

From Resistance to Privilege: A narrative literature review on disconnection studies

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Abstract

Over the past decade, academic research has shown a markedly increasing interest in the concept of digital disconnection, a phenomenon frequently conceptualized as the disconnection turn. Despite the various methodological and analytical approaches examined by previous literature reviews, the field still lacks a clear thematic framework and a disciplinary definition for the several practices of disconnection examined by this literature. This narrative literature review addresses the growing academic field of disconnection studies, seeking to map the main thematic areas that have emerged in the literature and the meanings attributed to them by scholars. Utilizing a mixed (qualitative-quantitative) methodological approach on a corpus comprising 432 contributions, the study identified seven thematic clusters. The analysis phase yielded a conceptual map of the core thematic areas within the literature, complemented by an explanation of the distribution of articles in the corpus across the three ERC (European Research Council) domains. The clusters are subsequently synthesized in a two-dimensional analytical framework. This framework distinguishes 'Disconnection as Resistance' from 'Disconnection as Privilege', while also highlighting the difference between disconnection as a 'Performative act' and disconnection as a 'Collective issue'. The findings provide a theoretical framework for understanding the main conceptual approaches emerging in disconnection literature, while simultaneously offering a broader critical perspective of the structural factors that regulate disconnection practices in the age of platform society.

Keywords

disconnection, digital disconnection, narrative literature review, theoretical framework, resistance, privilege, performativity, platform society

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Introduction

The last decade has witnessed a steep increase in the interest, from both researchers and the public, in resisting or refusing the use of digital technologies (Bagger, 2024). The beginning of the so-called ‘disconnection turn’ (Fast, 2021) can be detected in the publication of a few key texts (Baumer et al., 2013; Portwood-Stacer, 2013). Thanks to these studies, disconnection is also beginning to be considered as a ‘voluntary act’; the possibility of resisting and distancing from the paradigm of constant connectivity imposed by the platform society (Van Dijck et al., 2018) and its data-driven logic has therefore opened new perspectives within media and communication studies.

The Covid-19 pandemic contributed to further expanding this research field, as it has further complicated the delicate balance between digital connection and disconnection (Treré et al., 2020), giving rise to what Jansson and Adams (2021: 13) describe as a ‘gigantic connectivity experiment’. This has led to the development of a strong multidisciplinary interest in this topic to the point that, according to the two researchers, ‘disconnection will define the social sciences in the 2020s just as connectedness defined them in the 2000s and 2010s’ (Jansson and Adams, 2021: 3). Notably, since 2020 there has been an increased interest in the topic, manifested by several anthologies and journal special issues (Karppi et al., 2021; Karsay and Vandenbosch, 2021; Lomborg and Ytre-Arne, 2021; Vanden Abeele and Nguyen, 2022).

Building upon this existing scholarship, the narrative literature review presented in this article aims to map the diverse practices of disconnection identified in the literature on digital disconnection. Specifically, this study seeks to outline the disconnection practices explored in the literature through the review of the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the main thematic areas that emerged in digital disconnection literature and how have disconnection studies developed chronologically?

RQ2. What are the main critical positions and conceptual approaches that emerge in disconnection literature?

Through the combined use of qualitative and quantitative methods, the review aims to demonstrate how the disconnection literature generates a series of thematic areas that integrate contributions from different fields of research. Although academic attention to disconnection practices has focused primarily on the social sciences and humanities, the scientific contributions from disciplines such as engineering and the life sciences should not be overlooked. Building upon this initial classification, the present review seeks to construct a theoretical framework that explicitly illustrates the multidimensional aspects of different digital disconnection practices and their underlying structural factors. However, before addressing the literature review in detail, it is necessary to define the concept of disconnection and its academic context.

Defining digital disconnection, between ambiguity and different perspectives

Digital disconnection is understood in this article as a ‘critical response to the mediated conditions that characterise our societies and permeate our everyday lives’ (Lomborg and Ytre-Arne, 2021: 1530). However, this working definition must be situated within the context of the field’s current state, as Nassen et al. (2023: 5) note that there is ‘currently no comprehensive consensus in the field on the delineation, conceptualization, and terminology of voluntary digital disconnection’. A key element is the deliberateness or intentionality of disconnection, which refers to the conscious act of

temporarily or permanently abstaining from connectivity. Furthermore, it is crucial to recognize the different possibilities in terms of duration and frequency of disconnection practices. Current disconnection practices refer less to the one-way decision to abandon a platform or the use of a specific device. On the contrary, these actions occur at a micro-level with a frequency that can be extremely variable (from short to long term). Complementary to the definition provided by Lomborg and Ytre-Arne, the concept of digital disconnection can be linked to several different practices. According to Pasquali et al. (2023), these practices may therefore concern both the *temporal* dimension, such as temporary abstention from a specific social media (Jorge, 2019), and the *spatial* dimension, as in the case of digital *detox tourism* (Syvertsen, 2022). This increased attention to digital disconnection has therefore mobilized a range of motivational spheres, ranging from critical resistance to the hyper-connectivity paradigm, promoted by the platform society, to 'elitist or nostalgic cultural performances of a predigital paradigm' (Pasquali et al., 2023: 83).

The initial overview reveals that the concept of 'digital disconnection' is multifaceted, encompassing a variety of forms such as total or partial, definitive or periodic disengagement. These forms range from practices related to unfriending (Karppi et al., 2021) to acts used to convey social prestige (Fast, 2021; Jorge, 2019). As Pasquali et al. (2023) highlight, the underlying motivations for engaging in digital disconnection practices, despite variations in form and rhetoric, are embedded in a well-established tradition of media critique, based on the premise that, under certain conditions, these technologies can produce negative effects on users or social life. Following this preliminary critical overview of the debate on the definition of digital disconnection, the subsequent section will introduce and contextualize the emergence of disconnection studies.

Dealing with media refusal in the age of platform society: The emergence of disconnection studies

Over the past decade, the increasing interest in digital disconnection within media and communication studies has led to the progressive delineation of a distinct disciplinary area: disconnection studies (Lomborg and Ytre-Arne, 2021). This field is premised on the hypothesis that disconnection is a response to the central, 'backbone' role of digital technologies in daily life (Lomborg and Ytre-Arne, 2021: 1531). Emerging at the intersection of technological embeddedness and critical discourse, disconnection research is a multivocal endeavour due to its practices manifesting across diverse realms (e.g. leisure, work, activism, education). Consistent with this complexity, the variety of online disconnection forms is context- and situation-dependent and subject to change (Leavitt, 2014). Furthermore, users hold different interpretations and understandings of these practices (Kania-Lundholm, 2021). Consequently, disconnecting is fundamentally both a technical and a social act, where users interpret the practice in relation to their understanding of the self (Birnholtz, 2010; Brubaker et al., 2016), reflecting a dynamic and contested practice heavily reliant on social context and circumstances. In contrast to normative media practices defined by connectivity which, as Van Dijck (2013) notes, transforms online commodity into tangible offline value the emerging counter-phenomenon of disconnection often serves ideological purposes. Kania-Lundholm (2021) suggests this trend frequently perpetuates and enhances neoliberal capitalism, notably through the commodification of disconnecting via apps, guides, or digital detox retreats.

