DIGITAL WELL-BEING BETWEEN LIFESTYLES IN LIMITED PANDEMIC CONDITIONS AND THE VARIED OFFER OF SOCIAL PLATFORMS

Lorena ȚĂRUȘ

Ph.D. Student, „Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University from Iasi (Romania)
Email: lorena.tarus@gmail.com

Abstract : *The context of the new pandemic of 2020 came with new challenges that no one had faced before. The social interaction once generating pleasant experiences, beneficial to the individual, but also conflicts and pressures that moved almost completely to the virtual space where everyone was forced to create their own space for expression. This article highlights the challenge of online which offers on the one hand a multitude of tools, applications, platforms that invite the user to spend as much time there as possible, and on the other hand draws attention to digital well-being - a concept that focuses on the use of the virtual environment in a way that is as useful as possible and for the time being that does not affect the normal activity of an individual. Digital well-being is a wake-up call and a growing trend in social media that is improving the user's experience and time-consuming application interfaces.*

Keywords: social media; limited pandemic conditions; digital well-being.

1. Pandemic lifestyle

Any topic of discussion with any kind of approach to it today revolves around the only topic that has captured the whole of humanity - the pandemic generated by Coronavirus. The coordinate that divides any subject today is "before the pandemic" and after it. People had not yet woken up since the winter and the pandemic and the measures taken sent them back home.

Avoiding potentially dangerous physical contact comes as a shock to every individual, whether he is extroverted and accustomed to an active lifestyle, surrounded by people, or something more secluded for which interaction with others is limited. Most companies have moved offices from large and tall buildings to employees' homes, institutions have digitized as much as possible the activities previously carried out face to face, and in periods with increasing numbers of infections, age groups exposed to a higher probability of infection had the recommendation to go out at the indicated time intervals for activities of strict necessity.

Limiting the exits according to everyone's preference caused waves, and the reactions were among the most controversial. The security of these meetings in front of the laptop, desktop, tablet or, the phone was a challenge, and if within the corporations the IT departments were vigilant in stopping any possibility of leaking data from the company, the Romanian school had at least in the first months of online some external presences that disrupt the activity and distort the purpose of meetings with teachers, educators or instructors. The problems were remedied in a relatively short time, which is not a guarantee that things cannot have a negative turn in the virtual educational environment in the future.

However, the measures taken seemed to have the necessary and sufficient arguments to limit the spread of the pandemic and its effects, so that a majority of

individuals complied with them. Each rethought its activities according to the factors of its life dynamics and looked for ways to adapt to the new reality that would not cease its effects too soon, after a few weeks as most of us hoped, but a few months later. Some of these measures even tend to be permanent.

The new lifestyle has familiarized many individuals with virtual social behaviors and has made those who were already accustomed to the ways of online communication and expression migrate to other channels or develop some skills on the Internet. If in the case of those with children of any age the activities of the house require a little more time, and social media platforms are perceived as an escape, entertainment, disconnection from that environment, single people felt the free time they otherwise spent in the city at various events, as an opportunity or a good opportunity to test new skills.

Figure 1: Social Media Behaviours. Perspectives on how internet users aged 16 to 64 engage with Social Media
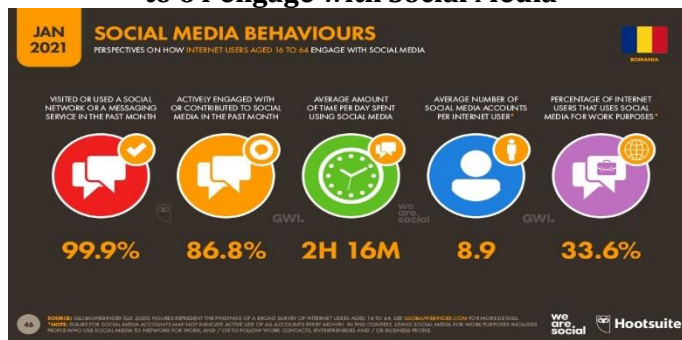
Although specialists have warned about the excess time spent in front of the screens and its effects, the average number of applications per user in Romania is 9 (https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-romania - accessed on 19.02.2021), which, transposed in a relatively short browsing time on each platform, leads to a number of a few hours spent daily online. At the same time, Eurostat publishes an infographic with the degree of use of social platforms, and Romania with a percentage of 65% exceeds that of the European Union located somewhere at 59% (https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?query=BOOKMARK_DS-053730_QID_-758A9195_UID_-3F171EB0&layout=IND_TYPE,L,X,0;GEO,L,Y,0;TIME,C,Z,0;UNIT,L,Z,1;INDIC_IS,L,Z,2;INDICATORS,C,Z,3;&zSelection=DS-053730INDICATORS,OBS_FLAG;DS-053730UNIT,PC_IND;DS-053730INDIC_IS,I_IUSNET;DS-053730TIME,2019;&rankName1=UNIT_1_2_-1_2&rankName2=INDICATORS_1_2_-1_2&rankName3=TIME_1_0_0_0&rankName4=INDIC-IS_1_2_0_0&rankName5=IND-TYPE_1_2_0_0&rankName6=GEO_1_2_0_1&rStp=&cStp=&rDCh=&cDCh=&rDM=true&cDM=true&footnes=false&empty=false&wai=false&time_mode=ROLLING&time_most_recent=true&lang=EN&cfo=%23%23%23%2C%23%23%23.%23%23%23 – accessed on 12.02.2021).

