

Power, pride, and patience in literary reading

A paradox of precarious attention and disconnection

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ABSTRACT

Ubiquitous digital connectivity is a challenge to literary reading for leisure and recreation, and there is a tension between online life and reading concentration. On the empirical basis of a qualitative study on adult readers of literature, in this chapter I explore the tension between the act of reading and the readers' priorities in today's era of deep mediatisation. The chapter presents a typology of three attributes to describe the interrelation between disconnection and concentrated attention as demonstrated by literary readers. First, being a literary reader adheres to personal values that lay the groundwork for pride in self-understanding as a reader. Second, the identity as a reader triggers the power to self-regulate digital connectivity. Third, being an experienced reader enforces enduring patience to read, though not without struggle and firm decisions. The identified attributes represent both positively motivating and negatively stressing experiences. Hence, combining modern media life and long-form reading triggers ambivalence and evokes a paradox of attention. This chapter demonstrates how even personally preferred and well-experienced cognitive demanding acts, such as long-form reading, requires attention on disconnection to keep up attention.

KEYWORDS: reading, attention, concentration, digital disconnection, balancing connectivity

Spjeldnæs, K. (2024). Power, pride, and patience in literary reading: A paradox of precarious attention and disconnection. In K. Albris, K. Fast, F. Karlsen, A. Kaun, S. Lomborg, & T. Syvertsen (Eds.), *The digital backlash and the paradoxes of disconnection* (pp. 363–382). Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. <https://doi.org/10.48335/9789188855961-18>

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore how literary reading is perceived and practised in digitalised daily life (Couldry & Hepp, 2017; Morley, 2005). Leisure reading unfolds physically in a paper book or digitally in an e-book or an audiobook (Spjeldnæs & Karlsen, 2022). I focus on the tension between the concentration needed to read literature and possible digital distractions, regardless of reading format or mode; whether literature is consumed in text or through sound, offline or online, is not considered here.

These days, the consumption of literature must be practised in a more complex media situation than only a generation ago (Baron, 2021), and spans of unbroken time are scarce in the modern world (Wajcman, 2015). However, what is constant is that the reader of a longer text must keep concentrating for some time (Baron, 2015; Wolf, 2018). Therefore, literary reading for leisure and recreation requires periods of focused attention (Terranova, 2012). The ubiquitous digital reminders and options coming from 24/7 connectivity have become increasingly intrusive and are perceived as threats to concentration (Firth et al., 2019).

Disturbances, real-life obligations, and personal treats of one kind or another are not new to the art of reading, but they have changed under the influence of digital media. Practical duties like cleaning one's house or clothes have not ceased. Further, interruptions from family and private and professional relations are no longer limited in time and place: Anyone can reach you anytime, anywhere. Also, the amount of content for entertainment and education has turned into an endless flow of easily accessible and time-consuming offers competing for attention. On the one hand, the continuous digital connection allows digital media to influence social relations and to profoundly interfere with human life in general (Couldry & Hepp, 2017; Karlsen & Ytre-Arne, 2021). On the other hand, digital disconnection arguably contributes to better real-life experiences (Syvertsen, 2022) and well-being (Karppi et al., 2021). This chapter concentrates on disconnecting *to* rather than disconnecting *from* (Jorge et al., 2022), and I argue that there is a need to create more knowledge on the interrelation between digital disconnection and demanding cognitive acts. Literary reading is an example of such acts. In this chapter, I explore disconnection and literary reading according to the following research question: How do readers of literature experience the balancing of long-form reading with digital connection in the age of deep mediatisation?

The empirical basis for this chapter consists of a qualitative study of twelve adult readers of fiction and nonfiction undertaken in Norway during the Covid-19 pandemic. In exploring how they perform their literary reading under the ever-present possibility of digital updating or more easily consumed digital entertainment, this study investigates the perceived relationship between attentional pulls (Throop & Duranti, 2015) from digital distractions and a

desire to concentrate, focusing on the dilemma of balancing literary reading with digital connectivity. I aim to highlight some major tensions perceived by media users who want to concentrate but are challenged by digital media.