Based on these studies, in the first half of the 2020s several literature reviews on digital disconnection were published, which contributed to the thematic and methodological developments of disconnection studies. Among the first thematic contributions stands the one by Moe and Madsen (2021), who propose five main thematic frames on digital disconnection within media studies (*as health-bringing, as concentration, as existentiality, as freedom and as sustainability*) and the one by

Vanden Abeele et al. (2022), who provide a framework for a theoretical classification of digital disconnection through the use of three metaphors to distinguish the discourses revolving around social media disconnection: (1) drug (user's lack of self-control); (2) demon (platform's persuasive design); (3) donut (societal pressures). The latter theorization shows that digital disconnection is not a monolithic concept, but a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by individual, technological and social factors. Consequently, the model suggests several motivations behind disconnection, ranging from abstinence and resistance to the search for personal balance. Subsequently, in their literature reviews, Nassen et al. (2023), Altmaier et al. (2024a), Ross et al. (2024) and Bagger (2024) propose several reflections through which disconnection studies can be approached. These considerations concern, for example, how disconnection is defined in the literature, the categorization of disconnection processes, the methodologies employed in the study of this phenomenon and the issues that have emerged in the field of disconnection studies. Nassen et al. (2023) analyzed the research design of 112 studies, finding most were empirical (76.8%), employing diverse quantitative (20.5%), experimental (27.7%), and qualitative (28.6%) approaches, reflecting different epistemological perspectives. Based on this methodological overview, Altmaier et al. (2024a) examined 138 articles, revealing temporary disconnection/abandonment as the most studied behaviour, alongside use management, general non-use, with a prevalence of quantitative (mainly online surveys) and qualitative (primarily interviews) methods, with some studies employing mixed methods. Ross et al. (2024) offer a theoretical framework by situating digital disconnection studies on a continuum defined primarily by ontology (individual vs social meaning) and secondarily by epistemology (post-positivist vs interpretive) and methodology (quantitative vs qualitative), emphasizing how ontology is the key dimension as it shapes how disconnection is understood. Finally, Bagger (2024) identifies four trends in disconnection studies: a geographic focus on the Global North, a primary concern with social media resistance, the prevalence of limited or temporary abstention, and the identification of the disconnection agent as an isolated individual. However, these trends have limitations: neglecting the contexts of the Global South, overlooking other problematic technologies, downplaying permanent disconnection, and potentially obscuring the collective dimensions of resistance. The strong focus on the individual may also overshadow recent developments that highlight the collective aspects of media resistance.

Following the overview of existing literature reviews on digital disconnection, which have partially systematized this issue, the article introduces a new narrative literature review, specifically designed to highlight the most prevalent research themes and analyze how various disconnection practices are conceptualized and interpreted. The primary aim is to provide a clear narrative synthesis of the thematic and disciplinary heterogeneity that has characterized disconnection research over the last decade.

A narrative approach to the study of disconnection literature

Before detailing the methodological steps, this study defines its epistemological nature: while it deliberately adopts core systematic review characteristics (e.g. defined specific research questions, inclusion/exclusion criteria, PRISMA flow chart) to ensure rigour (Chapman, 2021; Page et al., 2021; Pollock and Berge, 2018), this study falls within the category of narrative reviews (Green et al., 2006; Pautasso, 2019). Given the absence of an acknowledged methodological framework for narrative reviews (Ferrari, 2015), this study nevertheless incorporates a series of characteristic properties to maintain structure. The review adheres to the fundamental aim of objective reporting and synthesizing novel evidence-based conclusions (Green et al., 2006). Furthermore, it offers a broad, integrative perspective on digital disconnection, incorporating historical and disciplinary

considerations essential for understanding the field's development and current state. The review ultimately concludes with broader theoretical reflections aimed at fostering critical dialogue around this concept.

Defining the corpus of the narrative: Search & selection phase

The research design is based on the work of [Delli Paoli and D'Auria \(2021\)](#) and followed four steps: *search, selection, analysis* and *synthesis*. Unlike the researchers, who based their selection phase exclusively on iterative keyword searches in Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus, the approach in this stage involved a manual review of two Zotero databases containing two existing literature reviews in the field. I started by combining two different pre-existing corpora: (1) the *On & Off* ($n = 396$) library collection of DD articles, developed by [Jorge \(2023a\)](#) and (2) the *Disconnection Review* ($n = 138$) database, developed by [Altmaier et al. \(2024b\)](#). Both are Zotero databases and span from 2002 to February 2023. Regarding the inclusion criteria, the two pre-existing corpora were composed as follows. The *On & Off* library collection ([Jorge, 2023b](#)) contains contributions published until 2022 as Online First and considers books, book chapters, articles, PhD theses (in English) and proceedings. The search keywords ('disconnection', 'digital disconnection') were entered into the main databases, considering the following research areas: Communication, Media Studies, Cultural Studies, Science & Technology Studies, Human-Computer Interaction, Psychology, Tourism and Design. In addition, there were some integrations from published literature reviews in the field ([Kania-Lundholm, 2021](#)). Conversely, from the article by [Altmaier et al. \(2024a: 6\)](#), it is possible to extract the search string used by researchers within WoS (see the [Appendix](#) Section).

To ensure that my corpus included the most recent academic contributions in Disconnection Literature, the two initial databases were combined with 58 additional contributions published after March 2023 up to December 2024. The studies were retrieved from Google Scholar ($n = 55$) and Scopus ($n = 2$). The inclusion process considered a broad range of academic works, written both in English and Italian, including books, book chapters, articles, theses, reports and conference proceedings. Although the primary aim was to capture the most recent publications (2023–2024), this procedure also identified two contributions from previous years not included in the two databases. Finally, one contribution was identified from a university database. This procedure resulted in the search query included in the [appendix](#). The identification process produced an initial corpus of 592 articles.

In the selection phase I compared the *On & Off* library collection with the *Disconnection Review* and I excluded all the articles that were duplicated ($n = 64$). Subsequently, the 528 studies in the corpus were subjected to a screening process: the titles and abstracts of the articles were filtered through a series of keywords closely linked to the field of disconnection. These keywords come mainly from the *On & Off* Zotero library and correspond to the different labels used by [Jorge \(2023a\)](#) to refer to digital disconnection (e.g. *resistance*, *non-use* or *digital detox*). Through this procedure, 96 studies were excluded as not being related to the disconnection studies field. The final number of academic items included in the review was therefore 432 ([Figure 1](#)).

Narrative analysis: A two levels process

The methodological approach underpinning the first level of analysis is Grounded Theory (GT), which treats data collection and theory generation as two integrated components of a single process ([Glaser, 1978](#); [Glaser and Strauss, 1967](#)). While a literature review necessarily involves collecting

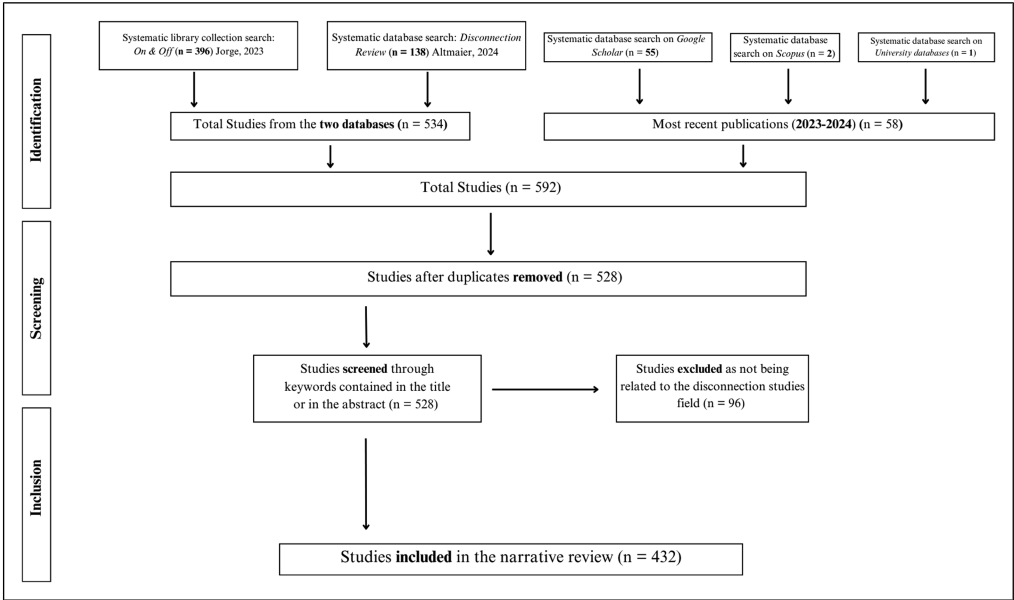


Figure 1. Prisma flow diagram for search and selection phases.

most of the data corpus (e.g. the academic articles) prior to the analysis, the adoption of a grounded approach serves to explicitly reveal the underlying operations leading to theoretical conceptualizations (Robrecht, 1995). This emphasis shifts the aim from data summary to theory construction and generation. In this context, the first level of analysis, defined by the sub-processes of identification and thematization and governed by the highly iterative nature of open coding, began immediately after the selection phase. This process ensured the comprehensive capture and immediate thematic structuring of all recurring concepts and patterns within the corpus.

