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Dualities of digital services: everyday digital services as positive and negative contributors to customer well-being

Dualities of
digital services

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Abstract

Purpose – This study examines the dualities of digital services – that is, how customers' favorite everyday digital services can positively and negatively contribute to their well-being. Thus, the study describes the meanings of favorite digital services as part of customers' everyday lives and the types of well-being to which such services can contribute.

Design/methodology/approach – We used a qualitative research approach through semi-structured interviews conducted in 2021 to collect data from 14 young adults (22–31 years old) who actively used digital services in their daily lives.

Findings – Our findings revealed that customers' favorite everyday digital services can contribute to their mental well-being, social well-being, and intellectual well-being. Within these three dimensions of well-being, we identified nine dualities of digital services that describe their positive and negative contributions: (1) digital escapism versus digital disruption, (2) digital relaxation versus digital stress, (3) digital empowerment versus digital subjugation, (4) digital augmentation versus digital emptiness, (5) digital socialization versus digital isolation, (6) digital togetherness versus digital exclusion, (7) digital self-expression versus digital pressure, (8) digital learning versus digital dependence, and (9) digital inspiration versus digital stagnation.

Practical implications – These findings suggest that everyday digital services have the potential to contribute to customer well-being in various aspects – both positively and negatively – accentuating the need for service providers to decipher the impacts of their offerings on well-being. Indeed, understanding the relationship between digital services and customer well-being can help companies tailor their services to customers' needs. Companies that prioritize customer well-being not only benefit their customers but also create sustainable growth opportunities in the long run. Further, companies can use the derived information in service design to develop marketing strategies that emphasize the positive impacts of their digital services on customer well-being.

Originality/value – Although prior transformative service studies have investigated the well-being of multiple stakeholders, such studies have focused on services related to the physical and healthcare domains. Consequently, the role of everyday digital services as contributors to customer well-being is an under-researched topic. In addition, the concept of well-being and its various dimensions has received limited attention in previous service research. By investigating everyday digital services and their multidimensional

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contribution to customer well-being, this study broadens the perspective on well-being within TSR and aids in refining a more precise conceptualization.

Keywords Digital services, Everyday services, Customer well-being, Transformative service research, Customer-dominant logic

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Digital services have become an integral part of our daily routines. Indeed, they are now present from the moment we wake up until the moment we go to bed. Consequently, digital services play an increasingly critical role in influencing the well-being of their customers, with each customer–service interaction yielding diverse outcomes. These outcomes may be positive in situations in which digital services simplify tasks such as online banking but could also be negative if the digital service discourages in-person interactions or enhances addictive behaviors, for instance. Therefore, comprehending the impact of digital services on customer well-being has become imperative in our technology-driven world.

The importance of services as contributors to well-being has been examined, especially in the field of transformative service research (TSR). What sets TSR apart from other service research is its primary focus on the outcomes it explores and emphasizes. TSR seeks to go beyond traditional service research, which has concentrated on investigating service outcomes that are pertinent to management, such as customer satisfaction, loyalty, repurchase intentions, and word-of-mouth recommendations (Rosenbaum, 2015). TSR focuses on understanding and promoting positive transformations in individuals, organizations, and society through services (Anderson *et al.*, 2013; Anderson and Ostrom, 2015).

Although TSR has explored various themes and addressed many different subjects, ranging from vulnerable consumers (Parkinson *et al.*, 2017; Dodds *et al.*, 2023) and employees (Nasr *et al.*, 2014) to corporate social responsibility (Losada-Otálora and Alkire, 2021), certain topics and themes have been neglected, requiring further attention. First, TSR often focuses on services with a self-evident transformative nature. These include, for instance, the healthcare, non-profit, and social services sectors, where the well-being of all stakeholders is the main concern and outcome (Parkinson *et al.*, 2019). For example, health-related studies (e.g. Rosenbaum and Smallwood, 2013; Parkinson *et al.*, 2017; Anderson *et al.*, 2018) have investigated themes related to diseases and conditions. However, TSR lacks a detailed examination of the relationship between everyday services and their role as transformative services that contribute to customer well-being. Everyday services, such as transportation, communication, delivery, and entertainment, form an integral part of people's daily routines. Thus, everyday services also have the potential to influence customer well-being, even though such services may not be inherently transformative in nature (Rahman, 2020). Recently, more attention has been given to this theme in the context of gambling (Rosenbaum and Wong, 2015), shopping malls (Rosenbaum *et al.*, 2016), and hospitality (Gallan *et al.*, 2021), for instance.

Second, most TSR studies tend to focus on services in physical settings, even though the rise of services delivered through online and digital channels is well-acknowledged (Parkinson *et al.*, 2019), with scholars noting that online services can potentially affect well-being, both positively and negatively (Anderson *et al.*, 2013). Rosenbaum and Russell-Bennett (2021) argued that service researchers have a limited grasp of the positive and negative consequences linked to digital service technologies, encompassing web-based and mobile applications. As such, it is crucial to develop a better understanding of digital services and their role in different stakeholders' well-being.

Third, Alkire *et al.* (2020) indicated that a significant portion of the current TSR research is primarily theoretical, with concepts such as service inclusion and financial well-being being introduced without empirical validation. Therefore, there is a pressing need to bridge the

theoretical underpinnings of TSR with practical, real-world applications (Alkire *et al.*, 2020) and enrich the research field through empirical studies. Through empirical research, we can better understand, for example, what well-being means to different stakeholders and what different dimensions are associated with it. In previous service studies, the well-being concept has often been treated rather superficially, so there is a need for a deeper understanding of its content and essence, including the associated dualities. These inquiries expand the well-being viewpoint in TSR and contribute to the development of a more precise conceptualization, aligning with the call made by Alkire *et al.* (2020).

Finally, Abboud *et al.* (2023) highlighted limited knowledge of customers' roles in enhancing their well-being when interacting with service providers. Similarly, the customer-dominant logic approach in service research (Heinonen *et al.*, 2010; Heinonen and Strandvik, 2015, 2018) has emphasized the significance of prioritizing customer perspectives and comprehending how a company's offerings become integrated into the lives or operations of customers, as opposed to adopting the conventional service provider-centric approach.

Consequently, to address the aforementioned concerns, this study draws attention to the role of everyday digital services in customer well-being. The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe the dualities of digital services by specifically focusing on customers' favorite digital services. The research question of this study is as follows:

RQ1. How do customers' favorite everyday digital services positively and negatively contribute to their well-being?

The present study contributes to service research by providing a framework that identifies three dimensions of well-being that digital services contribute to, as well as nine dualities that describe the positive and negative contributions of digital services. By discussing the dualities of digital services, this paper provides valuable tools for gaining a deeper understanding of how everyday digital services can enhance or diminish customers' well-being. Scholars have recently called for such investigations into the technology–humanity intersection in service research. According to Rosenbaum and Russell-Bennett (2021, pp. 261–262), “service technologies and human well-being’ is one of the key issues in topical service research: *“research is needed to investigate how to achieve well-being with service technologies and address questions such as how can humanity and technology be balanced to achieve well-being”*. Furthermore, as services play a crucial role in customer well-being (Anderson *et al.*, 2013), it is essential to gain insights that may help design and optimize services to effectively enhance customer well-being.

This study consists of three main components. In the next section, we provide a short overview of the literature related to TSR, well-being, and digital services. We then describe the empirical methodology used in this study. Finally, we present the empirical findings and analyze their theoretical and practical implications, followed by suggestions for future research.