By age segments, 86% of users aged between 16 and 24 use social platforms, and a not negligible percentage is 23% of people aged between 64 and 75 years. By the degree of use of social platforms, we mean "the percentage of the population that has made user profiles or posted messages or other contributions on social media in the last   3   months   until   the   time   of   data   collection.

(https://www.startupcafe.ro/marketing/romani-retele-sociale.htm - accessed on 12.02.2021)."

The figures indicate that Romania's online transition did not happen with great difficulty, the physical distance recommended and imposed by the authorities leading rather to a virtual approach or a desire for greater exposure in the online environment, in the absence of the possibility of offline exposure.

2. Time spent online seen as a lockdown strategy

As time spent offline has dropped considerably due to measures to stop the virus, the world has moved online. Any activity that could be carried out remotely became virtual. School, work, leisure - everything has taken on a new form since March 2020. The trend towards increasing the online area has been predictable, and creators in the digital area have taken advantage of this opportunity to crowd the users. Each platform offered new functionalities, intuitiveness and access to as many categories of public as possible were the watchwords faced by technology specialists. The increase in the percentages of social media users, especially in the age segments between 35 and 64 years old, is proof of this and has determined IT industry specialists to adapt the interfaces of platforms, websites, blogs, applications for any type of screen so that it is easy for any user, more or less experienced.

Figure 2: Percentage of internet users who use online social platforms

Social Media Users in Romania, H1 2019 & H1 2020
% of internet users, by demographic

	H1 2019	H1 2020
Gender		
Female	89.2%	88.7%
Male	88.2%	89.4%
Age		
16-24	89.8%	88.9%
25-34	89.8%	86.4%
35-44	87.6%	89.6%
45-54	89.2%	89.7%
55-64	86.7%	91.6%
Annual household income group		
High	91.1%	90.3%
Medium	88.4%	90.8%
Low	88.7%	87.0%
N/A*	83.7%	85.8%
Household location		
Urban	88.7%	88.7%
Suburban**	-	-
Rural	88.8%	89.7%
Total	**88.7%**	**89.1%**

*Note: actively engaged with or contributed to at least one service in the past month via any device; services include Facebook, Facebook Messenger, Instagram, Line, LinkedIn, Pinterest, reddit, Sina Weibo, Skype, Slack, Snapchat, Tencent Weibo, Twitch, Twitter, WeChat, WhatsApp, YouTube and/or other; respondents were asked, "Which (of the following services) have you actively engaged with or contributed to in the past month via any device?"; *don't know/prefer not to say; **omitted due to small sample size*
Source: GlobalWebIndex, Q1-Q2 2019 & Q1-Q2 2020, August 2020

T20875   www.**eMarketer**.com

(https://www.globalwebindex.com/hubfs/Downloads/global-media-intelligence-report-2020.pdf?utm_campaign=Generic%20nurture%202019&utm_medium=email&_hsmi=97800303&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-96bz1_kggFkOQ7vV-FxIMfafbf3CvPERfonqd5NzlyoK0V8UtXqTkbKD9yb4kR7hULgmlxlsU8KoD0BtLUtcm_w_ks-A&utm_content=97800303&utm_source=hs_automation – accessed on 17.02.2021)

The above figures indicate an increase of about 5% for the age group over 55, which should come as no surprise given that we are talking about the most vulnerable

age group in a pandemic and with a way of predominantly offline socialization, through direct face-to-face interaction with others. The aspect of increasing the percentage of users among the rural population is an equally direct consequence of isolation and physical distancing, the increase of the percentage suggesting rather the adaptability of those in rural areas with online interaction, given that activities in rural Romania are time-consuming and leave more little room to stay online.