The identification coding phase enabled the emergence and the grouping of these concepts into distinct clusters. Initial pre-coding was conducted on a small sample of academic items (around 30) from which emerged the first three clusters (Disconnection as Media Resistance, Digital Disconnection Review and Digital Detox Tourism). This coding scheme was inductively adapted *in itinere* and applied to the corpus of 432 studies, highlighting the emergence of additional clusters. The strong iterativeness embedded in the grounded approach, combined with open coding, facilitated the progressive refinement of these clusters. For instance, the cluster *Disconnection as Digital well-being* emerged in the last instance, requiring a re-coding process across the entire corpus.

At the end of the analysis phase, I identified seven emerging thematic clusters: *Disconnection as Media Resistance*, *Disconnection as Media non-use*, *Digital Inequalities in disconnection*, *Digital Disconnection Review*, *Digital Detox Tourism*, *Disconnection as Lifestyle* and *Disconnection as Digital well-being*. These results have a strong empirical basis, as they are derived directly from the data within the analyzed corpus:

In parallel with the progressive identification and emergence of each conceptual cluster, the thematization sub-phase was concurrently implemented. This simultaneous approach, based on the Grounded Theory principle of constant comparison, ensured that the initial conceptual groupings

were immediately validated and framed as coherent and concrete concepts. During this sub-phase, each cluster was further refined by associating it with a series of keywords, drawing again on the *On & Off* library. This step facilitated the progressive substantiation and circumscription of the seven conceptual clusters. Critically, the definition of these keywords also reduced inter-cluster ambiguity in the coding process (e.g. resolving cases where a single article could plausibly be attributed to two distinct clusters simultaneously). The thematic keywords ($n = 30$) associated with each cluster are shown in Table 1:

The second level of analysis involves a quantitative approach focused on the academic research fields of the corpus. The main purpose of this phase is to validate the thematic clusters externally, exploring how the concepts emerged from disconnection studies manifest across diverse disciplinary fields. The comprehensive corpus includes various academic items, including articles, book chapters, conference proceedings, books and other academic texts like reports and thesis. Table 2 shows the different academic genres included in the corpus:

Focussing exclusively on the journal articles ($n = 340$), Table 3 can be reformulated as follows:

Limiting the analysis of the subject area to journal articles ensures methodological consistency with the review by Delli Paoli and D'Auria (2021), whose corpus consisted exclusively of articles. Furthermore, this focus simplifies the classification work, since assigning disciplinary fields to articles is more homogeneous (and less complex) than assigning them to book chapters or reports.

A total of 166 single academic journals published the articles included in the corpus. The coding of the research areas of the journals was carried out in three stages:

- (1) The three disciplinary domains defined by the European Research Council guidelines (ERC, 2024) were identified as a starting point: (1) LF (Life Sciences); (2) PE (Physical and Engineering); SH (Social Sciences and Humanities).
- (2) Each of the 166 academic journals was assigned to a disciplinary domain and subsequently a panel (e.g. LF1, PE5, SH4) based on three parameters: the name of the journal, the information provided on their respective websites regarding the disciplinary fields to which they belong, and the disciplinary areas covered by each panel.
- (3) Following the established parameters in point 2, two journals (Emerging Science Journal and PLOS One) were excluded from the final analysis due to the inability to assign a single,

Table 1. Thematic keywords related to clusters.

Clusters	Keywords
Digital Detox Tourism	Tourism, Offline tourism, Holiday, Unplugged Tourism
Digital Disconnection Review	Digital Disconnection, Digital Detox, Special Issue, Sociology
Digital Inequalities in disconnection	Digital Divide, Digital Inequality, Inequalities, Global South, Abundance, Vulnerabilities
Disconnection as Digital well-being	Digital Wellbeing, Wellbeing, Abstinence, Addiction, Anxiety
Disconnection As Lifestyle	Abandonment, Accelerated Capitalism, Detox Digital, FOMO, Self-Regulation
Disconnection as Media non-use	Non-use, Non-Users
Disconnection as Media Resistance	Resistance, Activism, Quitters, Media Nostalgia

Table 2. Kinds of studies within the corpus.

Genre of academic items	Number of items
Books	21
Book chapters	21
Conference Proceedings	34
Journal Articles	340
Other (Thesis, report etc.)	16
Total	432

univocal disciplinary domain. Consequently, the coding process involved the analysis of 164 journals.

Analysis of the 10 most frequently appearing journals (Table 4) shows that the SH3 panel (The Social World and its Interaction), is the most represented within the corpus.

Despite a strong occurrence of journals related to media and communication studies, it is also possible to identify a significant number of journals concerning panel SH4 (The Human Mind and Its Complexity).

On the other hand, Table 5 shows the distribution of ERC domains and disciplinary panels across the entire corpus of articles:

The analysis of the corpus, summarized in Table 5, confirms that disconnection studies are a multidisciplinary field. While the domain of Social Sciences and Humanities accounting for 89% ($n = 304$) of the contributions, the topic is also present in distant, academic domains, including Life Sciences (LF) (6%, $n = 20$) and Physical and Engineering (PE) (5%, $n = 18$). Notably, all articles in the PE domain¹ belong to the PE6 panel (Computer Science and Informatics), underlining the relevance of disconnection within field focused on AI and complex systems. Within the SH domain, SH3 (which covers disciplines such as Sociology, Education, and Communication) is the most represented panel (68%), though SH4 and SH7 indicate that disconnection is also addressed in Cognitive science, Psychology, Geography, and Human mobility studies.

Figure 2 cross-references these disciplinary domains with the thematic clusters. As expected, the Life Sciences domain shows a strong concentration, with of articles belonging to the *Disconnection as Digital well-being* cluster. This percentage stands at 50% in the PE domain. Conversely, 32% of articles in the PE domain belong to the *Disconnection as Media non-use* cluster, a finding linked to

Table 3. Number of academic items related to clusters.

Thematic clusters	Number of academic items	Percentage
Digital Detox Tourism	34	8%
Digital Disconnection Review	25	6%
Digital Inequalities in disconnection	26	6%
Disconnection as Digital well-being	108	25%
Disconnection As Lifestyle	78	18%
Disconnection as Media non-use	68	16%
Disconnection as Media Resistance	93	21%
Total	432	100%

Table 4. Top 10 most frequent academic journal in the corpus.

Journal	Number of articles	Panel
New Media & Society	27	SH3
Convergence	21	SH3
Computers in Human Behaviour	16	SH4
Media, Culture & Society	15	SH3
Social Media + Society	12	SH3
First Monday	12	SH3
Information, Communication & Society	7	SH3
Cyberpsychology, Behaviour, and Social Networking	7	SH4
International Journal of Communication	5	SH3
Mobile Media & Communication	5	SH3

the strong intersection between media non-use and the Science and Technology Studies (STS) tradition. The SH domain shows the most heterogeneous distribution. The significant prevalence of *Disconnection as Lifestyle* and *Digital Detox Tourism* (31%, $n = 93$) suggest a tendency within the social sciences to address disconnection primarily as a symbolic and cultural practice. Furthermore, the Digital Disconnection Review cluster shows a remarkable concentration in SH journals (95%, $n = 19$) with 42% of those articles appearing in the journal *Convergence*. Finally, Media Resistance remains a significant component within SH domain, accounting for the 26% of articles.

Following the quantitative corpus review, the subsequent sections detail the synthesis process, which concurrently constitutes the theory building phase of the grounded approach. Drawing on the

Table 5. Distribution of ERC domains and disciplinary panels in the article's corpus.