The following presentation of this chapter's background sets the frame of modern and multi-format literary reading within a digitalised daily life. Proceeding to the theoretical frame, the concepts of temporal ambivalence, authenticity, and self-regulation are introduced before being applied in the analysis. Then follows a discussion before the final presentation of the typology and the concluding remarks.

Why literary reading and digital disconnection?

This chapter emerges from the background of a deeply mediatised society where digital connections ubiquitously influence personal experiences in daily life (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). In their comprehensive analysis of media development and its consequences, Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp (2017) introduced the three waves of mediatisation in order to place the accelerated process of digitalisation in a historical tradition. Mechanisation due to the printing press characterised the first wave. The electrification of communication media defined the second wave, which began with the telegraph and developed until the third wave, namely the penetrating digitalisation that has taken place in the last couple of decades. These waves highlight distinctive changes in a long history characterised by continuous development. Mechanised print media, such as the book, has predominated over the last 600 years.

The term mediatisation points to the thorough transformation of practices of communication and social processes (Couldry & Hepp, 2017) and emphasises the influence of digitalisation on the social world. The profound transformation caused by the third wave has required the addition of “deep” when describing the last decades of digitalisation. The deep mediatisation and its transformative force must be understood through its relation to time, according to Couldry and Hepp, because time is the central organising principle in human perception.

A reaction to digital overload is to opt-out and actively search for digital disconnection, and this can take place over shorter or longer times (Syvertsen, 2020; Syvertsen & Enli, 2020). Research on digital disconnection highlights how disconnection is seldom a goal in itself. Instead, disconnection is a means to achieve something else (Moe & Madsen, 2021; Sutton, 2017), like real-life sociality (Kuntsman & Miyake, 2019), relaxation and well-being (Beattie & Daubs, 2020; Karppi et al., 2021), or concentration on demanding cognitive tasks, either in professional life (Fast, 2021; Karlsen & Ytre-Arne, 2021) or private life (Karppi et al., 2021). In the words of Anne Kaun (2021: 1573), I am “countering the assumption that non-use is passive”. Another notion worth stressing is that literary reading is an individual act of concentration.

When readers make their grounds for a literary experience, a non-social mode is usually preferable to a social one. In this realm, disconnection is performed to obtain temporary solitude and not social experiences in real life.

A text constitutes meaning when the information given in the text inter-relates with experiences already registered in the mind (Iser, 1978; Wolf & Barzillai, 2009). In this, the content of what is read is understood by the reader's active participation. Personal engagement and subjective contribution are prerequisites to developing meaning when reading.

Further, being immersed in the text and understanding and remembering what is read is what characterises the quality of deep reading (Birkerts, 1994; Wolf & Barzillai, 2009). Deep reading implies a flow comparable to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) description of engaging in physical activity. Distractions following digital disturbances threaten the concentrated mode that readers need to be in to immerse themselves in literature (Baron, 2021; Baron & Mangen, 2021).

Scholars of reading research have expressed increased concern about the development of long-form reading (Baron, 2021; Baron & Mangen, 2021; Kovač & Van der Weel, 2018).¹ The challenges growing out of digital connectivity on human attention span have become an ever more relevant topic as the reduced capacity to concentrate for a more extended period has become a widespread concern in both scholarly and vernacular environments (Carr, 2010; Hari, 2022; Twenge, 2017).

Trained readers gain advantages in their ability to adapt their reading following the complexity of the text and in their capacity to manage long-form reading in general. In addition, readers of literature develop the ability for complex thinking (Baron, 2015, 2021; Baron & Mangen, 2021), develop empathy (Kuzmičová et al., 2017; Mar, 2011), increase their vocabulary, and train their reading competencies (Baron, 2021; Wolf, 2008, 2018).

The current era of deep mediatisation (Couldry & Hepp, 2017) challenges the ability to perform deep reading and to maintain deep reading over time (Firth et al., 2019; Hayles, 2007; Twenge et al., 2019). While reading complete works of fiction or nonfiction cultivates a mix of cognitive strengths (Baron & Mangen, 2021), the distracting effect of the smartphone has been demonstrated to be present even when kept on silent mode (Ward et al., 2017). On the other hand, the ability to collect meaning from a long narrative text is dependent on keeping track of the plotline and characters and continuously relating what is read to relevant former experiences, whether they are themselves read experiences or real-life experiences (Mangen et al., 2019), while documentary and argumentative texts demand that the reader keep track of sustained arguments and multi-sided evidence before proceeding to complex conclusions (Baron & Mangen, 2021).

