Well-Being in the Digital Age: Introducing the Special Issue of Communication Technology and Well-Being (Part I) [Editor's Note]

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There are always concerns for people's well-being in the current digital age. We are not unfamiliar with the worries that the usage of digital media may increase people's stress, cause more depression, reduce life satisfaction, or elicit even more serious health problems. Therefore, technology giants, like Google, have emphasized their missions to improve users' well-being, such as helping people form healthy habits of media use, stay away from distraction, and build balanced relationships with digital devices (see https://wellbeing.google/). However, not everyone agrees with the notion that people's well-being in the digital age is in danger. A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center among more than 1,000 digital media experts discovered that almost half of the respondents believed in the beneficial impact of digital media on people's well-being (Anderson & Rainie, 2018). For example, some people argue that the increased connectedness through social media may benefit people's mental health. Such a debate could also be found in the existing scholarship of well-being and digital media. While some research has reported direct and indirect effects of using digital media on various symptoms of ill-being (e.g., Primack et al., 2017; Vannucci, Flannery, & Ohannessian, 2017), other scholars have argued that using digital media does not necessarily hurt (e.g., Hall, Kearney, & Xing, 2019) or even benefits people's well-being (e.g., Chou & Edge, 2012).

Well-being is a complicated construct. As a psychological factor, it contains multiple dimensions—from people's temporary emotional feelings to their overall satisfaction of life (Chan, 2013; Goswami, 2012). The topic of well-being also covers people's health and financial conditions. It is not our intention to affirm whether using digital media improves or inhibits people's well-being, as there is no consensus and there will probably not be one. We attempt to carry on the conversation of well-being in the digital age from a different perspective—to understand the role of communication technology. We believe communication technology is a double-edged sword for well-being. Instead of debating whether using digital media is good or bad, a more meaningful approach is to investigate how the various aspects of communication technology influence the well-being of different groups of users under distinct circumstances.

The purpose of this special issue is to provide a forum where the role of communication technology in influencing digital users' well-being could be deeply discussed. The current issue is the first part of this special issue and contains four articles that examine people's well-being in digital media from different perspectives using distinctive research methods. Young, Lachlan, and Young (2021) analyzed headlines and snippets about birth control in Google search. Their analysis focused on word usage, sentiments and online popularity. The authors found that anti-birth control search results contained more emotional words, especially the words that express fear, and conflicting messages about benefits and dangers of birth control accounted for a large part of the search results returned by Google. This study contributes to the discussion of communication technology and well-being by exhibiting how digital media deliver health-related information to the public.

Johnson (2021) conducted a survey to investigate social comparison within computer-mediated communication and its impact on people's psychological well-being. The findings indicated that younger, frequent Facebook users tended to make more upward comparisons, while those people who use Facebook to manage their moods tended to make more downward comparisons. Downward comparisons in the digital environment were found to benefit people's psychological well-being to a greater extent than upward comparisons. This study's focus on psychological well-being and social comparison brings an innovative perspective to the conversation in this special issue.

Yu, Alvarez, and Chen (2021) concentrated on game streamers' well-being. They interviewed 23 game streamers and conducted a qualitative content analysis of the interview video recording. Their major research question was about how game streamers cope with

their well-being challenges. The findings indicated that prioritizing different outcomes in the game streaming practices lead to negative well-being issues. Game streamers reported that their use of resilience and self-aware platform features is the most effective way to cope with the well-being challenges. This study provides a deeper understanding of the relationship between digital media and well-being in the field of game streaming.

Kallis (2021) conducted a qualitative study to examine how people's dating app experiences influence their well-being. This study discovered that users' engagement with dating apps affects their self-esteem. Female users reported an overall more positive experience than male users, while gay males expressed insecurities during app usage. This study contributes to the current conversation of digital well-being by focusing on mobile media and dating. With more and more people using mobile apps for dating, this study provides useful suggestions for practitioners in this emerging area.

I would like to thank my colleagues in the editorial team for working on the publication of this special issue. I would also like to thank Ms. Christina Myers (doctoral student at University of South Carolina) for her proofreading service. We thank you for reading this special issue and look forward to publishing the second part of this special issue at a later time of this year.

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