Domain and panel	Number of articles
Life Sciences (LS)	
LS4-Physiology in health, Disease and Ageing	2
LS5-Neuroscience and Disorders of the Nervous System	8
LS7-Prevention, Diagnosis and Treatment of Human Diseases	8
Total LS	18
Physical and Engineering (PE)	
PE6-Computer Science and Informatics	18
Total PE	18
Social Sciences and Humanities (SH)	
SH1-Individuals, Markets and Organizations	20
SH2-Institutions, Governance and Legal Systems	2
SH3-The Social World and its Interaction	208
SH4-The Human Mind and Its Complexity	34
SH5-Texts and Concepts	2
SH7-Human Mobility, Environment, and Space	29
SH8-Studies of Cultures and Arts	9
Total SH	304
Total	340

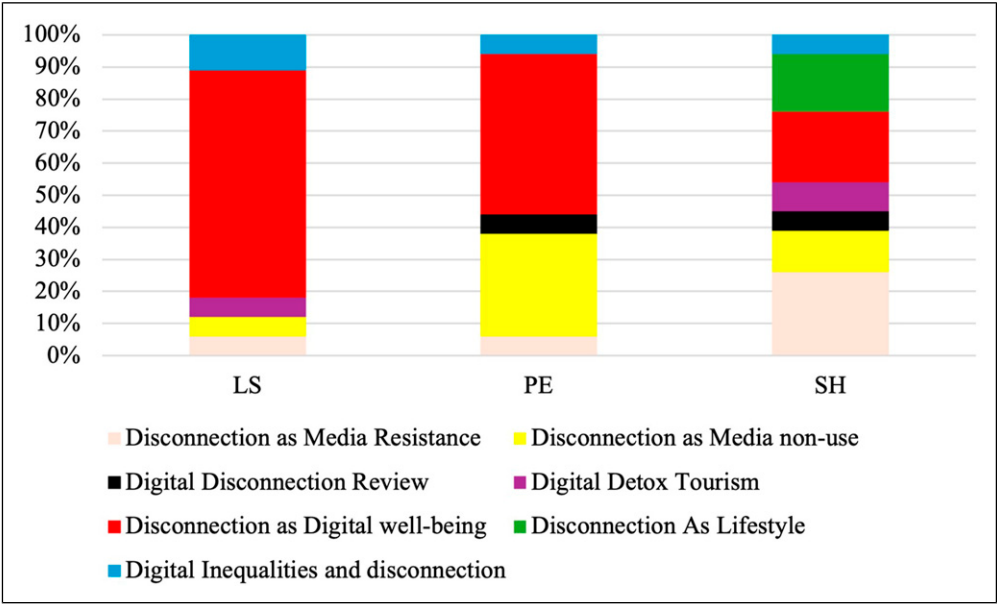


Figure 2. Clusters by academic field (column percentage).

overview proposed by [Delli Paoli and D’Auria \(2021\)](#), and directly addressing the two RQs, this literature review proposes a theoretical framework designed to map the several dimensions of digital disconnection and simultaneously highlights its conceptualization within the reference literature.

Disconnection beyond digital: A long history of refusal

The qualitative analysis section, utilizing the Grounded Theory methodology and an open data coding, identified seven thematic clusters within the corpus. This initial emerging theory directly addresses RQ1 by mapping the primary thematic areas in the digital disconnection literature ([Table 3](#)). This result is further supplemented by a series of chronological findings.

Articles belonging to the clusters of *Disconnection as Media Resistance*, *Disconnection as Media non-use* and *Disconnection as Digital well-being* accounted for 64% of the total ($n = 218$). A comparison of [Table 6](#) and [Figure 5](#) shows that these three clusters were among the earliest to emerge concretely within the academic research on media refusal. On the other hand, more recent areas of disconnection studies, such as the Digital Disconnection Review ($n = 20$), Digital Inequalities in disconnection ($n = 23$), and Digital Detox Tourism ($n = 28$), present fewer associated articles. [Figure 3](#) illustrates a clear historical trend in the corpus, noting in particular an increase during the Covid-19 pandemic. The contributions published in 2020 – 2021 ($n = 134$) account for 31% of the entire corpus. However, the immediately previous years (2018 and 2019) also record a significant volume ($n = 88$, 20% of the corpus), suggesting that academic attention to disconnection was already increasing by the end of the decade. Despite a decline in contributions starting in 2022 ($n = 47$) and notably in 2023 ($n = 18$), a slight uptick observed in 2024 ($n = 26$) appears to indicate that academic focus on disconnection studies is not a passing phenomenon linked solely to the pandemic.

Table 6. Number of journal articles related to clusters.

Clusters	Number of journal articles
Digital Detox Tourism	28
Digital Disconnection Review	20
Digital Inequalities in disconnection	23
Disconnection as Digital well-being	89
Disconnection As Lifestyle	53
Disconnection as Media Resistance	80
Disconnection as Media non-use	47
Total	340

Analysis of the corpus’s chronological distribution, particularly within *Disconnection as media resistance* and *Disconnection as Media non-use* clusters (Figure 5) reveals a key historical trend. Disconnection research exists in continuity with a long tradition of media resistance and refusal studies. Indeed, the history of the media can be reviewed through the perspective of media acceptance versus media refusal/rejection, a ‘dialectical struggle’ not exclusive to the digital context (Butcher, 2020). This ongoing tension reflects the human condition, wherein the concept of Connectivity, understood as the dynamic interplay of connection and disconnection shaped by social forces, has always been central to human interaction. While connection is often viewed as the ‘positive pole’, disconnection expresses its opposite. Historically, forms of refusal to media are periodically renewed in relation to the emergence of new technologies (Syvertsen and Enli, 2020), often generating a ‘media panic’ (Drotner, 1999) that rehashes the debate. Consequently, media resistance, media non-use and digital disconnection can be viewed as three converging expressions of media refusal within distinct historical periods. For this reason, media resistance and media non-use could be considered the theoretical ‘antecedents’ of digital disconnection. However, the emergence of the new digital trend does not completely replace prior frameworks. Media resistance

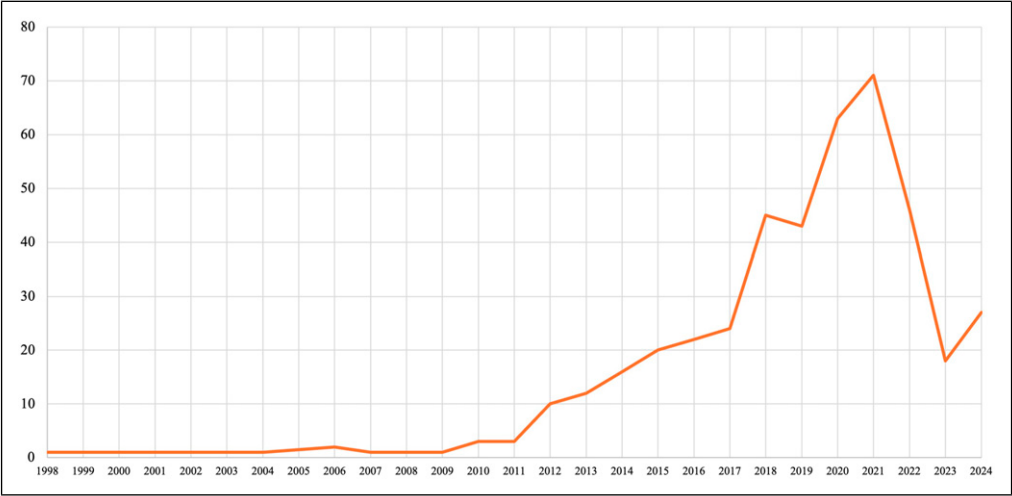


Figure 3. Chronological arrangement (1998–2024) of the 432 analyzed studies.

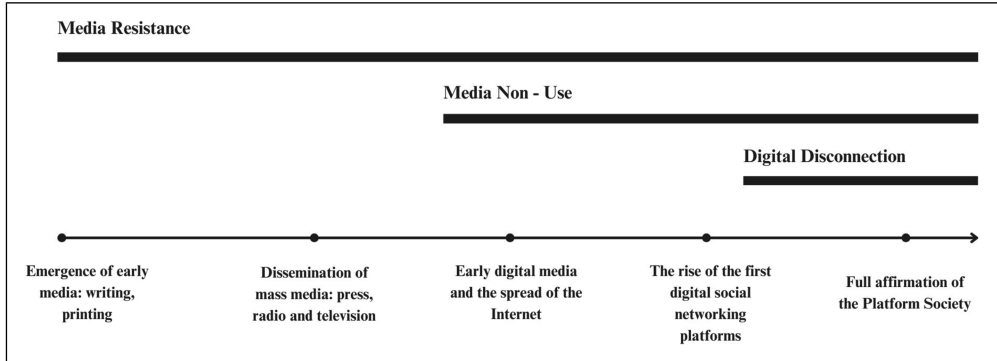


Figure 4. Timeline of media refusal history.

and media non-use remain valuable perspectives for understanding contemporary digital disconnection studies (Figure 4).