Readers participate in media consumption and are known to demonstrate active deliberation in their choices and ways of operating their reading

(Jenkins, 2013; Radway, 1984), thus making their handling of a widely digitalised media repertoire interesting to explore. Against the background of a deeply mediated society causing responses of digital disconnection and concern about the future of reading, I now present the three concepts that constitute the theoretical lens for the analysis in this study on literary readers: temporal ambivalence, authenticity, and self-regulation.

Analytical framework

The first concept in the theoretical approach to the analysis is temporal ambivalence, which is related to experiences of time. The perspective of time as a fundamental principle in handling personal experiences (Couldry & Hepp, 2017) is a guide to approaching the handling of literary reading in a deeply mediated daily life. The interrelation between the deep mediation of our era and the attention economy (Davenport & Beck, 2001) underlines the vulnerability of available time when dealing with digital connection and cognitive attention (Firth et al., 2019; Terranova, 2012). The readers' perceived notions of their handling of digital (dis)connection in the context of literary reading are expressed through their perception of time. The concept of temporal ambivalence (Ytre-Arne et al., 2020) highlights how subjective deliberations mark the experiences of time related to digital development.

It is worth noting how temporal ambivalence brings forward a notion of “lost time”, as demonstrated in a study on smartphone use (Ytre-Arne et al., 2020). The ever-present smartphone leads to increased experiences of time lost in indefinite cycles of checking the phone and in long stretches of mobile scrolling (Kormelink & Meijer, 2018; Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021). The sentiment of “temporal overload” relates to the experience of temporal ambivalence (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020). The experience of time as an essential structuring tool leading to ambivalent reactions as revealed in disconnection studies serves as a theoretical perspective into the empirical material in this chapter.

The second concept applied in analysing the empirical basis for this chapter is authenticity. The perspective of authenticity serves to highlight the importance of personal values when handling digital connection and disconnection (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020). In the concept of authenticity, there is a related longing for the pre-digital era, the time before deep mediation, and a notion of presence. Being present is regarded as a significant motivation to limit digital connection (Syvertsen, 2020), referring both to physical presence in social relations and to being cognitively present and connected to one's inner self (see also Jorge, Chapter 16, and Jansson, Chapter 17 in this volume).

Notions of authenticity are put down in media use, and inner values and perceived hierarchical structures are demonstrated. Couldry (2004: 115) emphasised the role of media as a structuring element in people's lives, and how people “order” or “practise” their media use indicates how

their perceived hierarchical structures are dependent on inner values. Thus, personal values connected to authenticity guide the practical handling of (dis)connection in daily life.

Being true to one's inner self is perceived as distinctly different from scrolling online (Karlsen & Syvertsen, 2016; Syvertsen & Enli, 2020; Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021). Experiences in nature (Syvertsen, 2022; Syvertsen et al., 2019) and holidays away from connected daily lives (Beattie & Daubs, 2020; Syvertsen & Karlsen, Chapter 15 in this volume) are examples of practices of "disconnecting to reconnect" (Sutton, 2017). Notions of a more balanced and fulfilling lifestyle, characterised by an active search away from new technology that is considered invading and alienating, are recognised as subjective reasons to disconnect (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020).

Related to authenticity is the notion of digital well-being, a state where technology is in balance with the non-connected parts of life (Baym et al., 2020; Jorge, 2019; Vanden Abeele, 2020; Vanden Abeele & Mohr, 2021). Furthermore, digital-wellbeing implies a level of self-control, in contrast to the addictive use of social media with negative implications such as exhaustion and concentration problems (Beattie & Daubs, 2020) resulting from "over connection" (Baym et al., 2020).

While increased discomfort is known to grow out of too much digital connectivity, particularly from Facebook use (Baym et al., 2020), active disconnection practices can enforce a sense of personal empowerment (Allcott et al., 2020). According to the defining power of reading for personal identity (Jenkins, 2013; Radway, 1984), identifying as a reader lays the groundwork for the unfolding of passions, for making personal choices (like what to read), and for fully immersing oneself in an activity according to one's inner values.