2. Literature review

2.1 TSR and well-being

Service research has evolved over time to reflect the changing needs and interests of service providers and users. One significant shift in recent years has been the increased interest in the transformative capabilities of services – their inherent potential to induce significant changes in individuals, organizations, and society. Scholars have suggested that services have the capacity to impact the lives of service users and other stakeholders, such as employees and families, in a positive or negative manner by enhancing or diminishing their well-being (Rahman, 2020). The TSR paradigm offers holistic insights into services' impact and fosters a deeper exploration of their transformative potential, how service interactions can be transformed into more meaningful and impactful interactions, and how services can enhance

the well-being of the different stakeholders (Anderson and Ostrom, 2015; Prentice *et al.*, 2021). The topics within TRS encompass a broad spectrum of issues, including the well-being of vulnerable consumers and employees, corporate social responsibility, and environmental concerns, such as pollution and climate change (Keränen and Olkkonen, 2022). TSR is centered on comprehending the broader impact of services in enhancing well-being outcomes related to health, literacy, access, and happiness, among others (Rosenbaum *et al.*, 2011).

The core concept of TSR – well-being – is difficult to measure and precisely define (Dodge *et al.*, 2012). While well-being can vary depending on individual perspectives and cultural contexts (La Placa *et al.*, 2013), there have been many interpretations of its essence. Dodge *et al.* (2012) defined well-being as the balance point between an individual's psychological, social, and physical resources and challenges. That is, well-being occurs when individuals have the resources they need to meet a particular challenge. Chen *et al.* (2021) observed that a prevalent gauge of well-being pertains to subjective well-being (SWB), as seen in TSR. SWB encompasses individuals' emotional and cognitive assessments of their lives and comprises elements commonly referred to as happiness, peace, fulfillment, and overall life satisfaction (Diener *et al.*, 2003), including current life, past, and the future (Diener *et al.*, 1999). SWB is often paired with the concept of objective well-being, which encompasses elements such as one's living conditions and financial situation (Dodge *et al.*, 2012).

Further, well-being has been approached by categorizing it into eudaimonic and hedonic well-being (Anderson *et al.*, 2013). Eudaimonic well-being emphasizes the pursuit of one's potential, personal growth, and a sense of purpose and meaning in life. Anderson *et al.* (2013) noted that dimensions such as access, literacy, improved decision-making, individual and collective health, the reduction of health and well-being disparities, consumer involvement, harmony, power, respect, support, and social networks embody this focus on well-being. Hedonic well-being, in turn, is grounded in the concepts of pleasure, happiness, and life satisfaction. For this reason, the concept is considered to be similar to SWB (Anderson *et al.*, 2013). The existence of happiness, satisfaction, and joy among stakeholders indicates the presence of hedonic well-being, whereas the presence of negative emotions, such as tension, fear, strain, and stress, signifies a lack of hedonic well-being (Anderson *et al.*, 2013). In this study, well-being is conceptually aligned with the notions of SWB and hedonic well-being, considering how favorite digital services can enhance or diminish happiness, peace, and life satisfaction.

However, although well-being has been examined from various perspectives and is perceived to encompass many aspects, there have recently been proposals to broaden the concept of well-being and approaches that capture it in TSR. Alkire *et al.* (2020) highlighted the need to expand the scope of well-being considered in TSR, suggesting that researchers should move beyond the confines of well-being and work toward providing a more precise definition of the concept. They asserted that an exclusive emphasis on enhancing well-being is inadequate because it assumes the presence of a baseline level of well-being that can be easily improved through services. The approach is not comprehensive because millions of people live in conditions in which the basic level of well-being is not met. Consequently, the authors advocated for the inclusion of “relieving suffering” in TSR's definition and research agenda, thus shifting the focus away from the sole enhancement of well-being.

2.2 Digital services and well-being

As digital services have become an integral part of our daily routines, it has become evident that they can significantly influence our well-being, both positively and negatively (Anderson *et al.*, 2013). Gaining insights into how digital services affect users' well-being has become crucial, and there has been an increasing focus on transformative services provided online (Parkinson *et al.*, 2017). A digital service can be defined as any type of service primarily accessed through digital channels, such as the internet or computer technology (e.g. a smartphone) (Williams *et al.*, 2008). Thus, digital services include services such as e-books,

music streaming, and online entertainment (Rosenbaum and Russell-Bennett, 2021). Digital services have been studied in the service research field using various concepts, including e-services (Kalia *et al.*, 2016) and online services (Parkinson *et al.*, 2019; Adil *et al.*, 2022), and by focusing on different types of services, such as streaming services (Skälén and Gummerus, 2023) and videogames (Hussain *et al.*, 2022).

Given the multitude of benefits that digital services provide to their customers, it is plausible to perceive them as contributing positively to users' well-being. Based on previous research, the benefits of digital services include the possibility of immediate consumption (Atasoy and Morewedge, 2018), the interactive flow of information (Rust and Lemon, 2001), greater accessibility in terms of distance and opening hours (Rowley, 2006), and lower entry barriers to services than found in the physical world (Fritze *et al.*, 2019), among others.

The examination of the positive influences of digital services on well-being has been a subject of study in diverse academic fields, including psychology and communication research. A notable attribute identified for fostering well-being through digital services is their ability to enrich social interactions. Rosenbaum and Wong (2012) concluded that instant messaging through digital services can offer social support and positively influence individuals' subjective well-being. Furthermore, video games have been recognized as potential enhancers of well-being. Halbrook *et al.* (2019) proposed that video games can contribute positively to players' well-being, particularly by fostering social interaction. Prior studies have also highlighted the potential of digital services to promote relaxation. For example, Reinecke and Hofmann (2016) observed that media usage has a positive impact on users' entertainment and, as a result, overall well-being. Additionally, devices such as mobile phones can be employed to redirect attention away from difficult emotions or life situations, as noted by Lukoff *et al.* (2018).

By contrast, there is also evidence that digital services can influence customer well-being by decreasing it – that is, digital services can create problems and challenges (Bayer *et al.*, 2023). For example, digital services can cause negative physical and mental effects, such as addiction, depression, and decreased self-esteem, if consumers spend prolonged periods using their computers and mobile devices (Allred and Atkin, 2020). Spending more time on devices and services than on non-screen activities can decrease the psychological well-being of adolescents (Twenge *et al.*, 2018).

Researchers from various fields have been particularly interested in the negative effects of social media services and have demonstrated social problems related to isolation, social norms, technostress, and addiction, among others. Primack *et al.* (2017) showed that increased use of social media is associated with a heightened sense of social isolation when compared to less frequent use. Vaterlaus *et al.* (2015) found that social media exert pressure on young adults to conform to specific diets and exercise programs. Brooks (2015) noted that higher usage of social media contributes negatively to well-being and can promote lower task performance and technostress. Van Koningsbruggen *et al.* (2017) discussed how people who are active on social media often experience difficulty resisting the desire to use social media. Prior research has investigated the problematic and addictive utilization trends linked to specific social networking platforms, including YouTube (Balakrishnan and Griffiths, 2017), Facebook (Young *et al.*, 2017), and Instagram (Kircaburun and Griffiths, 2018).

However, the positive and negative impacts of digital services on the well-being of customers have been studied primarily outside the field of service research. Rosenbaum and Russell-Bennett (2021) concluded that service researchers have not yet developed a complete understanding of the potential advantages and disadvantages of digital service technologies, including web-based services and mobile applications. Although digital services (e.g., e-books, streaming music, and online entertainment) are increasingly shifting consumers' consumption experiences from physical to virtual domains, the impact of digital services on the human experience is a relatively unexplored area of service research (Rosenbaum and Russell-Bennett, 2021). This indicates the need for more comprehensive research to better

understand the relationship between digital services and customer well-being. This study, therefore, seeks to expand the current understanding by studying customer well-being and the role of digital services as positive and negative contributors.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data collection

As the primary objective of this study is to explore how customers' preferred digital services contribute to their well-being, a qualitative research approach, specifically semi-structured interviews, was selected as the data collection method. Semi-structured interviews provide an opportunity for in-depth exploration and understanding of participants' experiences, perspectives, and insights, as participants can express their thoughts and experiences in their own words (Kallio *et al.*, 2016). By using interviews, we were able to gain an understanding of the specific issues and themes that hold genuine relevance and meaning to participants' when utilizing digital services as well as how those themes can contribute to individuals' well-being.