This historical trajectory is reflected in the distribution of clusters within the corpus. Prior to the mid-2010s, the majority of contributions focused almost on *Disconnection as Media resistance* and *Disconnection as Media non-use*. While subsequent research expanded the conceptualization of disconnection, these two clusters maintain an enduring significance within the field of disconnection studies (see Figure 5). The chronological pattern observed across the remaining thematic clusters generally reflects the trend shown in Figure 3, with the highest concentration of contributions occurring between 2020 and 2022.

The main peculiarity is found in *Disconnection as Digital well-being*, which shows dual publication peaks in 2018 ($n = 20$) and 2020 ($n = 21$). As will be discussed in the subsequent section, this cluster presents unique thematic and chronological peculiarities that distinguish it from the others.

Following the identification of the main thematic clusters, their relationships to different academic fields, and their chronological trajectories, the final stage of this review is dedicated to a descriptive analysis of the emergent clusters.

The digital disconnection framework: Mapping the different fields of disconnection studies

This second section addresses the RQ2 ('What are the main critical positions and conceptual approaches that emerge in disconnection literature?') by introducing an analytical framework to map the disconnection field. The cluster *Digital Disconnection review* is excluded as it represents a meta-category focused on literature synthesis rather than the understanding of disconnection practices themselves. The remaining six thematic clusters are positioned within this framework (Figure 6), and their subsequent discussion is structured sequentially based on their horizontal position (from left to right).

The framework's axes

The framework is constructed around two distinct continua:

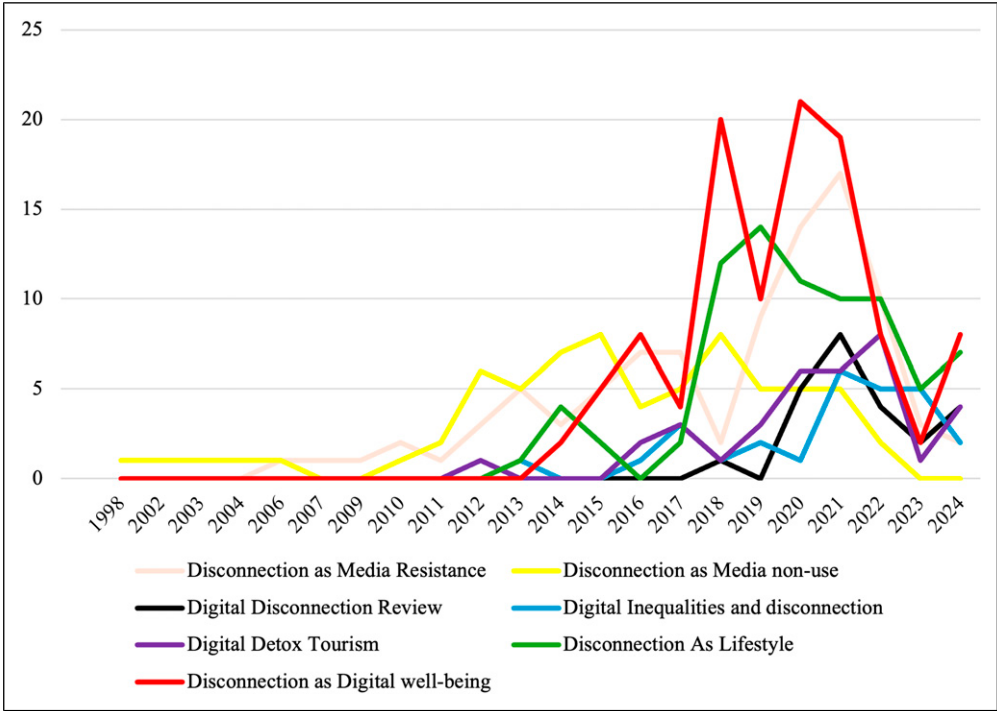


Figure 5. Chronological arrangement (1998–2024) of the seven clusters.

Horizontal axis. Structure and Critique (Disconnection as Resistance vs Disconnection as Privilege).

This axis offers a critical analysis of the structural factors regulating disconnection practices. It ranges from practices identified as exclusive and structurally privileged (Disconnection as Privilege) to those framed as forms of media resistance (Disconnection as Resistance). Disconnection as Privilege, strongly influenced by Bourdieu’s theory of habitus and distinction (1984), brings together studies that reflect on how the ability to disconnect has become a new indicator of social status and a new form of social distinction. This capacity, emerging as a new form of symbolic capital, is strongly correlated with personal cultural and economic capital, represents a luxury (e.g. publicly announcing a digital detox or taking a digital retreat holiday) inaccessible to all. Disconnection as Resistance is defined drawing on Kaun and Treré (2020: 707) as ‘practices of refusal to comply with specific political context and developments that are implemented by actors that are not part of the political elite and belong to grassroots organizations’. Aligned with British cultural studies perspective, this extreme aims to frame digital disconnection as a political praxis against media power, exemplified by research in social movement studies or platform work, where disconnection is understood as a site of struggle within broader political activists’ movements.

Vertical axis. Conceptual Approaches (Performative act vs Collective issue). This axis highlights the divergent conceptual approaches attached to disconnection practices, summarized into two macro-categories. Considering disconnection as a performative act integrates scholarship that analyses how these practices become distinctive traits in the construction of digital identity. Drawing on

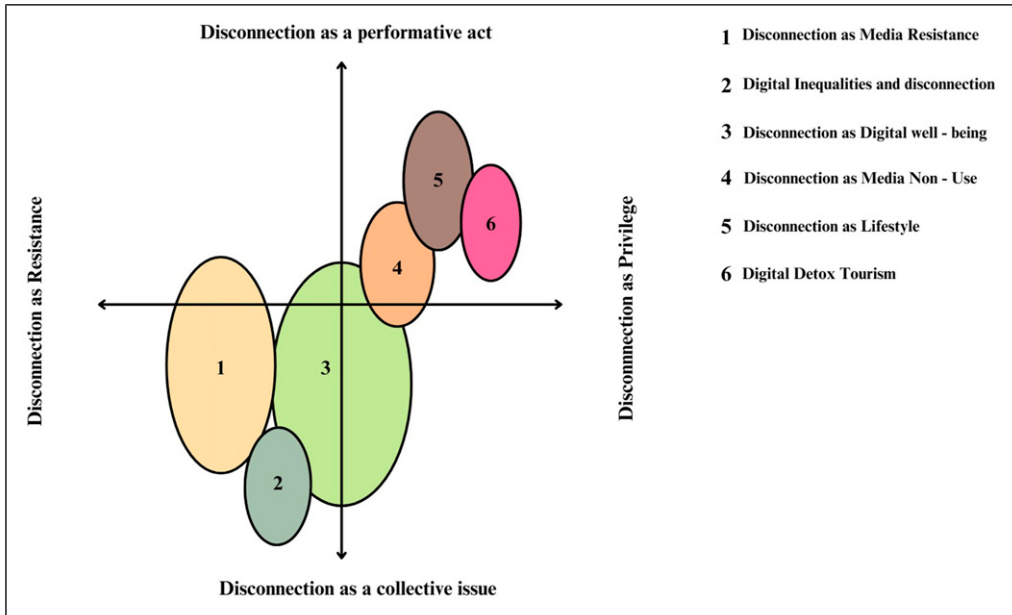


Figure 6. Theoretical framework of disconnection literature.