Self-regulation is the third concept applied to the analysis in this chapter. The psychologist Ole Jacob Madsen (2015: 124) underlined the interrelation between "exercising control over actions, thoughts, and emotions" and long-held personal values. In this, self-regulation differs from the inherently short-term concept of self-*control*, which is more about managing impulses. Self-regulation implies an overarching perspective of one's actions, and a self-monitoring mode is kept alive based on personal values and desires. According to Madsen, self-regulation includes both conscious and unconscious operations.

Scholarly exploration of self-regulation leads back to the famous marshmallow study, where Walter Mischel and his colleagues found that small children who endured waiting for a second marshmallow before eating the first one given to them were more successful later in life than those who ate their first marshmallow at once (Mischel et al., 1988; Shoda et al., 1990). Later studies have forcefully nuanced the findings in the early marshmallow studies, the first of which was Mischel's initial study in the early 1970s (Mischel, 1974), demonstrating the importance of the children's family background and the reliability of the environment when their ability to decide on waiting for

gratification is considered (Kidd et al., 2013; Watts et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the ability to self-regulate and demonstrate willpower is not to be bypassed when implementing personal acts that require endurance over time (Madsen, 2015). To manage self-regulation, though, Madsen suggested that the ability for metacognition is a prerequisite in searching for a higher goal.

To maintain the balance between online and offline activities, the need for self-regulation requires a forced position (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020). The impact of deep mediatisation makes being a digital media consumer a 24/7 identity. The transformative processes involved in profound digitalisation have led to the individualisation of responsibility for balancing a digitally connected life with “real life” experiences (Pyysiäinen et al., 2017; Syvertsen & Enli, 2020). This emerging position of self-regulation increases the individual’s responsibility in handling digital connections, as exemplified when users of social media actively interrupt their digital connection to control their lives, time, social life, and well-being in general (Jorge, 2019). The result is that the operating of a digital daily life may lead to an increase in conflicts experienced on a personal level (Ytre-Arne et al., 2020).

In these times of deep mediatisation, demands on ensuring that time is “put to good use” have been transferred from working life into leisure life (Madsen, 2015: 90). The assumption about an empowering force growing out of leading oneself is even more manifest. In a few generations’ time, the concept of work has changed from being a liberating force in itself to becoming empowering, and a relation between self-leadership and self-regulation has emerged (Madsen, 2015). Hence, individual human capital becomes essential in managing modern life, whether it is professional life (Fast, 2021; Guyard & Kaun, 2018) or in the context of leisure reading (Kosch et al., 2022).

In the following, after a presentation of the method, the perspectives of temporal ambivalences, authenticity, and self-regulation are used as key concepts in exploring the literary reader’s balancing of long-form reading with digital connectivity.

Method

This chapter is based on a study of semi-structured qualitative interviews with adult readers of literature conducted by Faltin Karlsen and I in Norway in January–March 2021. Informants were recruited through snowball sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981), starting with a post on Facebook asking for leisure readers (and explicitly not professionals within the literary industry) willing to share their experiences of reading habits and digital influence on reading, including analogue reading (paper) and digital reading (e-book or audiobook). All informants ended up describing how they had been recommended to register for the study from a friend or family member, demonstrating that the Facebook post had reached far beyond the first level

of “friends”. New informants were interviewed until saturation was reached in terms of variation in experiences with digitalisation and literary reading.

Twelve informants responded to a request about being a leisure reader and having experience in analogue reading (paper) and digital reading (e-book or audiobook). They consented to share their experiences of reading habits and digital influence on reading, and in a small survey sent to the informants after their first consent to participate, they submitted information about age, educational background, present occupation, and preferred genres and experiences with different reading media. Five male and seven female readers aged 28–67 were included in the study. The minimum of personal information, such as the informants’ reading media and an indication of their amount of reading, is shown in Table 18.1 to outline the empirical basis for this chapter. Because the study concentrated on the readers’ relation to their reading medium and their experiences of how digitalised daily life influences their consumption of literature, the interview sessions did not dive deeply into variations in the informants’ demographic and social background.