The participants in this study were intentionally selected using a purposive sampling approach (Etikan *et al.*, 2016). The selection criteria included several years of experience using digital services and age. We wanted to recruit individuals who possessed a high degree of knowledge, experience, and expertise about the phenomenon of interest – digital services – and to focus on a homogeneous group – participants who shared similar traits in terms of age and life experience (Etikan *et al.*, 2016). Young adults (22–31 years old) were recruited because they typically exhibit high levels of activity as digital service users. They also belong to the generation of digital natives, born after 1984, who have been immersed in digital technologies throughout their lives (Kirschner and De Bruyckere, 2017). By intentionally selecting participants with relevant characteristics, purposive sampling can help ensure that the findings are relevant to the research questions or objectives (Palinkas *et al.*, 2015).

To identify the appropriate participants, we employed different methods. Two participants were identified by posting an Instagram story intended to attract interested individuals. Two additional participants were selected based on the recommendations of those initial interviewees. Finally, 10 interviewees were contacted directly because they met the selection criteria. The principle of data saturation was considered throughout the sampling process (Saunders *et al.*, 2018). After conducting 14 interviews, we observed that the participants' views began to converge, meaning that additional interviews were unlikely to yield substantially new insights regarding the research purpose (Fusch and Ness, 2015; Saunders *et al.*, 2018).

The second author conducted all 14 interviews in Finland in 2021. Due to restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, 13 of the interviews were conducted using Zoom video conferencing software. One interview was conducted in person, per the interviewee's preference. On average, each interview lasted approximately 41 minutes. Table 1 outlines the participants' demographic details, including their preferred digital services.

In the interviews, we focused on three main themes to gain a comprehensive understanding of the role of digital services in customers' lives. These main themes revolved around the utilization of digital services (behavior), the participants' perspectives and perceptions of digital services (cognitive aspects), and the emotional responses triggered by the use of digital services (emotions). These dimensions are typically involved when discussing customers' experiences (see, e.g. Verhoef *et al.*, 2009).

Rather than directly asking the interviewees about the impact of digital services on their well-being, we approached this issue indirectly by utilizing indirect questions. This approach allowed us to gather insights into the influence of digital services on individuals' well-being from different angles. The interview guide is presented in Appendix.

Dualities of digital services

	Age	Gender	Status	Favorite digital services	Customer characteristics	Interview duration (min)
P1	22	Male	Student	Spotify, Discord, YouTube	Uses a lot of different digital services. Considers self a pioneer in their use	42
P2	29	Female	Employee	Netflix, Spotify, Microsoft Gamepass	Uses digital services according to mood and amount of free time	38
P3	26	Female	Student	Instagram, Spotify, WhatsApp	Considers self an active user of different, familiar, and safe digital services	41
P4	30	Female	Student	Spotify, Instagram	Uses digital services according to amount of free time, mostly for entertainment and learning	52
P5	27	Female	Employee	Facebook, Instagram, Netflix, WhatsApp	Very active user of digital services. Community, social relationships, and sharing own life in digital services are important aspects	51
P6	26	Female	Employee	Instagram, OP-mobile, WhatsApp	Describes self as a content creator and uses digital services as a hobby. Uses services to socialize with people	40
P7	25	Male	Student	Snapchat, WhatsApp, YouTube	Considers self an active digital service user. Picks digital services according to close ones' recommendations	23
P8	31	Male	Employee	Spotify, BookBeat, Netflix	Actively uses digital services almost all the time as part of daily routines at work and during free time. Considers self to be addicted to certain digital services	57
P9	25	Male	Student	Reddit, YouTube, Twitch	Favors carefully selected digital services. Digital services help eliminate boring moments in life	34
P10	24	Male	Student	Spotify, Discord, Twitch	Uses widely different digital services. Values socializing with digital services	42
P11	23	Female	Employee	YouTube, Discord, Counter-Strike: Global Offensive	Uses digital services daily, mostly for entertainment. Considers self a moderate user of digital services	35
P12	26	Male	Entrepreneur	Google, Gmail, Counter-Strike: Global Offensive	Active user of digital services at work and during free time. Uses digital services to solve problems	31
P13	31	Female	Student	Instagram, Spotify, WhatsApp	Active daily user of digital services. Uses digital services to socialize and create content	37
P14	28	Male	Employee	WhatsApp, Netflix	Uses digital services to solve problems or for entertainment in daily life	53

Source(s): Table created by author

Table 1. Participants' background information

The participants were asked to talk about their favorite and most valued digital services. The interviewer did not suggest any particular digital service, which left the participants free to discuss the services they personally found most valuable. The participants' favorite digital services fell into multiple categories, mainly streaming, gaming, instant messaging, and social media services. The preferred streaming services provide access to movies, television shows, and music (e.g. Netflix and Spotify), as well as to e-books (e.g. BookBeat). The gaming category included popular video games, such as Counter Strike: Global Offensive, as well as subscription services, such as Microsoft Game Pass. One standout service in this category was Twitch, which allows players to livestream their gameplay and interact with their audiences in real time. In addition, the participants mentioned instant messaging services, such as WhatsApp, Snapchat, and Discord, with Discord noted as a service facilitating real-time voice chat during activities such as gaming. Social media services such as Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat were also popular among the participants. The other digital services mentioned included Reddit, an international discussion forum, and OP-mobile, a Finnish mobile banking service. Overall, the participants' favorite digital services highlighted the broad and varied ways in which digital services are now used and valued in everyday life.

3.2 Data analysis

To analyze the gathered data, a thematic analysis method was employed, following the guidelines outlined by [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#). A thematic analysis involves the identification, analysis, and reporting of recurring themes that contain information relevant to the research purpose. To gain a fresh understanding from the customer perspective, we adopted an inductive approach in which the process of identifying themes was not influenced by the existing literature or by the researchers' preconceptions of the subject ([Braun and Clarke, 2006](#)). The aim was to accurately describe the participants' experiences, meanings, and realities.

[Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#) outlined a six-step process for thematic analysis: familiarizing oneself with the material, generating codes, identifying themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming the themes, and writing a research report. Our analysis predominantly adhered to these guidelines. However, it is important to highlight that each step entailed substantial reflection and numerous incremental actions during which the gathered data were reorganized.

To begin the qualitative data analysis, we first read and reviewed the interview transcripts to gain a better understanding of the data. Subsequently, the data were imported into NVivo qualitative analysis software for further processing and analysis. In the second step, initial codes were created. This was achieved by identifying and extracting relevant phrases and sentences in which the participants described the positive and negative contributions of digital services. Tentative names were assigned to these codes. The third step involved organizing the different codes into potential themes and subthemes based on their content and meaning. Later, we concluded that the contributions of digital services were mainly linked to mental well-being, social well-being, and intellectual well-being. Therefore, these three main themes constituted the focal points of the final analysis. Subsequently, codes that described the positive contributions associated with each main theme were gathered and grouped, and descriptive names were assigned to the identified subthemes. In the fourth step, we re-explored the negative codes, with the aim of identifying contrasting aspects – “dualities” – related to each identified positive subtheme. The subthemes that lacked a justifiable negative perspective on the material were eliminated. The fifth step involved defining, naming, and specifying each final subtheme based on its content. In the naming and definition process, previous literature was not utilized; instead, the authors named and defined each theme in a way that best corresponded to the intended meaning based on the

data. As a result, the final analysis included three main well-being dimensions and 18 subthemes that describe the dualities related to those dimensions in the context of digital services. These findings are discussed in detail in the following section.