Portwood Stacer's (2013) theorization, the performative dimension links the conspicuousness of disconnection to both identity work and political lifestyles. In this sense, performativity is not an isolated individual choice, but an intersubjective and relational practice, where the act of disconnecting acquires meaning through its social visibility. Recent theoretical approaches demonstrate how disconnection is performed as a process of identity construction that reframes digital consumption (Rosenberg and Vogelmann-Natan, 2022). Disconnection could be also understood as a performative practice of boundary management (Asmolov and Logunova, 2024), reflecting the ongoing tension between offline and online identities (Agai, 2022).

Furthermore, through the concept of Disconnection as Distinction (Fast, 2021), this extreme points to how practices of withdrawal are 'socially stratified and hence might serve as means of distinction' (Fast, 2021: 62). Conversely, Disconnection as a Collective issue includes contributions that define the phenomenon as a problem affecting society as a whole, reflecting systemic challenges rather than personal preferences. This perspective groups studies focussing on digital inequality, resistance to constant connectivity in the world of work (particularly among platform workers) and legal claims, such as the internationally debated 'right to disconnect'.

To strengthen the link between the literature review and the resulting categories of disconnection, the six clusters identified will be presented and defined exclusively through studies derived from the sample examined. This approach ensures that the analytical framework remains empirically grounded and directly reflects the fundamental meanings of digital disconnection that emerge from the primary data.

Disconnection as media resistance

Resistance to the media is a long-standing thematic, closely linked to collective issues. Scholars like Syvertsen (2017) have traced the enduring historical trajectory of media resistance since the earliest

forms of communication, noting its constant presence and its evolution alongside the changing media environment. Observing the distribution of academic studies in [Figure 5](#), it is evident how media resistance was not readily integrated into disconnection studies until the first half of the 2010s. During the emergence of digital media and platforms, the STS framework for media non-use remained a dominant paradigm for understanding media refusal ([Selwyn, 2003](#); [Wyatt, 2003](#)) primarily focussing on individual non-use of media and thus limiting its ability to address the collective and critical dimensions of media resistance. However, the period 2008–2018 marked a reformulation of media resistance, with the work of scholars such as [Lin et al. \(2010\)](#), [Weaver et al. \(2010\)](#), [Feldman \(2012\)](#) and [Stieger et al. \(2013\)](#), who provided key characteristics of media resistance, many later incorporated into the emerging field of disconnection studies:

- (1) Collective action, involving social movements.
- (2) The influence of structural factors like economic conditions and social inequalities.
- (3) Ideology, characterized by critical engagement and ‘oppositional reading’ ([Woodstock, 2018](#)) that actively decodes and challenges media meanings.

[Woodstock \(2014\)](#) theorizes a continuum of media resistance, from uncritical acceptance of all technologies to complete refusal and critical thinking. [Syvertsen’s analysis \(2017\)](#) shows many cases of people refusing to use (in some cases even completely) specific media. It is therefore no coincidence that very often resisters identify themselves as members of a broader social group or movement ([Bennett, 2012, 2017](#); [Foot, 2014](#); [John and Dvir-Gvirsman, 2015](#); [Kaun, 2017](#)). Building on this, disconnection studies have found media resistance particularly relevant in digital political activism, with [Kaun and Treré \(2020\)](#) among the first to investigate digital disconnection in social movement studies. Contemporary activism perceives disconnection as a fundamental political and emotional act necessary to maintain the sustainability and authenticity in the platform society ([Caldeira et al., 2024](#)); it also includes offline initiatives ([Syvertsen, 2022](#)), self-defined as ‘movements’. Although offline initiatives do not always manifest themselves as explicitly joint and targeted political actions, they share characteristics with other forms of social and political participation.

Disconnection practices are not homogeneous; the profound differences and inequalities that arise in different global (but also local) contexts shape different acts of resistance. Consequently, the agency of social actors is another crucial factor in understanding these practices. The intersection of disconnection, resistance, and agency is particularly intense in digital work. [Fast \(2021\)](#) argues disconnection is a necessity in digital capitalism, especially in the gig economy ([Bonini and Treré, 2023, 2024](#); [Jiang, 2023](#)) and knowledge work ([Karlsen and Ytre-Arne, 2022](#)), where it becomes a strategic act to reclaim time and resist platforms power and algorithmic control. Furthermore, media resistance intersects disconnection studies in everyday life ([Maslen, 2022](#)), morality ([Mutsvairo et al., 2022](#)), and interpersonal relationships ([Ghita et al., 2021](#)), often motivated by ethical concerns, personal values and the desire for meaningful human connections. Building on the collective and structural dimensions of media resistance, the *Digital Inequalities in disconnection* cluster examines how socio-economic disparities and the geographical context profoundly influence and diversify disconnection practices, particularly in terms of access, literacy and agency to reject digital engagement.

Digital inequalities in disconnection

Although represented by a smaller number of studies (Table 3), *Digital inequalities in disconnection* represents a recent and vital topic within disconnection studies. Grounded in the material condition of dis/connection (Dourish and Mazmanian, 2012), this approach suggests that digital inequalities are reshaping the concept of materiality, even within the typically well-connected Western context. This reframing highlights privileged and unprivileged conditions of disconnection to cultivate a nuanced understanding of the heterogeneous experiences and motivations.

This theoretical lens reprises the early 2000s Digital Divide debates that were prominent within STS. As Helsper (2021: 26) argues, the issue has evolved ‘from digital divide to gradations of exclusion as expressed in skills, motivation, engagements and participation levels’. Consequently, as digital inequality theory implies that greater connectivity is better and asserts that privileged individuals tend to have better technological opportunities, summarizing as socio-digital privilege (Hargittai, 2021). Digital inequalities, although less explicitly ideological than media resistance, share a strong collective component and are heavily shaped by structural factors (Helsper and Reisdorf, 2017; Pavez et al., 2017; Reisdorf and Groselj, 2017). While media resistance involves voluntary ‘challenge’ against dominant media discourses, digital inequalities emphasize the systemic boundaries that limit access (Straumann and Graham, 2016).

Despite the modest size of this cluster, its items are uniformly distributed across the three disciplinary domains (Figure 2). Research includes gerontological studies (Life Sciences domain) and analyses on adolescents’ self-esteem, where factors like restrictive media parenting and internet inequalities in access established a negative correlation (Hampton and Shin, 2022, 2023). These barriers, embedded in socio-economic disparities, can be viewed as a form of structural resistance, challenging the normative pre-conditions of the digital age (Kratel, 2023). The intersection between disconnection and digital inequalities in geographically disadvantaged regions remains a relatively under-explored area. Bozan and Tréré (2023) highlight this gap, noting that while inequalities studies overlook attitude toward voluntary non-use, disconnection studies disregard the material implications of inequalities (e.g. in rural Turkey). Recent research on digital inequalities research has tried to expand its scope to contexts poorly studied by disconnection studies, including Africa, the Middle East (Muschert and Ragnedda, 2024; Pype, 2021; Wildermuth, 2021), the Global South (Lim, 2020) and even sensitive contexts such as prisons (Brites and Castro, 2022; 2023). While this cluster fundamentally addresses structural and collective issues, the reviewed literature currently lacks studies focussing primarily on the direct relationship between the individual perspective of disconnection and digital inequalities. As pointed out by Bozan and Tréré (2023), this research gap leaves the motivations and discourses surrounding disconnection in marginalized contexts largely unexplored. This oversight risks framing disconnection exclusively as a voluntary lifestyle choice, obscuring the structural inequalities that determine the possibility of disconnecting. Ignoring these disparities means decontextualizing this issue and neglecting the reality that, in marginalized contexts, disconnection practices often represent a forced exclusion rather than a voluntary act of agency. These critical implications, which link individual experience with systemic inequality, emerge in part in the next cluster: *Disconnection as Digital well-being*.

Disconnection as digital well-being

While overlapping with other themes, the *Disconnection as Digital well-being* cluster is distinctive in its focus on sustainable, long-term practices for healthy technology integration (Cesareo et al.,

2021; Liu et al., 2021; Markham, 2021; Verlinden et al., 2024), rather than temporary restrictions (*Digital Detox Tourism*) or purely performative aspects (*Disconnection as Lifestyle*).