The interviews lasted 40–60 minutes, and most of them were conducted online (Zoom or FaceTime), while two were conducted via telephone. The Covid-19 pandemic situation was the reason for conducting the interviews digitally; however, all the interview sessions turned into deep conversations on the themes addressed by the interview guide. Hence, it is likely safe to assume that the secluded set up of a digital interview might have been rewarding for the informants, considering that literary reading is mostly a private act. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, anonymised, and coded in NVivo. I have translated the quotations in this chapter from Norwegian to English.

TABLE 18.1 Overview of informants

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Occupation	Reading formats	Level of reading
John	28	M	Carpenter	paper + audio	medium
Richard	29	M	Digital designer	audio + paper	medium
Simon	32	M	Postdoc	paper + audio	medium
Susan	34	F	PhD candidate	paper + tablet + audio	heavy
Theresa	40	F	Librarian	tablet + audio	heavy
Alice	53	F	Unemployed	tablet + paper	heavy
Hannah	55	F	Actress	audio + tablet + paper	heavy
Kate	59	F	Newly retired teacher	audio + tablet + paper	heavy
Henry	60	M	Researcher	tablet	heavy
Caroline	62	F	Home-maker	paper + audio	light
Rita	63	F	Bioengineer	paper	light
Gustav	67	M	Caseworker/ bureaucrat	tablet + paper	medium

Comments: Heavy reader: Reads whenever possible, presenting herself as someone who is always reading. Medium reader: Reads regularly, at best every day; also identifies as a heavy reader (partly) because of earlier reading. Light reader: Identifies with books and reads more occasionally, like on holidays and because of social encouragement, like a book club.

Analysis

When analysing the interviews, an inductive approach according to thematic analyses guided the creation of categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which was further developed into coding in NVivo. Out of the initial 23 categories in NVivo, the following 6 were used in the analyses: frequency, concentration, identity as a reader, time, availability, and importance. A level of axial coding was added when the first level of coded material was analysed through the perspectives of temporal ambivalences, authenticity, and self-regulation to understand what the reports of these devoted readers bring forward at a generalised level. In the following, I proceed with the analysis in the following order: the meaning of time-related issues, the sense of authenticity, and the importance of self-regulation.

Enduring patience in balancing temporal ambivalences

Directly addressing reading time versus time spent on smartphones was a recurring theme among the informants. Even though the interview guide had no detailed questions about experiences of time concerning digital connectivity, all informants referred to sensations of time as being essential to their reading practice. The notion of time spent on online activities on smartphones was an explanation for less reading, as clearly expressed by both a younger and an older male informant. Simon (32) said: “I think it [the smartphone] has made me less capable of reading longer texts”. The smartphone, with its immediate connectivity to social media, swallows time and interferes with the ability to indulge in a book. This time-consuming capacity of smartphones was stated by several informants: “I spend much more time on the smartphone than I spend reading books. Absolutely. I do not know how much more, ten times more, I guess” (Gustav, 67).

It is worth noticing that smartphones and social media seem to be automatically interrelated. The relationship was consistently stated as a matter of objective truth, regardless of the interview questions, and it did not trigger any need for an explanation from the informants. The smartphone was the cause of interruptions and broken reading sessions: “I turn it off, I choose no disturbances if I want uninterrupted time to read. It is important to me that my reading is uninterrupted, that I get into the flow of reading” (Alice, 53). The informants clearly expressed tensions between having time to read and concentration in order to delve into a text, on the one hand, and the challenges of disruptions brought on by the smartphone, on the other. Notions of time defined the readers’ experiences at several levels, and the ability to read was directly connected to available time, especially the availability of uninterrupted time. Time was thus the structuring element in their management of literary reading (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). The readers expressed a “loss of time” (Ytre-Arne et al., 2020) when digital connection limited their possibility for reading, and they said how the smartphone leads to a lack of concentration needed to read, and this is sensed and expressed as if time disappears: “It [the smartphone] is negative, it affects me negatively. In every part of my life, my smartphone can be awful” (John, 28). To engage in reading implies being patient and enduring in resisting ubiquitous digital temptations.