4. Findings

The findings of this study show that customers' favorite everyday digital services can contribute to their mental well-being, social well-being, and intellectual well-being. In this study, mental well-being refers to having a positive mindset and the ability to manage stress and maintain good mental health. Social well-being is related to positive interactions with others, a supportive network of relationships, a sense of connection to the community, and the ability to express oneself to others. Intellectual well-being involves the development and stimulation of one's intellect and cognitive abilities. Thus, it encompasses activities and aspects related to intellectual growth and curiosity. These well-being dimensions and the identified dualities related to them are discussed next. The findings are summarized in [Table 2](#). Sample quotes (translated from Finnish into English) that describe each identified theme are also included in the table.

4.1 *Mental well-being*

The findings indicate that everyday digital services can contribute positively to customers' mental well-being by offering them opportunities for digital escapism and digital relaxation. Furthermore, digital services facilitate both digital empowerment and digital augmentation. By contrast, digital services can contribute negatively to mental well-being by causing digital distraction, digital stress, digital subjugation, and digital emptiness.

4.1.1 Digital escapism versus digital disruption. The findings show that digital services can have a positive impact on individuals' well-being by providing an avenue for digital escapism. By allowing individuals to engage in digital environments or activities, these services offer them a brief respite from the pressures and demands of the physical world. In particular, digital services provide a means of evading unpleasant or monotonous situations, such as waiting, or other instances when there is "nothing to do." Conversely, digital services also represent a source of digital disruption. They can induce a sense of restlessness, thereby diverting individuals from their tasks, activities, or interactions in the physical world. Moreover, the presence or use of digital services can lead to a loss of focus and engagement in the present moment if individuals become absorbed in their digital experiences. The participants described how it can be difficult to fully immerse themselves in physical reality and to be present in unfolding events. Additionally, there can be pressure to juggle multiple responsibilities and obligations that involve being simultaneously present in both the physical and digital realms.

4.1.2 Digital relaxation versus digital stress. In addition to providing brief moments of escape, digital services can contribute to individuals' well-being by offering a means of relaxation and stress reduction. The participants reported that activities such as watching movies, listening to music, or playing games grant a reprieve from daily problems and responsibilities. Furthermore, digital services can serve as an avenue for shifting one's mood or mindset in daily life. For instance, listening to an audiobook can allow an individual to transition from a work mood to a more relaxed and liberated mental space. Digital services also provide simple solutions for situations in which one is fatigued and lacks the motivation to engage in productive activities. Conversely, digital services can be sources of digital stress. Stress can arise due to encountering issues or challenges while using digital services, for example, when a service does not function as intended. The participants highlighted how digital services can generate a sense of urgency and feelings of pressure to respond promptly

Table 2.
Summary of findings

Example quotes	Dualities	Example quotes
<p><i>Mental well-being</i></p> <p>It involves having a positive mindset and the ability to manage stress and maintain good mental health</p> <p>"[I use digital services] when I don't have anything else to do. Leisure time, but also during those empty moments at work. They are always present, at work, during leisure time, in hobbies, everywhere. They fill those empty gaps." – P6</p> <p>"We assist in transitioning out of work mode. When I go for a walk after work and listen to an audiobook, it has a significant effect on my ability to detach myself from work. As I walk a kilometer, my thoughts gradually shift away from work. I become immersed in the book and in my own time." – P8</p>	<p><i>Digital escapism:</i> using digital services as a means of disconnecting from physical reality and immersing oneself in a digital environment</p> <p><i>Digital disruption:</i> being diverted or interrupted from tasks, activities, or interactions due to the presence or use of digital services. It occurs when individuals become engrossed in digital services, leading to a loss of focus, productivity, or engagement in the present moment</p>	<p>"There should be more moments when you put your phone aside and focus on what's important. I notice that people can't, so to speak, be bored anymore. As soon as you get bored, you dig out the phone and start watching something." – P3</p> <p>"I allow myself to use it for entertainment under the guise of at least trying to do something sensible at the same time. [...] Multitasking, yeah!" – P4</p> <p>"In a negative sense, it has encroached upon the ability to pause and fully immerse myself in the present moment. There is a constant need to seek stimulation." – P8</p>
<p>"As soon as it gets boring or there's nothing to do, that's when I'm likely to browse them. [...] I browse Reddit when sitting on the toilet, and the same goes for work if I have to wait for something or can't do something." – P9</p> <p>"Game Pass and Netflix, they are my means of relaxation. If you want something to do, but you don't really feel like doing anything, they are good." – P2</p> <p>"Streaming services help when you want to reset your brain. [...] Some chance to clear your head." – P4</p> <p>"Netflix... it gives you that "yeah" feeling; now I'm here, and the evening can begin. It really wraps up the day." – P8</p>	<p><i>Digital relaxation:</i> The use of digital services to promote relaxation and stress reduction</p> <p><i>Digital stress:</i> Negative reactions that individuals may experience as a result of their interaction with digital services, particularly when it becomes overwhelming or exceeds their ability to cope</p>	<p>"The need to constantly check and respond to emails is persistent. It remains open throughout the day, and whenever a new email arrives, I strive to reply as promptly as possible." – P12</p> <p>"Email often... The stress level rises when you read a certain message or maybe get frustrated with an email, for example, or what is happening in some service." – P12</p>

(continued)

Example quotes	Dualities	Example quotes
<p>"I primarily utilize Spotify when traveling by car. Upon entering the car, the app automatically activates, enabling me to listen to my preferred music instead of having to endure radio stations with excessive commercials that do not interest me." – P2</p>	<p><i>Digital empowerment:</i> the empowerment of customers due to digital services. Digital services offer greater control, flexibility, and options in various aspects of lives</p>	<p>"There are very few situations where digital services are not involved. You can go to the sauna or to the store, those don't require digital services, but pretty much everywhere else. [...] Spotify is one of those things that you can't really imagine living without anymore. It would be really strange to be without it." – P1</p>
<p>"I feel that streaming-style gaming is much more convenient than paying €60 for a single game and committing to playing only that. I can pay €40 for 3 months and get to play everything they have to offer." – P2</p>	<p><i>Digital subjugation:</i> individuals willingly or unwillingly become submissive to digital services. A state of dependency or reliance on digital services, whereby individuals rely heavily on digital services. It involves a compulsive or excessive use of digital services</p>	<p>"I feel that sometimes I use them way too much. Their use should be stopped and reduced. I've attempted to limit certain elements on Facebook so that I wouldn't hang out there for nothing and instead focus on more important things, like other things in life." – P5</p>
<p>"I feel that it's easy to integrate them into life and remove them when needed. If you get tired of them, you can simply cancel the subscription with a snap of your fingers." – P9</p>		<p>"I see it as a dependency relationship. I wouldn't necessarily label it as problematic, but it holds a significant presence in my life. When I wake up in the morning, I first check the messages, I check Instagram, I check everything." – P6</p>
		<p>"They are so important that you wouldn't really manage without them. Or you would, but your whole life would be turned upside down. [...] I guess I'm probably addicted to some of these services." – P12</p>

(continued)

Dualities of digital services

Table 2.

Table 2.