While some studies in this cluster explore collective issue, like well-being strategies and workers' rights (Mannell and Meese, 2022; Zlatanović et al., 2024), *Disconnection as Digital well-being* generally limits its engagement with critical analysis of dominant media discourses stance of the *Media Resistance* cluster. The cluster also intersects with *Digital Inequalities in disconnection* (Hampton and Shin, 2022; Nguyen, 2021, 2022), recognizing that disconnection practices are intrinsic to socio-economic strata and factors like capital and age significantly influence digital skills and privilege of benefiting from disconnection experiences. Consequently, this cluster is centrally positioned across all four dimensions of the framework, serving as its conceptual pivot. Placing *Disconnection as well-being* at the heart of the framework carries two significant implications. First, it emphasizes its transversal nature, suggesting that well-being has evolved beyond a purely medical or psychological concern into a site of social struggle and a marker of privilege. Second, it underlines how, in the platform society, well-being becomes a normative imperative that legitimizes disconnection practices, whether they are framed as political resistance, health self-care, or a performative act. In doing so, the framework reveals how the 'right to well-being' is not distributed equally but is increasingly contested at the intersection of structural and critical factors and the diverse conceptual approaches to disconnection.

The emergence of disconnection as a key research area coincides with growing concerns over digital well-being (Vanden Abeele and Nguyen, 2022). Starting in the mid-2010s, terms like 'social network fatigue' (Ravindran et al., 2014) and 'technostress' (Maier et al., 2015) started to circulate, reflecting growing interest in the potential negative effects of excessive use. The forced hyperconnection during the Covid-19 pandemic amplified these concerns, driving widespread focus on terms like MNO (Managing News Overload), FoMO (Fear of Missing Out) and Zoom fatigue (Ahmed, 2020; Aagard, 2022; Tugtekin et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021).

The attention extends beyond the ERC SH domain, as demonstrated by the strong presence of the cluster in Life Sciences and Computer Science (Figure 2.). Technology companies have started to integrate 'digital well-being' features (such as 'do not disturb' modes) and usage metrics (e.g. screen time, usage time) into their applications and services to empower users and potentially 'making disconnection more accessible and manageable' (Nguyen et al., 2022: 17). However, the implementation of these features remains controversial: they shift responsibility for well-being onto the individual (Docherty, 2021; Syvertsen and Enli, 2020) making disconnection seem like a performative act; secondly, these practices allow tech companies to collect more data on use and non-use behaviours, fostering greater datafication and surveillance (Jorge et al., 2022). Beattie and Daubs (2020) suggest that these features may function as 'social goods', designed to pre-empt future legislative regulations. Although *Disconnection as Digital well-being* addresses sustainable usage strategies, its limited commitment to structural critique finds its conceptual counterpart in the *Disconnection as Media non-use* cluster, which also frames the rejection of digital technology primarily as performative action rather than an explicit challenge to the prevailing media ecology.

Disconnection as media non-use

The widespread adoption of online social networks and early digital platforms on a global scale has profoundly altered the nature of individual technology use, influencing both the timing and patterns of adoption and abandonment. Subsequent literature on media non-use has underlined that media rejection does not necessarily entail a complete rejection of all media technologies: researchers have explored the nuanced and multifaceted nature of non-use practices (Brubaker et al., 2016; Coursaris

et al., 2013; Neves et al., 2015; Portwood-Stacer, 2013). This includes the acknowledgement that non-use can be selective, performative and target specific platforms or functionalities while maintaining engagement with other aspects of the digital world.

The issue of the digital divide, although reworked in form and content, is also present in more recent media non-use studies, where it is often identified as a collective issue. In an increasingly digitized society, divide issues have been analyzed in contexts such as technology adoption among older people (Fernández-Ardèvol et al., 2017; Hakkarainen, 2012; Kania-Lundholm, 2021; Neves et al., 2015; Olphert and Damodaran, 2013; Van Deursen and Helsper, 2015) or between segments of the population generally forgotten by media studies such as rural populations or indigenous tribes (Ali-Hassan et al., 2020; Ems, 2014, 2015; Neriya-Ben, 2017). Since the 2020s, the topics of selective and conspicuous non-use and digital divide have been integrated into broader disconnection studies, particularly within *Disconnection as Lifestyle* and partly *Digital Inequalities*; however, building upon the theoretical foundations provided by STS and second-generation cultural studies, with their emphasis on the ‘domestication’ of ICTs, some studies are now re-interpreting these frameworks to understand contemporary experiences of disconnection. As shown in Figure 2, the substantial concentration of studies on the technology and media non-use relationship within the Computer Sciences field and Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) domain highlights the interdisciplinary nature of this theme. This research encompasses a diverse range of topics, including the non-adoption of technological innovations (Garg, 2019), the re-domestication of smartphone use (Bassett, 2020; Karsay and Vandembosch, 2021; Rosenberg and Vogelmann-Natan, 2022), and the nuanced relationships individuals develop with specific applications (Beattie et al., 2021; Huang and Miao, 2021). The strategic and selective nature of non-use lays the groundwork for understanding the next cluster: *Disconnection as Lifestyle*. The transition from media non-use to conscious, nuanced, platform-specific withdrawal evolves into a fully formed performative project (see also Figure 4).

Disconnection as lifestyle

The literature on disconnection as a lifestyle builds on these practices of selective non-use and readjustment, examining how individuals articulate digital disconnection as a means of constructing identity, adhering to personal values and communicating social status in an increasingly connected world. This cluster examines disconnection through the lens of personal agency, highlighting its potential for performative action. In general, this cluster brings together fast paced and more individualizing practices associated with acts of disconnection (Kaun and Treré, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic has inaugurated a new era for disconnection practices, embedding them in many people’s everyday lives. Treré (2021) identifies three distinct ‘ecologies of disconnection’: intensification, discovery and abandonment. The ‘Intensification’ of media technology use was primarily motivated by the need to maintain online connections that had been temporarily lost in the physical world. This urgency renders disconnection nearly impossible, yet simultaneously highlights the urgent need for it, prompting reflection on one’s digital lifestyle. With ‘Discovery’ people are starting to actively experience disconnection. This is not about total abandonment, but rather the discovery of new practices (e.g. adopting a dumb phone to combat the pressures of hyper-connectivity). Here, ‘disconnection as a lifestyle’ begins to take shape as a conscious choice, even if only partial. ‘Abandonment’, describes voluntary cessation of applications use (e.g. Google Maps) or data plan suspension, highlighting the dynamic and evolving nature of disconnection

practices in response to changing circumstances. This abandonment is the peak of ‘disconnection as a lifestyle’, where disconnection is no longer a temporary action, but a permanent change in behaviours that are integrated into daily life. Starting from Treré’s theorization, it is interesting to note that this specific cluster is exclusive to the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) domain (Figure 2). Unlike the other clusters, *Disconnection as a lifestyle* theorizes disconnection as an intrinsically performative social practice that is simultaneously intertwined with individual agency and experience.

Nguyen observes instances of disconnection ‘as a social experiment’ and the sentiment that ‘offline is the new luxury’ (2022: 15), emphasizing how reducing the use of social media is not only something socially desirable but also a privilege not accessible to all. Drawing on Bourdieu’s social distinction, these actions can be interpreted as ‘conspicuous non-consumption’ (Portwood-Stacer, 2013) of digital media, a performative act distinguishing the individual from the ‘mass’ of digitally connected users through a form of activism close to the domain of ‘lifestyle politics’ (Portwood-Stacer, 2013: 1043). In the historical trajectory of media refusal, conspicuous non-consumption can also place disconnection in the sphere of taste. As it shows in digital detox tourism, the element of nostalgia or a return to analogue can vehicle a strongly performative form of disconnection as in the case of those who prefer vinyl or cassettes to digital music (Rahm-Skågeby, 2011) or those who convey the concept of ‘media slowness’ (Rauch, 2018: 28). The narrative of disconnection as lifestyle is often associated with the digital world as a vehicle for less authentic experiences. According to Sutton, this ‘disconnectionist rhetoric’ involves the food-related metaphor of the digital detox where ‘online life is indulgent and unhealthy, while off-line experiences are more demanding’ (2017: 28). Ana Jorge’s (2019) study of Instagram users’ discourses on media use interruption also reveals this rhetoric. She notes how several users announce their temporary absence from Instagram through a series of hashtags such as ‘#socialmediadetox’, ‘#offline’ or ‘#disconnecttoreconnect’. Jorge identifies three predominant themes: enjoying life offline and regaining control, converting others and disconnection as a lifestyle choice. These reflect a broader social discourse that emphasizes self-regulation in the use of social media. Collectively, these dimensions suggest a shift towards viewing disconnection not exclusively as an individual practice but as a socially desirable and virtuous pursuit, contributing to a growing cultural focus on well-being and the conscious use of technology.