Pride based on authenticity

In analysing the reports from these literary readers, there appears the notion of intense devotion. Finding a balance between reading and digital connection and disruptions is a challenge for almost all of them, but they expressed only minor concerns about their ability to master this challenge. Digital ties do not prevent them from reading, even though they have to take some precautions,

and they might even struggle with their self-discipline from time to time. Deep down, they do not doubt their own ability to self-regulate. Even though they participated in this study in their capacity as readers, the overall impact of their identification as literary readers was striking:

[I got these books for Christmas,] and now I am longing to read them, but then, there is a new semester, and I must work on the reading list and everything. So, I try to do it as fast as possible to squeeze in some reading time. That is my goal. (Susan, 34)

If I go on Facebook, that is my choice. And I usually do it once a day, and I admit that this is to check that I do not miss out on something, for instance, birthday greetings and all of that. I think that's nice to do. But if I am in the middle of a book, I'll read that book. [...] Then, no one can stop me. (Hannah, 55)

Reading literature is a prioritised activity for these individuals. Their identity as readers seems to make them keep up their favourite activity even though it requires cognitive presence and they must struggle to maintain their reading capacity over time. To them, literary reading is coherent with their identity as an act of great authenticity (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020).

This study shows a clear tendency in readers to keep track of their priorities for their attention. They seem to have an innately understood hierarchy of what is worthy of their interest, and this conscious prioritising enforces their ability to self-regulate. Several informants clearly expressed how their love of reading strengthens their ability to resist distractions and disturbances in the face of digital connectivity: “When I read, it [social media/smartphone] does not compete” (Susan, 34). Reading is a matter of value, and it fits in with the participants’ overarching personal values (Couldry & Hepp, 2017).

The meaning of literature to many of these readers is further emphasised in the deliberation of literature with regard to other media. They also nuance their media consumption within works of literature, and personal assumptions of quality come into question: “It depends on the book; how good I find the book. Take Jon Kalman Stefansson [Icelandic author], for instance. I was completely taken [...] then I do not check on Facebook or what has happened” (Alice, 53).

Attached to the notion of authenticity in being a reader is a nostalgic sentiment that some informants clearly expressed. Interestingly, the longing for paper books and unbroken reading time was highlighted by informants at both ends of the age range. The traditional analogue book is exclusive (Syvertsen, 2020), and both the oldest and the youngest readers referred to experiences of still reading paper books in terms of superiority. To be a reader is experienced as something to be proud of and is connected to one’s inner values and personal identity (Jansson, Chapter 17 in this volume).

Power to self-regulate

The readers expressed great consciousness of the interrelation between them mastering their time and the possibility to read. The informants' awareness of how their time to read relates to their ability to regulate connected smartphone use is confirmed in the perceived relation between concentration and experiences of time.

Even though the readers are bothered by digital distractions from online connections, they expressed a uniform understanding of how it is up to themselves to make time for reading in their daily life (Madsen, 2015). This is not to say that managing (dis)connection in order to read is without struggle, and several informants clearly expressed how easy it is to be distracted by connected devices and how they firmly put pressure on themselves to resist them:

Sometimes I am extreme in moving my attention toward my smartphone. It depends on me, on how good I am at... Right now, I am in a period of being extremely oriented towards Twitter, so I am checking far too often. (Theresa, 40)

Theresa's underlining of how "it depends" on her reflects the general notion of the readers' need to regulate their media consumption and their connectivity themselves. None of the informants presented any other option than self-regulation to ensure their opportunity for reading (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020).

Being dependent on self-regulation implies personal freedom, including the freedom to take advantage of digital connections. A few of the informants emphasised how digital connection can be an advantage to reading: "I want to read a book, and then, suddenly, I am thinking about the story that engages me, and then I want to check something online (Gustav, 67). It is also worth noticing how the readers of literature are accustomed to navigating in a world of disruptions, regardless of connectivity: "Modern life is full of distractions, and I have at least tried to take precautions to minimise them" (Alice, 53). Physical and digital limitations determine the possibilities to read, and many of these are not at all new to the art of reading, including family needs, practical obligations, other media, or combinations of these.