Example quotes	Dualities	Example quotes
<p>"I utilize digital services for all kinds of purposes, both during work and during leisure time. It is rare for me to encounter situations that do not involve the use of digital services, except for instances such as going to the sauna or grocery shopping, where you don't need digital services." – P1</p> <p>"When cleaning or cooking, whether alone or with others, I typically play music from Spotify on a speaker as background music." – P2</p> <p>"When cooking, there always needs be a video. And when eating, You can't do that without a video." – P7</p>	<p><i>Digital augmentation</i>: digital services complement and improve various activities or processes during everyday life, making them more efficient, convenient, or enjoyable</p>	<p>"I notice at work that if I have to charge my headphones, the charging time is such that I'm really nervous and I'm no longer present in that situation." – P8</p> <p>"[If the services I use ceased to exist] I would feel depressed . . . I don't know. I would probably need to come up with so many other things to do in their place, figure out what to do. It could be quite tough if I wouldn't be able to use them anymore." – P11</p> <p>"[If the preferred service ceased to exist], the initial response would be a sense of emptiness. And what alternative options could be considered as a substitute." – P13</p>
<p><i>Social well-being</i></p> <p>It involves positive interactions with others, a supportive network of relationships, and a sense of connection to community or society</p> <p>"You can meet new people and keep in touch with old acquaintances, that is, that interaction with the world. That's the most important thing about it." – P1</p> <p>"Instagram, Snapchat, Tinder, WhatsApp, I find them really important because they enable communication and interaction. It's not always direct contact [. . .] but that's where you find out what other people are up to, what you could do yourself, you get ideas." – P6</p> <p>"It makes me happy, it makes me grateful. People who would never talk to me on the street, talk to me online." – P6</p>	<p><i>Digital socialization</i>: the practice of using digital platforms, social media, messaging apps, and other online tools to initiate, develop, and nurture social connections with others</p> <p><i>Digital isolation</i>: the negative impact of excessive or unhealthy digital service usage on an individual's social skills, relationships, and ability to engage in face-to-face interactions</p>	<p>"Social media enable me to stay informed about what is happening in other people's lives without needing to engage in one-on-one interactions." – P2</p> <p>"It is easy to be there with others, even though you aren't truly with others." – P10</p> <p>"I spend a good part of the day sitting in front of the computer. [. . .] We've joked with colleagues that you can tell how unsocial your life is when a global pandemic hits, and nothing changes." – P14</p>

(continued)

Example quotes	Dualities	Example quotes
<p>"Discord is like a [physical] plaza where you can find people and different groups with whom you like to hang out." – P1</p> <p>"Game Pass – my husband's brother's kids play Minecraft with my account. Then I guide them, making it a more communal experience." – P2</p> <p>"Facebook has certain groups where you can get peer support. [...] All your friends are there, and there is a sense of community." – P5</p>	<p><i>Digital togetherness</i>: the feeling of unity, connection, and shared experience that individuals can experience through digital services</p>	<p>"I feel like it's a must to be where all the others are." – P1</p> <p>"If you're not on Instagram or Facebook or somewhere else, it's harder to belong to a group or follow people's lives." – P4</p> <p>"When I wasn't on social media, I was completely outside. People had babies, were pregnant, moved, and I didn't know anything. Nowadays, people share a lot about their lives and it is assumed that you can see it on social media. It is assumed that if you tell something to a group, usually everyone will see it, especially friends." – P6</p>
<p>"You can share meaningful aspects of your life. I don't like to call, etc. so it's a way to present myself, showcase my opinions, and take a stance on various matters. Visuality is very important to me, for example, on Instagram. I enjoy thinking about what to post there." – P3</p> <p>"Sometimes I feel like I'm sharing every moment of my life somewhere. Usually, it's Instagram because it's much easier to make content there. But on Facebook I only update things that are a little more important, like bigger life events or deep reflections." – P5</p> <p>"It's nice to produce content and it's nice to take content from there. The content plays the biggest role. [...] Instagram is a nice platform to share my own stuff, and it's nice to get feedback as well." – P13</p>	<p><i>Digital self-expression</i>: utilizing digital services to express one's thoughts, ideas, opinions, emotions, creativity, or identity</p>	<p>"At times, I experience a strong sense of envy toward others, questioning why I'm not like them or in a similar situation." – P5</p> <p>"I've read that many people feel a sense of inferiority, and there's talk about how many people have a facade or a sense of inferiority on social media. Research has shown that young girls suffer from it the most. There's always someone richer, thinner, fancier, or prettier than you. But that's maybe why I've tried to keep it safe for myself, I just follow my friends." – P6</p> <p>"[Spotify] is my own place. I have Ricky Martin and NSYNC on my playlist and it's cool to listen to those songs. But it would be a bit disturbing if someone said "Do you listen to Ricky Martin?" There are things you just want to keep to yourself." – P8</p>

(continued)

Dualities of digital services

Table 2.

Table 2.

Example quotes	Dualities	Example quotes
<p><i>Intellectual well-being</i></p> <p>It involves the development and stimulation of one's intellect and cognitive abilities. It encompasses activities and aspects related to intellectual growth and curiosity</p> <p>"Instagram: I really learn visually, so it's a good channel in that sense." – P4</p> <p>"[Browsing the] comment fields of news services [is] a perfect pastime, but it's also a way to learn about other people's thinking, their reasoning, and what they think about certain things. You can expand your own knowledge." – P5</p> <p>"When I play CS: GO, there can be situations, where you have to think, think more, and concentrate on what you're doing." – P11</p>	<p><i>Digital learning</i>: Acquiring knowledge, skills, or information through digital platforms</p> <p><i>Digital stagnation</i>: Inability to generate new ideas, find motivation, or experience creativity because of digital services</p>	<p>"I have to be informed all the time about what is happening in the world. I wouldn't have believed it five years ago if someone had told me that I would be addicted to the <i>Helsingin Sanomat</i> newspaper, but it just happened. It has good and bad meanings for me." – P8</p> <p>"Online banking: All day long you can look at stock prices and wonder why you invested wrong once again." – P14</p>
<p>"Some of those channels raise questions related to self-improvement." – P4</p> <p>"You get ideas and inspiration, especially from Facebook groups. That's probably the reason why I use them: I can see what others are doing and what I could do myself." – P5</p> <p>"I get inspiration from others and what I see on Instagram or Snapchat." – P11</p>	<p><i>Digital inspiration</i>: Stimulation or motivation that individuals derive from digital platforms, content, or experiences. It involves finding ideas, creativity, or a sense of motivation through digital mediums</p>	<p>"It has happened with Facebook. I'm not there. I don't feel a sense of missing out because many people have said that our mothers and fathers are the only ones left there. [...] That app [Tinder] has lost interest. Interest has dropped compared to when I joined. Today, those same faces are there. It's very easy to get tired of meeting new people." – P6</p> <p>"At one point, Spotify had such a function that when you were listening to your own music, it would throw in random songs and you could give them a thumbs up. It was a terrible experiment. I didn't like it at all because it interrupted me, that I was waiting for a certain song and that I knew what was coming." – P8</p>

Source(s): Table created by author

to the messages and information provided. Additionally, the need to constantly monitor multiple digital services, such as email or social media platforms, was mentioned as a factor contributing to the experience of stress.

4.1.3 Digital empowerment versus digital subjugation. The findings demonstrate that digital services empower individuals by giving them greater control, flexibility, and options in their lives. Here, empowerment is associated with the selection of available services, and it also extends to the content that individuals desire to incorporate into their daily lives. For instance, music and streaming services provide the ability to concentrate on content that aligns with one's interests at a convenient time and pace. This eliminates the need to conform to preset schedules and predetermined programming, as encountered in relation to traditional television and radio formats. In terms of social media, individuals wield power through their ability to choose whom to follow or unfollow. Yet, while digital services offer individuals a feeling of empowerment, they can also establish control and foster digital subjugation. The participants acknowledged that they occasionally rely heavily on digital services to meet different aspects of their everyday needs, which causes them to form strong attachments to digital devices, applications, and online platforms. Digital services now play a crucial role in daily routines and consume a significant amount of time and effort. For example, using social media services can be an essential part of daily routine, and users may not notice spending long periods on social media channels. This reliance on digital services can create the perception that one is unable to function efficiently without them.

