often do you impose restrictions/mobile-free zones on yourself in the following situations?’ The scenarios encompassed time spent with family, socializing with friends, during holidays, and being in nature. Respondents rated each setting on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always), with an optional ‘I do not know’ response.

Table 4 provides an overview of the multiple regression analysis across the situations. Regarding smartphone restrictions within family settings, the multiple regression analysis shows gender as the only significant variable, with  $\beta = 0.34$  ( $p < 0.01$ ), indicating that women reported engaging in restrictions more often than men. Looking at the mean scores, the overall mean is 3.34 (SD = 1.06), with women slightly

above at 3.52 (SD = 1.02) and men slightly below at 3.17 (SD = 1.07). This suggests that while the gender differences are notable, they remain relatively small. The analysis of survey responses regarding time spent with friends shows that, with  $\beta = 0.01$ ,  $p < 0.01$  in both models, older respondents were slightly more likely to report establishing smartphone restrictions when around friends. Moreover, gender yielded significant differences, with  $\beta = 0.36$  ( $p < 0.01$ ) indicating that women reported more frequent restrictions. This is also evident in the mean scores, with women scoring 3.72 (SD = 1.03) and men scoring 3.30 (SD = 1.13). The overall mean is slightly higher compared to family settings, at 3.51 (SD = 1.10).

In addition to these social scenarios, gender differences also emerged amid nature and during holidays. These contexts commonly serve as settings for disconnecting from digital media as they often provide distinct spatial and temporal confines away from the daily grind (Conti & Farsari, 2022; Schwarzenegger & Lohmeier, 2021; Syvertsen, 2022). In both models, multiple regression analysis indicates that individuals in larger households were more likely to report smartphone restrictions during holidays, with  $\beta = 0.12$  ( $p < .001$ ) in Model 1 and  $\beta = 0.11$  ( $p < .001$ ) in Model 2. When gender was included in Model 2, the effect increased to  $\beta = 0.24$  ( $p < .001$ ), suggesting that women were more likely to report enforcing restrictions during holidays. This trend is reflected in the mean scores, with women averaging 2.75 (SD = 1.06) and men 2.46 (SD = 1.12). Among all the settings examined, the holiday setting had the lowest reported restrictions, as shown by the overall mean score of 2.61 (SD = 1.10). In the context of nature, the regression analysis also shows that women were more likely than men to report more frequent restrictions, with  $\beta = 0.45$  ( $p < .001$ ). This is also reflected in the mean scores, with an overall average of 3.23 (SD = 1.26); men scored lower at 2.98 (SD = 1.30), while women scored higher at 3.50 (SD = 1.16).

**Table 4. Multiple regression summary of smartphone and Internet restrictions across different situations.**

Independent variables	With family	With friends	On holidays	In nature	
Model 1	Intercept	3.05***	2.76***	2.22***	2.79***
	Age	.01	.01***	.01	.01
	Education	.03	.07	.04	.08**
	N People in Home	.04	.03	.12***	.05
	Income	-.02	-.04	-.02	-.01
	<b>R (R2)</b>	.07 (.01)	.18 (.03)	.14 (.02)	.10 (.01)
Model 2	Intercept	2.54***	2.23***	1.87***	2.13***
	Age	.01	.01***	.00	.01
	Education	.01	.05	.02	.05
	N People in Home	.03	.02	.11***	.03
	Income	.01	-.02	-.01	.02
	Gender (1=men, 2=women)	.34***	.36***	.24***	.45***
<b>R (R2)</b>	.17 (.03)	.24 (.58)	.17 (.03)	.20 (.04)	

Standardized Beta values presented. Significance levels are reported at the \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \* =  $p < .05$  respectively.

### *Gender differences in opinions*

Further gender differences surfaced in opinions regarding who bears the responsibility for managing digital media use. The issue is perceived as subject to ‘responsibilization’, in which matters are viewed as individual problems instead of collective responsibilities (Syvertsen, 2020). As a result, despite the strong influence of societal structures on media use, negative impacts are often attributed to individual behavior. Nevertheless, collective strategies such as legislation and corporate policies receive increasing attention (Guyard & Kaun, 2018; Hesselberth, 2018). To ascertain how the respondents position themselves regarding the responsibility of media use, they assessed different statements. The first one: ‘The use of the Internet and smartphone is primarily an individual responsibility’. And the second one: ‘The authorities should not interfere with people’s use of the Internet and smartphones’. The respondents then rated



these statements on a scale of 1-5, from completely disagree to completely agree, with the additional option to respond 'I do not know'.