On the other hand, although the number of users of social platforms has increased, their tastes and interests have been refined and acquired some characteristics and directions. Although the pandemic has somehow forced an increase in the percentage of people who choose social platforms for information, entertainment, leisure, education, etc., users have become much more sensitive to the posts and content they find on their accounts. I'm watching them. They are much more attentive to what they are looking for and to whom they give their time.

Figure 3: Reasons why users refuse to follow brands
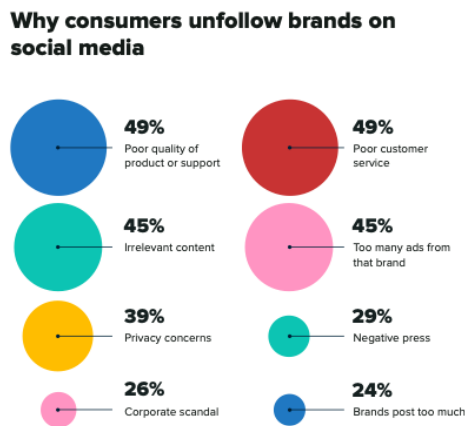
Source: https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-statistics/ - accessed on 19.02.2021

Content consumers, also called followers, are moving more towards quality posts from which they can extract something useful. 49% of users would unsubscribe from following a brand if it did not have relevant and quality content. At the same time, followers are very sensitive to the concern for them perceived as consumers of brands, the mere perception that brands do not care about customers or well-known customer service in a broadly perceptible sense user will leave that brand. Users also have a high sensitivity for irrelevant content or too many advertisements from brands, strong enough reasons for users to leave brands.

Thus we notice that on the one hand the creators of IT have implemented their knowledge according to the data collected from the market and the need of the public, and on the other hand, the simple aspects related to the use of an application and user experiences are not enough. The need for individuals to find something that resonates with is as important as the technical aspects through which they end up using applications and platforms.

3. New applications and folding on the needs of the consumer in the isolated house

Predictably, traditional social platforms have had increases in terms of the number of users, time dedicated to each application, the volume of content created and uploaded by people. Facebook had the same growth rate as before the pandemic, and other networks with a certain history remained on an upward trend.

Figure 4: The trend of the social platform Facebook in the last months of 2020
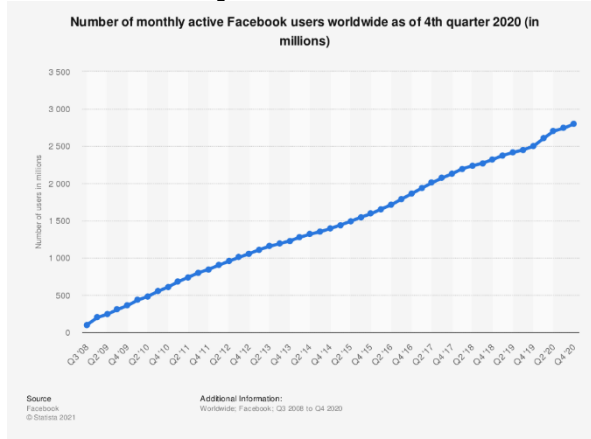
Source: https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-statistics/ - accessed on 19.02.2021

After Facebook, which stands out at the top of traditional networks, the YouTube platform that provides video content and applications for written, audio or, video communication such as WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger occupies the first positions by the number of users worldwide, and immediately after Instagram appears. promoted for years in a row mainly the image and the photo followed at a very close score by another chat application. The percentages only show that the interaction in any form was and is a much healthier and more desirable choice than its lack.