4.1.4 Digital augmentation versus digital emptiness. The findings further show the importance of digital augmentation in individuals' everyday lives and daily tasks. Digital services positively contribute to customer well-being by complementing and improving various activities or processes, rendering them more convenient and enjoyable. Digital services can enhance an individual's mood and are often used to uplift an individual's spirit during daily tasks. The role of music streaming services was highlighted in this regard. Listening to music can promote positive emotions during less desirable tasks, such as cleaning, and it can enhance the enjoyment of physical exercise. On formal occasions, such as parties, the addition of music can enhance the atmosphere and add an extra element of excitement to the physical space. Moreover, the participants perceived videos and audiobooks as valuable additions to everyday life due to such services adding flavor and enrichment to their experiences. However, while digital services were recognized by the participants as valuable enhancers of everyday life, their absence was noted to potentially create a sense of digital emptiness – that is, an individual experiences a void or lack of fulfillment when unable to access or utilize digital services during daily activities. According to the participants, digital services have become an integral part of everyday tasks to such an extent that they feel disoriented without them. Thus, the potential discontinuation of beloved services was perceived as a distressing prospect, although the participants reported a sense of assurance that alternative services would eventually be found.

4.2 Social well-being

The findings of this study also suggest that the use of everyday digital services can positively influence customers' social well-being by enabling them to engage in digital socialization, fostering digital togetherness, and allowing them to express themselves digitally. However, there is again a negative aspect to consider, as digital services can lead to digital isolation, digital exclusion, and digital pressure.

4.2.1 Digital socialization versus digital isolation. The importance of digital socialization – that is, the role of digital services in facilitating social interaction and communication – was highlighted by the participants. They perceived digital services to be vital for well-being because they help bridge the gap between individuals and enable connections and

relationships to be established and maintained via various applications, such as WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, and Tinder. Nevertheless, the findings also shed light on the flip side of digital socialization: digital isolation. As a substantial number of interactions now occur through digital services, they can have adverse effects on face-to-face interactions, interpersonal skills, and individuals' willingness to engage in offline interactions. Social media platforms, for example, can foster a sense of complacency, leading to reluctance to pursue physical or personal contact with acquaintances. Due to the convenience of monitoring acquaintances' lives through social media updates, there may be a diminished desire to pursue in-person catch-ups.

4.2.2 Digital togetherness versus digital exclusion. Digital services can also promote well-being by creating a sense of digital togetherness. This entails a sense of connection, community, and shared experiences that individuals can experience through digital services. The participants felt that digital services foster a sense of community because many like-minded people and acquaintances use the same platforms. For instance, Discord was perceived as an important enabler of community bonds because it allowed individuals to gather and socialize. Just as individuals come together in physical marketplaces and plazas to socialize, Discord provides a digital counterpart in which users can hang out and become part of a community. Yet, while digital services have the potential to foster a sense of community, they can also inadvertently contribute to feelings of exclusion. For example, not engaging with digital platforms may result in a lack of information, leaving individuals unaware of important events or updates in acquaintances' lives. Hence, there may be a fear of missing out. In certain circumstances, online communities can become so ingrained in one's daily life that the ability to be comfortable in solitude is diminished, as the constant presence of these online communities blurs the boundaries of personal space and privacy within one's own home.

4.2.3 Digital self-expression versus digital pressure. Digital services can foster well-being by creating opportunities for individuals' self-expression. Indeed, digital services provide a platform for individuals to share significant aspects of their lives that they deem important. They also allow individuals to express their opinions and take a stance on various matters. The positive aspects of digital services stem from their inherent convenience and versatility: one's views and opinions can be easily shared with a wide audience. Furthermore, a wide array of services are available that facilitate both verbal and visual forms of self-expression. For instance, Instagram serves as an ideal platform for visually inclined individuals to narrate their personal stories through visual content. However, while digital services offer various avenues for self-expression, they can also impose digital pressure. Constant exposure to curated content and the achievements of others can create a sense of comparison and a desire to conform to certain standards or expectations. The participants noted that their use of digital services sometimes triggered emotions such as envy and a sense of inferiority. Thus, individuals may feel compelled to present an idealized version of themselves or to engage in activities that garner social validation. The participants also expressed a desire to maintain privacy regarding certain services; for example, they did not share their Spotify playlists with others due to the fear of potential criticism of personal music taste.

4.3 Intellectual well-being

The findings also indicate that everyday digital services can enhance customers' intellectual well-being by offering them avenues for digital learning and digital inspiration. Yet, the potential downsides include digital dependence and digital stagnation.

4.3.1 Digital learning versus digital dependence. Digital services promote well-being by enabling digital learning. In fact, digital services provide easy access to information regarding current events and allow individuals to stay informed about global events and

current phenomena. The participants particularly highlighted the importance of news services and magazine websites in this regard because they consistently produce information about important world events. In addition, access to information via digital services simplifies the completion of everyday tasks and tasks related to work or education. Digital resources help in reaching well-informed and well-reasoned decisions, as well as in performing tasks more efficiently and effectively. The participants concluded that digital services such as Google are the perfect problem-solving partners on any occasion. However, the continuous use of digital services can lead to digital dependence due to the benefits they provide. Digital dependence is characterized by compulsive behavior whereby individuals excessively seek, consume, and rely on digital information from various sources. In such situations, individuals constantly feel the need to be connected and stay updated on the latest information, even at the expense of other aspects of life. Moreover, individuals may find it challenging to solve certain puzzles or problems without relying on digital services for assistance.

4.3.2 Digital inspiration versus digital stagnation. In addition to facilitating learning, digital services provide digital inspiration. Here, digital inspiration refers to the stimulation or motivation that individuals derive from digital platforms, content, or experiences. This involves finding ideas, creativity, or a sense of motivation through digital mediums. Due to exposing users to different kinds of content, digital services represent a rich source of material for inspiration. For instance, observing the behaviors and posts of others, such as dance videos, was perceived by the participants as a source of inspiration. They also identified new perspectives and modes of thinking as manifestations of inspiration. However, the findings also revealed indications that digital services can decrease enthusiasm and inspiration. In this regard, digital stagnation refers to the inability to generate new ideas, find motivation, or experience a flow of creativity due to the use of digital services. In the participants' discussions, the notion of digital services discouraging enthusiasm and inspiration was primarily associated with feelings of boredom. They reported that digital services no longer held the same level of interest as before, offering examples such as Facebook becoming uninteresting due to its user base being uninspiring, particularly given the increased presence of parents and older people. The frequency of service usage was also considered important in terms of inspiration, with Tinder indicated as potentially losing its appeal when used excessively in the beginning. Overuse can lead to a sense of fatigue, with services no longer providing the same sense of novelty. Digital services can weaken users' inspiration by trying to be inspiring, for example, by introducing surprising new features. For instance, listeners considered Spotify to be disturbing when it added new songs to their playlist on its own accord. Additionally, the participants observed that the use of digital services hindered the chance of being inspired in the physical world due to consuming time that could otherwise be spent on other activities.

5. Discussion

This study has discussed the dualities of digital services – how everyday digital services can positively or negatively contribute to customers' well-being – making three main contributions to service research, particularly TSR.

First, this study elucidates how everyday services can contribute to customer well-being, an area that has been largely overlooked in previous studies. While TSR studies have traditionally focused on the healthcare, non-profit, and social services contexts (Parkinson *et al.*, 2019), it is essential to understand the contribution of other types of services – that is, those that are not inherently transformative in nature (Rahman, 2020) – to customer well-being. This study broadens the scope of TSR and provides valuable insights into the ways in which services can promote well-being across different domains.

Second, this study enhances our understanding of the role digital services can play in customers' well-being. Traditional service encounters in physical spaces have received significant research attention (Parkinson *et al.*, 2019; Rosenbaum and Russell-Bennett, 2021; Ungaro *et al.*, 2022; Dodds *et al.*, 2023); however, there has been a lack of research on digital services, even though consumers are increasingly shifting toward virtual domains. Rosenbaum and Russell-Bennett (2021) emphasized that service researchers currently have a restricted comprehension of the outcomes linked to digital service technologies. The authors called for further research exploring the intersection of technology and humanity within the domain of service research, highlighting the pivotal role of the connection between service technologies and human well-being in modern service research. This study answers this call by examining everyday digital services and their complexities concerning customer well-being.