The trend across the sample indicated that Internet and smartphone use were commonly seen as an individual responsibility, as reflected by a mean score of 4.24 (SD = 0.92). Gender differences were negligible, with men scoring 4.29 (SD = 0.91) and women scoring 4.18 (SD = 0.92). Multiple regression analysis further revealed that gender was not a significant factor. Instead, education and income emerged as influential variables. Specifically, respondents with higher education (M1 and M2:  $\beta = -0.09$ ,  $p < .001$ ) were less likely to perceive internet and smartphone use as an individual responsibility. In contrast, respondents with higher income (M1 and M2:  $\beta = 0.05$ ,  $p < .001$ ) were more likely to regard media use as a personal matter.

In line with the perspective that Internet and smartphone use are personal matters, the sample showed a general tendency to reject authority interference, albeit slightly less pronounced, as indicated by the mean score of 3.56 (SD = 1.23). Gender differences were evident, with men scoring higher at 3.74 (SD = 1.24) compared to women at 3.37 (SD = 1.20). Men's greater tendency to reject authority intervention was also confirmed by the multiple regression analysis, which yielded  $\beta = -0.27$  ( $p < .001$ ) for gender. Notably, men and women differed not only in their opinions toward authority intervention but also in their levels of uncertainty about the issue. As shown in Table 6, 4.8% of women responded with 'I don't know', compared to only 1.6% of men. Additionally, 24.6% of women, versus 18.7% of men, neither agreed nor disagreed. Patterns related to education and income also emerged, consistent with findings on individual responsibility. Respondents with higher education were more open to authority intervention (M1:  $\beta = -0.17$ ,  $p < .001$ ; M2:  $\beta = -0.15$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In contrast, individuals with higher incomes were more likely to oppose such intervention (M1:  $\beta = 0.08$ ,  $p < .001$ ; M2:  $\beta = 0.06$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

**Table 5. Multiple regression analysis of opinions toward individual responsibility and authority interference.**

Independent variables	Individual Responsibility	Authority Interference	
Model 1	Intercept	4.50***	4.03***
	Age	-.01	.00
	Education	-.09***	-.17***
	N People in Home	-.02	-.04
	Income	.05***	.08***
	R (R2)	.15 (.02)	.20 (.04)
	Model 2	Intercept	4.57***
Age		-.01	.00
Education		-.09***	-.15***
N People in Home		-.02	-.03
Income		.05**	.06**
Gender (1=men, 2=women)		-.05	-.27***
R (R2)		.16 (.02)	.23 (.05)

Standardized Beta values presented. Significance levels are reported at the \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \* =  $p < .05$  respectively.

**Table 6. Opinions toward authority interference in media use.**

		Women		Men		Total	
The authorities should not interfere with people's use of the Internet and smartphones	Completely disagree	5.7%	(32)	5.8%	(33)	5.7%	(65)
	Partly disagree	19.5%	(110)	12.9%	(74)	16.2%	(184)
	Neither	24.6%	(139)	18.7%	(107)	21.6%	(246)
	Partially agree	25.1%	(142)	25.3%	(145)	25.2%	(287)
	Completely agree	20.4%	(115)	35.8%	(205)	28.1%	(320)
	I don't know	4.8%	(27)	1.6%	(9)	3.2%	(36)
Total		565		573		1,138	

Note. Cases do not sum to N = 1,142 due to 4 missing values.

## Discussion and Conclusion

This survey-based study described how both men and women in Norway experience digital disconnection differently, examining 1,142 responses. Both of these genders reported spending ‘too much’ time on their smartphones; however, women reported doing so to a greater extent. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that there was no significant difference between men and women in their screen time estimates. Hence, these results suggest that women do not necessarily spend significantly more time on their smartphones but may evaluate their time spent more critically than men. This interpretation aligns with findings from the aforementioned study by Fast et al. (2023), which showed that women experience smartphone-related problems to a greater extent, and from Franks et al. (2018), who found that women are more intentional and deliberate in their use. This dynamic could also explain why men, seemingly more at ease with their smartphone use, reported fewer restrictions in social situations, in nature, and during holidays. Another possible and potentially intersecting explanation for the differences regarding the scenarios could lie in their normative connotations. In terms of social situations, previous literature indicates that women often face expectations to attend to their offline caregiving responsibilities without online distraction, as well as to assist others in managing their disconnective behavior (Fast et al., 2023; Van Bruyssel et al., 2023). Such expectations may contribute to women reporting a higher frequency of disconnection when around others. Conversely, the results also highlight gender norms directed at men. Here, it might be valuable to consider masculinity norms which, according to Beattie (2020) and Portwood-Stacer (2013), grant men greater independence in their personal media use. Although there was no significant difference in men’s and women’s perceptions of digital media use as an individual’s responsibility, men were slightly more inclined to reject authority intervention. This finding suggests a need for further examination of whether this inclination can indeed be attributed to men’s association with independence in their relationship with digital media or if additional aspects are at play. Here, deepening the link between digital disconnection studies and gender studies—particularly through concepts like gender performativity (Butler, 1990) and doing gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987)—could elucidate how the structural construction of gender norms and everyday practices shaped by one’s assigned sex also influence digital disconnection. This could also lead to the adoption