The understanding of self-regulation as a prerequisite was a general theme among the informants, regardless of whether they face personal challenges in handling a connected daily life or not. "I do not need any special practice [to protect my reading time]", as Kate (63) said, and in this statement, the notion of her being free from invading digitalisation is shared among some of the older informants in our selection. They adhered to the understanding of the need to self-regulate, while at the same time they expressed relief that these are not their problems. However, there was a remarkable prevalence of worries about how continuous digital connection negatively influences people other than themselves. They reported how young people are caught up by their small smartphone screens, and they wondered what this will lead to in

the long run. Not only did they express concern for the younger ones, but there were also explicit references to people their age, friends in their sixties, who “lose” whole evenings because of Facebook. What comes to view is their deliberation of the implicit difference between themselves, who know how to self-regulate, and others who are more likely to fall prey to Facebook and other digitally connected time-stealers.

Regardless of the widespread notion of there being no alternative to self-regulation (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020), many informants expressed a kind of resignation and a sense of being overrun when it comes to the deeper reasons behind the challenges caused by digital connection. It is as if algorithms unavoidably capture them: “It is something about the design of these apps. You are meant to stay there as much as possible. It is an unpleasant design” (Hans, 60); “I do not have Twitter or Snapchat. I do not have many of those dependency apps” (Richard, 29).

Even though they are highly self-aware and take precautions to counter unwanted digital distractions, they see no other option than to accept the structural basis of modern digitalised life (Bucher, 2020) and the profound influence of algorithms. Generally expressed and as a matter-of-fact realisation, this is it. Therefore, there is no real option but to keep on self-regulating.

The attention paradox

The analysis in this study shows how readers of literature perceive their ability to indulge in long-form reading as determined by time in the current era of deep mediatisation. They expressed a strong interrelation between having time to read and not being caught up by digital distractions. They connected the ability to concentrate on reading with mastering their time and their use of their smartphones. Even though it might be challenging and troublesome, there was an overall tendency that self-confidence is expressed when it comes to the ability to disconnect in order to secure time to read. Digitally induced disturbances can be more invading, more tempting, and more addictive than the ever-present physical disturbances, which are still there; however, different from many “real-life” disturbances, they are in charge of the means of controlling the digital disturbances themselves.

The possibility of being the master of one’s time when digital connection is under control seems evident to these readers. They do not question whether they are going to secure reading time. They are aware that they have to deal with this, and they express self-confidence. They prove to themselves their ability to disconnect even though it is complicated and occasionally beyond their immediate desires. In this, they accept the paradox of having to concentrate on how to concentrate in order to engage in their long-time passion for reading. Thus, to counter penetrating digitalisation by controlling connectivity when immersing in a beloved activity includes not questioning the attention paradox.

Regardless of digitalisation, digital connection, and digital disconnection, adult literary readers must train themselves to hold their attention over time. Being familiar with long-form reading and performing deep-reading means that one has some practice concentrating on a text. This notion of knowing “how to do it” leaves the readers with the motivation to maintain their attention and go on reading.

The notion of having to balance intrusive digital media without rejecting them is a poignant finding in this study. This is clear in expressions about time and in how the readers mobilise the personal strength to occasionally liberate themselves from digital connectivity in order to read. The readers thus demonstrate a temporal ambivalence (Ytre-Arne et al., 2020) in handling reading alongside digital daily life updates, and their power to maintain self-regulation is connected to their identity as a reader (Madsen, 2015). They consider reading literature to be an authentic attribute that is inherent in their conception of themselves (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020), and they expect themselves to be able to handle the tensions following in the wake of constant connectivity (Syvertsen, 2022).

This chapter has explicitly focused on adult and experienced readers. Not only do they identify as readers, but they have also developed their reading habits in pre deep-mediatised times. There is a need for more knowledge on those introduced to reading *in* times of deep mediatisation to broaden our understanding of how continuous digital connection influences the concentration needed to read as well as reading patterns in deeply mediatised societies. Studies on practices among those who have to handle digital distractions without experiences of keeping attention over time, such as when reading to achieve something valuable to them, are needed to broaden the understanding of the influence of digitalisation on literary reading. Further studies on the interrelation between the reading of literature and digital disconnection will enrich the knowledge of literary reading practices and will contribute to the general understanding of how people balance digital connectivity with demanding cognitive acts.