Finally, this study describes the meanings and roles of customers' favorite digital services as part of their everyday lives and thus helps in understanding customers and their perspectives as users of digital services. Such insights are important because, according to Alkire *et al.* (2020), existing TSR research is often conceptual and lacks empirical validation, and there is a scarcity of knowledge regarding the ways in which customers enhance their well-being during interactions with service providers (Abboud *et al.*, 2023). The findings broaden the understanding of well-being within the context of TSR and aid in refining a more precise conceptualization, aligning with the suggestion put forth by Alkire *et al.* (2020). Furthermore, this research aligns with and advances the customer-dominant logic approach (Heinonen *et al.*, 2010; Heinonen and Strandvik, 2015, 2018) by accentuating the importance of customer perspectives. This study identifies the facets of customer well-being that digital services can influence, encompassing mental, social, and intellectual well-being. Within these overarching themes, this study extends the prior literature by delineating nine dualities that illustrate how everyday digital services can contribute to customer well-being. Figure 1 illustrates the framework of the digital service dualities developed in this study.

5.1 Dualities of everyday digital services: mental well-being

The findings of this study indicate that everyday digital services can have both positive and negative impacts on customers' mental well-being. On the positive side, such services provide

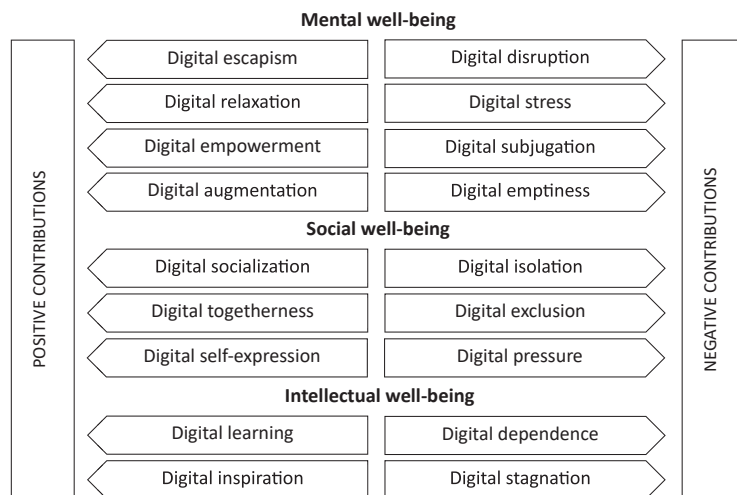


Figure 1. Dualities of digital services – Everyday digital services as positive and negative contributors to customer well-being

Source(s): Figure created by author

opportunities for digital escapism, relaxation, empowerment, and augmentation. Digital escapism allows individuals to briefly escape from the pressures of the physical world and to engage in digital environments or activities. However, digital services can also be a source of distraction, diverting individuals from their tasks and causing a loss of focus. Digital relaxation provides a means by which individuals can relax, reduce stress, and shift their moods or mindsets. However, digital services can also contribute to stress, especially when issues or challenges arise while using them. Digital empowerment offers individuals greater control and flexibility in their lives by allowing them to choose services and content that align with their interests. However, this reliance on digital services can lead to a sense of subjugation, with individuals potentially feeling that they are unable to function efficiently without such services. Digital augmentation enhances various activities and processes, rendering them more convenient and enjoyable, although the absence of digital services can create feelings of emptiness and a lack of fulfillment.

While these dualities have received only limited attention in service research, comparable findings can be observed in other fields of study, such as psychology and communication research. Mood management theory, for instance, suggests that individuals use media (such as movies, music, or books) to manage and regulate their emotions and moods, and seek out media content that aligns with their current emotional state or desired mood (Zillmann, 1988). The findings of this study suggest that digital services and devices provide new opportunities for such activities. Further, as similarly found in this study, individuals have been shown to employ their phones as a “micro-escape” from unfavorable circumstances (Lukoff *et al.*, 2018). Previous research has acknowledged certain dualities similar to those identified in this study. For example, media content can serve as a valuable tool for recovery, although it also has the potential to challenge self-control and hinder everyday life goal achievement (Reinecke and Hofmann, 2016). Brooks (2015) observed that the increased use of social media has a detrimental effect on well-being and can result in both reduced task performance and heightened technostress.

5.2 Dualities of everyday digital services: social well-being

The findings of this study also indicate that the use of everyday digital services can have both positive and negative effects on customers’ social well-being. On the positive side, such services enable digital socialization, digital togetherness, and digital self-expression. More specifically, digital socialization helps bridge the gap between individuals and facilitates connections and relationships, while digital togetherness creates a sense of community and shared experiences among like-minded individuals. Moreover, digital self-expression provides platforms for individuals to share important aspects of their lives and express their opinions. These findings indicate that everyday digital services can serve as third places (Oldenburg, 1999) where people gather, socialize, and build a sense of community. Traditionally, third places are considered physical locations such as coffee shops (Parkinson *et al.*, 2017). However, the findings of this study indicate that digital services can also play a similar role.

Prior research has yielded comparable results. Studies have demonstrated that consumers frequently seek social support from service providers and fellow customers in service establishments (Rosenbaum and Wong, 2012). For example, video games and instant messaging services can contribute positively to customers’ well-being, particularly by fostering social interaction and support (Rosenbaum and Wong, 2012; Halbrook *et al.*, 2019). Indeed, digital services are often used as sources of social support across different domains (Pan *et al.*, 2018).

On the flip side, the findings indicate that there are negative aspects. For example, digital services can lead to digital isolation, as individuals may rely heavily on digital interactions and become less engaged in face-to-face interactions. Such services can also contribute to

digital exclusion, as not engaging with digital platforms may result in a fear of missing out and a lack of information. Additionally, digital services can impose digital pressure, thereby fostering a sense of comparison with others, a feeling of envy, and a desire to conform to certain social standards.

Similar negative aspects have also been reported in previous studies in health and psychology. According to [Primack et al. \(2017\)](#), increased use of social media is associated with a heightened sense of social isolation compared to using social media less frequently. Similarly, [Sublette and Mullan \(2012\)](#) observed that online role-playing games can lead to social isolation and a decline in real-world friendships due to related social interactions in virtual environments. [Vaterlaus et al. \(2015\)](#) found that social media exert pressure on young adults to conform to specific diets and exercise programs. Similarly, the findings of the present study reveal the presence of envy toward others and the pressure to conform to and fit in with others. Other studies have also examined and discussed the problematic and addictive usage patterns associated with particular social networking platforms, such as YouTube ([Balakrishnan and Griffiths, 2017](#)), Facebook ([Young et al., 2017](#)), and Instagram ([Kircaburun and Griffiths, 2018](#)).

5.3 Dualities of everyday digital services: intellectual well-being

The findings of this study further suggest that everyday digital services have a positive impact on customers' intellectual well-being by providing opportunities for both digital learning and digital inspiration. Digital services enable access to information, facilitate problem solving, and offer a source of motivation and creativity. However, there are also potential negative consequences, such as digital dependence and digital stagnation. Continuous use of digital services can result in digital dependence, whereby individuals excessively seek and rely on digital information, which can potentially hinder their ability to solve problems without digital assistance. Moreover, our data suggest that excessive use of digital services can lead to digital stagnation, which reduces enthusiasm and possibly hinders creativity. Boredom, uninspiring user bases, and overuse are all factors associated with digital stagnation. Furthermore, the use of digital services may limit opportunities for inspiration in the physical world due to consuming an excessive amount of time.