of more critical approaches that allow for further problematization of gendered experiences. Still, this call for deeper research into gendered norms should not be misunderstood as a call to view men's and women's experiences as completely distinct. Rather, further work should also be attentive to nuance. As demonstrated in this study, while gender differences exist, they are not always the most pronounced. For instance, although the men in this study reported to a lesser extent than women to spend too much time on their smartphones, nearly half of them still believed they did. This shows that men too, grapple with feelings of overconnection. Considering women, it might also be reasonable to take a different perspective and examine their personal preferences beyond their perceived obligations to others. Consequently, this study primarily emphasizes the importance of understanding gendered experiences holistically, encompassing both stark differences and subtle nuances, as well as shared experiences.

While this study focused primarily on gender, the results also revealed notable patterns across other sociodemographic factors. For instance, older respondents were less likely to perceive their time spent on screens as too much. They also reported lower screen time estimates and a greater tendency to impose smartphone restrictions when with friends, compared to younger respondents. This finding aligns with previous research, which found that older media users engage in more frequent and distinct disconnection patterns (Fernández-Ardèvol et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2021). Further notable sociodemographic factors included education and income. Respondents with higher levels of education tended to report higher screen time estimates and viewed Internet and smartphone use as less of an individual responsibility, being more open to authority intervention compared to those with lower levels of education. As for income, the trend was reversed: Internet and smartphone use were more likely to be seen as an individual responsibility, with authority intervention being rejected. Notably, both education and income emerged in responses related to opinions, rather than behaviors. However, despite the general association of higher levels of both with greater social status, the patterns diverge in these contexts. As such, further investigation into the influence of social class could provide valuable insights.

The presence of minor but significant gender differences resonates within Norway's predominantly egalitarian society, which continues to grapple with persistent

gender disparities. Additionally, the data reveals peculiarities that further reflect the Norwegian cultural fabric. For instance, a majority of the sample consistently implemented smartphone restrictions when in nature. These reports may not only provide insight into the sample's media use but might also reflect the strong affinity Norwegians have for outdoor activities in general (Syvertsen, 2022). Furthermore, when considering the sample's perspective on digital media use as a personal responsibility and resistance to authorities' interference, it might be of relevancy that Norway ranks among the countries with the highest commitment to freedom of expression (V-Dem, 2024). The government itself proclaims that "[i]n the light of the rapid pace of development of digital technologies, Norway puts emphasis on safeguarding freedom of expression and information online" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). Accordingly, the Norwegian government assumes the role of providing digital infrastructure rather than intervening. In this regard, it is worth noting that the recent recommendation to ban smartphones in classrooms specifically targets students within their learning environments (Norwegian Government Security and Service Organisation, 2024), leaving the broader population unaffected. Acknowledging that these results appear to be deeply embedded in the Norwegian context, conducting similar studies in different national contexts could provide further insights.

This study contributes to the development of digital disconnection studies in two ways: firstly, by enhancing the general knowledge base of what digital disconnection entails through a gender-focused approach, and secondly, by broadening the interdisciplinary scope of digital disconnection studies by integrating gender studies. Still, this study represents only the beginning of integrating digital disconnection and gender, offering numerous opportunities for further exploration. In this regard, the descriptive analysis presented here could prove particularly beneficial, as descriptive data is well-suited to lay the foundations for future research (Munger et al., 2021). For instance, studies could focus exclusively on one gender and its specific intricacies, rather than employing a comparative approach. Qualitative methods might also be valuable for gaining more nuanced insights into contexts and their details. For example, this study primarily focused on different devices, predominantly smartphones, and time spent online or on the Internet. However, the specific activities of the respondents remain unknown. Inquiring about actual activities and allowing

respondents to provide more context could yield valuable insights. In conclusion, by highlighting tendencies regarding gender differences across various contexts, this study may serve as a foundation for further exploration.

### **Limitations**

As with any research, this study is not without limitations. One such limitation is that the survey was not originally designed with a focus on gender. Since previous discussions around this topic are often centered on notions of care, the use of 'people in the home' as a stand-in for exploring care relationships was somewhat limited. Incorporating sociodemographic factors, such as parental and relationship status, into the survey design could have provided deeper insights. Another limitation lies in the study's reliance on self-reported online time assessments. Critics of such measures argue that respondents tend to overstate their exposure to media content (Guess et al., 2019; Prior, 2009). Accordingly, the self-reported screen time estimates in this study can only be regarded as subjective perceptions, not factual data representing the respondents' actual screen time.

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