Concluding discussion

To answer the research question of how literature readers experience the balancing of long-form reading with digital connection in the age of deep mediatisation, I propose a typology based on three distinct attributes to describe the interrelation between disconnection and concentrated attention, as shown in Table 18.2.

TABLE 18.2 Typology of attributes activated when dealing with disconnection

	In handling disconnection	In not handling disconnection
Patience	- Mastering one's own time	- Time disappears
Enduring	- Succeeding in disconnecting	- Sense of loss
cognitive	- Cherishing uninterrupted time	- Impatience induced by pre-
presence		destined algorithms
Pride	- High in self-esteem	- Generally feeling low
Inbound	- Self-confidence following the	- Failure to disconnect nags on
motivation to	perceived identity	self-confidence
prioritise	- Internal values based on being	- Nostalgia toward previous
	authentic	analogue practices
Power	- Recognise a responsibility to	- Inward accusations when failing
Ability to	self-regulate	to disconnect
self-regulate	- Draw advantage of also being	- Captured by algorithms
	connected	- Worries about others
	- Experienced in maintaining	
	attention over time	

Comments: Enduring patience, pride in self-understanding, and power to self-regulate are attributes typically triggered when readers are handling, or not handling, continuous digital connectivity to pursue leisure reading.

First, being a reader adheres to personal values and deeply grounded identity attributes. Literary readers have an innate guide to priorities, corresponding with how the age of deep mediatisation enforces mediated figuration of the self (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). They convey pride in self-understanding as a reader. Second, this study shows how readers possess a strength that enables them the power to self-regulate: They can create “strong counter-measures” (Syvertsen, 2020). Even when it is costly and implies self-enforcement, it is possible to store the smartphone somewhere else or delete an app if that is necessary to find time to read. Third, the temporal dimension cannot be forgotten, neither in the dimension of literary reading nor in keeping the digital connection under control to maintain the concentration needed to read. In general, literary readers manage to control their connectivity patiently with their power to self-regulate and their pride in self-understanding. Literary readers demonstrate enduring patience in balancing reading and digital connection. When combining modern media life and long-form reading, each of these attributes can capture both positive and challenging experiences. Each positively named typology attribute brings forward the possibility of its negatively experienced counterpart. The power to self-regulate comes with the option of self-accusation, and failure to disconnect nags on one’s self-confidence. Patience in maintaining cognitive

presence has a flip-side in the ambivalent sense of smartphones taking up too much time and eventually losing time.

This typology of attributes in dealing with disconnection and continuous attention provides new knowledge on the processes needed for readers aiming to engage in literary reading. The typology brings forward an awareness of nuances in balancing the premises of private life where digital connection is the new normal (Ytre-Arne, 2023). The findings in this chapter correlate with those of disconnection scholars highlighting the general ambivalence characterising digital media consumption (Syvertsen, 2020; Syvertsen & Enli, 2020; Ytre-Arne et al., 2020). Further, the informants in this study expressed how digital disconnection is a time-limited operation: They capture pockets of reading time through practices of disconnection. In the current era of deep mediatisation, the devoted readers of literature manage to find reading time.

To keep up the authentic self who loves reading as it is developing in time (Couldry & Hepp, 2017) requires effort and motivation. The precarious attention needed to patiently maintain disconnection and continue reading for a while (Beattie, 2020) relies on the pride and power inherent to an identity as a reader. The tension inherent in the attributes required for dealing with disconnection underscores how deep mediatisation triggers contradictions. Moreover, when digital connection is the new normal, the attention paradox emerges: Even personally preferred and well-experienced cognitive demanding acts, such as long-form reading, requires attention on attention to ensure focus and concentration.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Faltin Karlsen for collaboration on the interviews. Thanks also to colleagues and reviewers who have commented on drafts. The research was funded by Kristiania University College and the Research Council of Norway (grant no. 287563).

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Endnotes

1. According to Baron and Mangen (2021), novels and nonfiction books are “long long-form” texts. Short long-form refers to newspaper articles up to 2,000 words, and medium long-form refers to journal articles up to 10,000 words. In this chapter, “long-form reading” covers all leisure reading.