Regarding intellectual well-being, previous research has primarily focused on the utilization of digital learning tools within educational contexts, particularly in the domain of educational studies. These investigations have shown that digital services can create stimulating learning environments for students. For example, [Evans \(2014\)](#) identified positive associations between university students' course-related activities and their use of Twitter. Similarly, [Escamilla-Fajardo et al. \(2021\)](#) discovered that incorporating TikTok into school activities positively influenced students' motivation and skill development. In line with these findings, this study found that digital services can serve as a source of both motivation and inspiration, even within leisure contexts.

5.4 Future research ideas

The present study provides a framework for understanding the dualities of digital services in the context of well-being and highlights how digital services can make both positive and negative contributions to customer well-being. Future studies can further explicate the ideas presented in this paper. Each of the identified dualities and dimensions of well-being require more in-depth research due to the limited exploration of various facets of well-being in prior service research. Since this study is based on interviews with 14 young adults, there is a need for additional research on this topic with larger sample sizes, diverse user groups, and various research methodologies. In addition, this study focused on customers' self-identified favorite services. In the future, more context-specific examinations of digital services and

well-being should be conducted, concentrating on specific types of digital services, such as gaming or streaming services.

Overall, the study raises some interesting questions and topics for future research and digital service design practice. It is important to better understand how digital services currently contribute to the different dimensions of well-being, and consider how digital services could enhance well-being in the future by leveraging advancements in technology and devices that are used to access these services.

First, it is crucial to consider how digital services can promote customers' and other stakeholders' mental well-being – escapism, relaxation, empowerment, and augmentation. Possible research areas include exploring how individuals employ digital services for digital escapism and relaxation, and examining the roles various types of digital services play in promoting relaxation and stress reduction among users. Furthermore, we should investigate how digital services empower customers and enhance their daily activities.

Similarly, the negative aspects of digital services in relation to mental well-being – disruption, stress, subjugation, and emptiness – also require further research. Possible areas for exploration are themes such as digital services' impact on an individual's ability to stay focused or engage fully in the present moment. Further research is needed to explore digital stress and ways of reducing the stress induced by digital services. In addition, questions such as “What are the repercussions of excessive reliance and compulsive usage of digital services?” and “How does the absence or inability to access and utilize digital services influence an individual's sense of fulfillment and lead to feelings of emptiness?” could provide interesting insights.

Second, it is crucial to explore how digital services can contribute to social well-being, fostering socialization, a sense of togetherness, and opportunities for self-expression. Possible areas for exploration comprise explorations of how people make use of various digital platforms and tools, such as social media and messaging apps, to start, cultivate, and sustain social relationships with others, and how these digital interactions influence their overall well-being. It is also important to better understand what contributes to the feeling of unity, connection, and shared experiences that individuals can derive from digital services, and how this sense of togetherness affects their well-being. In addition, we need more studies about how individuals use digital services to express their thoughts, ideas, opinions, emotions, creativity, or identity, and how this digital self-expression influences their overall well-being.

Conversely, there is also a need for additional research concerning the adverse facets of social well-being, which encompass isolation, exclusion, and pressure. Here, several themes can be further investigated – how excessive or unhealthy digital service usage affects an individual's social skills, relationships, and ability to engage in face-to-face interactions; the social and practical disadvantages individuals may encounter when they are not part of the digital world or do not engage with digital services; and ways by which digital services, particularly social media platforms, contribute to the feeling of being influenced, judged, or pressured to conform to certain standards or expectations and how this impact individuals' well-being.

Finally, researchers and practitioners in the service industry should explore the ways in which digital services can positively impact intellectual well-being by promoting learning and fostering inspiration – how digital platforms enhance individuals' acquisition of knowledge, skills, or information and ways by which individuals find inspiration and motivation from digital platforms, content, or experiences, leading to creativity and a sense of motivation. Conversely, there is a need for additional research into the negative aspects associated with intellectual well-being, including dependence and stagnation: how does digital dependence and relying on digital information impact well-being, and how does digital stagnation affect individuals' ability to generate new ideas, find motivation, or experience creativity.

5.5 Managerial implications

From a practical perspective, the insights derived from this study call upon digital service providers to consider the diverse well-being aspects of their services. Recognizing that digital services can positively or negatively affect customers' well-being underscores the importance of assessing the effects of a firm's service. It is important to reflect on the significance and role of the service in the user's life and the potential positive or negative impacts it may have from the perspective of the user's well-being, and to tailor firms' services accordingly. From an ethical and sustainable business standpoint, it is advisable to emphasize the positive well-being aspects and mitigate the negative ones. Achieving this requires a comprehensive evaluation of both the intended and unintended consequences stemming from a firm's digital service design choices.

Key areas of focus revolve around issues such as digital addiction, stress, and overload, underscoring the significance for service providers to address these potential negative consequences. Pertinent considerations include strategies to facilitate effective screen time management for users, the implementation of measures to mitigate the presence of harmful or addictive content on digital service platforms, and the provision of customization features that enable users to tailor and exert control over their digital experiences in alignment with their preferences and requirements.

Furthermore, it is of utmost importance to explore the significance and consequences of digital services on well-being on a broader scale through collaborative efforts involving a variety of stakeholders. While this study primarily examined the "perceived internal influence" of digital services on customers' well-being, it is essential to recognize that these services also have implications for physical well-being and health. For instance, prolonged periods of sitting at computers and using smartphones can increase the risk of neck issues, commonly known as "tech neck." Such health problems related to the use of digital services are likely to increase in the future. Hence, subsequent studies should explore the diverse facets of well-being, while also examining various stakeholders, including individuals, groups, and communities.

Finally, it is imperative for businesses and policymakers to collectively address guidelines, rules, and regulations related to various types of digital services. This could involve strategies to educate and raise awareness among users about responsible and mindful digital service usage, the adoption of ethical design principles by digital service providers to prioritize user well-being, and collaboration with regulators, experts, and other stakeholders to establish industry-wide standards and guidelines for responsible digital service design and usage. In summary, it is essential to undertake initiatives aimed at deepening our understanding of how digital services affect users' well-being and creating innovative solutions to alleviate potential negative impacts.

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Appendix Interview guide

Background information

Gender:

Age:

Education and/or work:

Warm-up

1. How would you describe yourself as a user of digital services?
 - o What needs do the utilized digital services meet for you?
2. What digital services do you use?
3. What are the most important digital services (or those you use the most)?
4. Why do you use these digital services?

Theme 1: utilization of digital services (behavior)

1. When was the last time you used digital services?
 - o Has the COVID-19 pandemic changed your usage of digital services?
2. In what kinds of situations do you use digital services?
3. What kind of role do digital services have in your everyday life?

4. What characteristics of digital services are important to you?
5. Do you use digital services alone or are other people involved?
 - o What kind of role do other people have in your digital service use?

Theme 2: perspectives on digital services (cognitive aspects)

1. Why do you use digital services?
2. What kind of value do you derive from your digital service usage?
3. How do you perceive the prices of digital services?
 - o If the service costs money, how do you view the price compared to the value?
 - o If the service is free of charge, what would you be prepared to pay?
4. Has any digital service provider involved you in their service development?
 - o Have digital services been discussed with you by the provider?
 - o What kind of “discussion” or “conversation” would you like from digital service providers?

Theme 3: emotional responses triggered by digital services (emotions)

1. Describe your favorite digital service.
2. How would you describe the importance of digital services in your everyday life?
 - o If digital services are important to you, why?
3. How would you describe your relationship with these digital services?
 - o What kinds of adjectives would you use?
4. What do you feel when you use digital services?
5. Do you feel attached to these digital services?
 - o If yes, how?
 - o If not, why not?
6. How would you feel if the digital service no longer existed?
 - o Could other digital services replace the digital service you use?
7. Have some of your important digital services gone out of market or have you stopped using them? Why?

To end the interview, do any thoughts, stories, or observations come to your mind? Do you feel that any aspect remains undiscussed?

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