Digital detox tourism

The final cluster examines how the lifestyle component, particularly the narrative of ‘offline is the new luxury’, is commercialized and externalized into organized, temporary practices. Consequently, Digital Detox Tourism serves as a highly visible, performative expression of the desire to escape hyper-connectivity, reinforcing disconnection as both a conscious individual choice and a privileged status symbol. This phenomenon is becoming increasingly common in the countries of Global North. Stäheli and Stoltenberg (2022: 6) conceptualize digital detox tourism as a ‘laboratory for producing a distinction between the digital and the analog’; however, this approach rests upon the presumption that the boundary between digital and analogue connection must be intentionally fabricated. While digital detox tourism often aims to facilitate a return to ‘authentic’ analogue experiences, it can also be seen as a staged and produced experience. This ‘authenticity’, often represented as a lost past, is itself a constructed concept, a nostalgic idealization of a past that may not have been as idyllic as perceived. With the emergence of digital detox tourism, neoliberalism has therefore commodified these sentiments, turning disconnection into a luxury good, marketed specifically for a certain social class seeking to escape the pressures of the digital age (Arenas-

Escaso et al., 2022; Schwarzenegger and Lohmeier, 2021). Since the mid-2010s, digital detox retreats started to pop up in the UK and France, while in the US the popular ‘Camp Grounded’ retreat provides annual digital detox in the north of the Bay Area. Camp Grounded, with its claim of ‘Disconnect to Reconnect’, is probably the most famous and one of the most studied cases in the literature on digital detox tourism (Fish, 2017; Madrigal, 2013; Stäheli and Stoltenberg, 2022; Sutton, 2017). Each year it hosts many workers from major tech companies, actively promoting the concepts of *analogisation*, *nostalgia* and *unplugged travelling*, encouraging participants to reconnect with nature and engage in offline activities, rediscovering the pleasures of a slower pace of life (Stäheli and Stoltenberg, 2022). Similar examples can also be found in Northern Europe, especially in Sweden (Bornestav, 2017; Conti and Farsari, 2022), a country that has made digital detox tourism a true hallmark. Concurrently, the retreat culture (Hesselberth, 2018) has expanded into Southern European countries (France, Greece, and Italy), primarily functioning as a form of leisure for visitors originating from Northern Europe.

Conclusion

Despite the extreme heterogeneity of the disconnection practices analyzed in the literature, this article aimed at foregrounding the main structural factors and conceptual approaches that have emerged within the field of disconnection studies. However, the resulting framework still leaves some theoretical aspects open for future inquiry.

The vertical axis of the framework (Figure 6) illustrates the significant overlap, nuances and interconnection between the identified clusters, underlining the dynamic and interdisciplinary nature of disconnection studies. The clusters *Disconnection as Media Resistance* and *Disconnection as Media non-use*, for example, reveal the polysemic nature of disconnection practices, showing fluid boundaries between performative and collective dimensions. In particular, some contributions within *Disconnection as Media Resistance* cluster examine also individual acts (e.g. Kent, 2020; Menke, 2017), while others within *Disconnection as Media non-use* explore collective forms of disconnection (e.g. Breines et al., 2020; Ems, 2015; Neriya-Ben Shahar, 2017). Consequently, future works could focus on the intersection between the performative and collective dimensions, aiming to more deeply explore their interrelationship and mutual shaping in the boundary management between online and offline identities.

The horizontal axis enables a critical reflection on the relationship between social structure (Giddens, 1984) and the possibility of engaging in disconnection. Drawing on Kratel’s theorization (2023), the possibility of disconnecting is profoundly affected and limited by social structures and power relations, rather than being exclusively determined by individual agency. This contrast is evident as cluster such as *Disconnection as Lifestyle* and *Digital Detox Tourism* align with practices associated with high structural privileges (e.g. cultural and economic capital, etc.) that contribute to social distinction. Conversely, *Disconnection as Media Resistance*, *Digital Inequalities in disconnection* and partially *Disconnection as Digital well-being* reflect structural inequalities (often collective) that render disconnection difficult or risky for specific categories of people, requiring constant negotiation with structures that impose connectivity. Starting from this axis and assuming that ‘disconnecting’ in the platform society is no longer a niche choice but a normative requirement, future studies should aim to empirically demonstrate the structural mechanisms underlying these privileges and difficulties.

While this review provides a synthesis of existing literature, it is crucial to recognize the inherent limitations of the narrative methodology, including potential for scope bias, the limitations imposed by the selected corpus, the inherent subjectivity and low replicability

associated with a grounded approach. Although the thematic clusters reflect prevailing conceptual areas, this methodological choice inevitably carries the risk of underrepresenting emerging topics. As the field continues to develop, future research reviews could empirically validate – or even rebut – the identified clusters and explore their interrelationships. The clusters serve as heuristics to investigate the contextual nuances of disconnection across different contexts and to examine practical implications for forming new, refined, thematic clusters. For example, a topic like the right to disconnect in the workplace (see, e.g. [Rubio and Barrera, 2024](#); [Verlinden et al., 2024](#)) highlights how disconnection is becoming a site of institutional struggle. Currently embedded in limited numbers within existing clusters (like *Disconnection as digital well-being*) this topic is likely to achieve autonomy as an independent cluster, critically addressing how the right to disconnect is redistributed along existing lines of economic and social capital. This evolution would transition the field from an exclusive focus on individual coping strategies toward a broader critique of digital labour and citizenship. Such a redefinition would further strengthen the role that studies on disconnection play in depicting the asymmetric power dynamics present in our increasingly mediated world. Understanding a phenomenon as complex and multifaceted as digital disconnection is critically important in an era defined by pervasive connectivity, offering essential insights into the evolving relationship between individuals and technology, alongside the broader social implications of our digital lives.

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Notes

1. For this reason, the synthesis phase will consistently reference the specific field of Computer Science rather than the broader domain of Physical Sciences and Engineering.
2. In the above query, LA denotes Language and DT denotes Document Type.

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Appendix

Appendix: Search queries

Search Query by [Altmaier et al. \(2024a\)](#):

TS= ("abstention from media" OR "anti-tech" OR
 "demediatization" OR "digital detox" OR "internet centrism"
 OR "internet dropouts" OR "luddi*" OR "media ambivalence"
 OR "neo-luddi*" OR "slow media" OR "screen-free" OR
 "screen-time limitation" OR "technology addiction" OR
 "technology control" OR "technology resistance" OR
 "technology retreat" OR "technophobia" OR "techno-stress"
 OR "typology of disconnection" OR "unplug*" OR "voluntarysimplicity"
 OR
 ("computer" OR "digital" OR "game" OR "internet" OR
 "media" OR "news" OR "online" OR "phone" OR "screen"
 OR "smartphone" OR "social media" OR "technology")
 NEAR/1 (abstain* OR absten* OR detox* OR disconnect* OR
 disengage* OR fatigue OR refus* OR "non-use" OR overload
 OR reject* OR resist*))

AND

LA =(English) AND DT=(Article)

Search Query used in this review²

SQ = ("digital disconnection" OR "disconnection" OR "digital detox" OR "media non-use" OR
 "media refusal" OR "disconnection as resistance" OR "disconnection as distinction" OR "detox
 tourism" OR "social media abstinence" OR "digital well-being" OR "inequalities")

AND (digital* OR media* OR technology* OR social media)

AND LA =(ENGLISH OR ITALIAN) AND DT =(Article OR Books OR Book Chapters OR
 Conference Proceedings OR Thesis OR Report)