Figure 5: The most popular social platforms by number of active users in January 2021
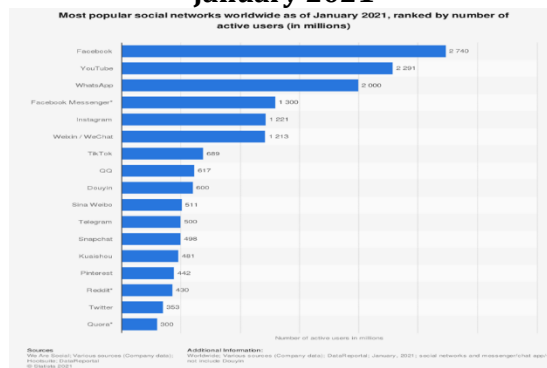
Source: https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-statistics/ - accessed on 19.02.2021

The network with the most spectacular growth during the pandemic was TikTok, an application that suggests from the description that any type of content is accepted there and that regardless of preferences, it is for everyone. A marketer says of this new social network that "at the moment, TikTok is one of the few mainstream places on the internet where you are not driven by any idealistic conception of what the application could be. Or, even more current, about who you could become. Nobody guesses why you're on the internet, at least in the beginning - until the algorithm knows exactly what kind of content to deliver to you. It's a feeling of security, even liberating, but also annoying at the same time. The Internet is no longer about the mystery of a parallel life or maybe it never was; nor about the actual connections as I thought when Facebook appeared. We have reached the point where the internet needs to be relatable, and TikTok is now what the internet can be in the next few years, the next decade, or why not, forever." (https://www.forbes.ro/tiktok-now-tiktok-forever-155038)

On a trend of virtual social platforms already on the rise, is developing this young platform that allows any type of content, does not focus on finding friends around the world and connecting with them such as Facebook, or on the photographic skills of users such as it was Instagram in the beginning, it didn't want any elitist platform with specialists from various fields such as LinkedIn. The aspects that define TikTok are the short videos of a few seconds left to the user without imposing a certain direction in terms of its content. In the first year after launch, the platform had relatively slow growth, given the reluctance of new users, given the lack of a set of rules for the platform. However, since March 2020, the network has exploded precisely due to this aspect, the lack of a regulation or content directions.

If before the pandemic the world had its proper organizational strategy, and the desire to comply with various regulations was the watchword, after the moments of imposing restrictions, the platform, which at first seemed used by unemployed teenagers, captured interest by the possibility of does not follow any pattern. The transition from the ease of leaving homes without any restrictions to the careful scheduling of each road outside the home has transformed the application seen ironically before, as one in which if you feel to express something, anything, there is the right space. A virtual space that has no impositions of any kind, which also has the advantage of intuitive elements with which users can become video creators. The application provides a vast music library and only with a few own videos filmed at home about anything, to which you add a background song and a few other elements existing in the application you become a content creator that attracts followers.

A social network launched even in a pandemic and reached in a very short time to several million users confirms once again the need for people to create their online strategy to go through the pandemic and disconnect from the whole daily life full of news about Coronavirus. "Clubhouse" is the audio version of direct interaction platforms such as Zoom, Skype, MicrosoftTeams, GoogleMeet, etc. Users from anywhere in the world meet virtually based on common interests and talk like a conference in sessions called rooms, to take the floor, the wish must be signaled by a button, and the moderator of the respective meeting grants the "microphone" according to the order in which the wishers registered. Things go like an offline meeting, except that the application does not have video functionality, but only audio.

Although the apparent lack of this functionality makes it seem more strange or generate some questions about the purpose of this utility, having no official explanation for this detail, some experts believe that application developers have responded in this regard to a need in the market. Although online interaction platforms have seen significant increases in the number of downloads and uses, as was natural, there is a niche of users who refuse to appear in front of others with a webcam and be seen by other participants. at the meeting. The creators of the application understood that even in the online environment, the fear of public speaking and the fear of exposure persist, therefore they adopted the new formula for exchanging ideas to this need. Anyone's voice can be heard in this way, but the eye pressure to which the speakers are exposed is eliminated with the help of this application.

Certainly, the issue needs to be analyzed in-depth and connected with concrete data, but at the first level of analysis, IT experts seem to have understood the needs of experts in various fields who behind the level of expertise face exposure anxiety. TikTok and Clubhouse are the most spectacular examples of new platforms that people spend their time with.

Music applications or mostly niche audio content have also seen a visible increase. Since many of these applications contain sections where specialists in various fields upload podcasts in their field and topic of activity and interest, the audio content reveals its usefulness through the very possibility of doing something else while listening to an episode, a lesson, a collage of music. While the child is sitting at the family's laptop in a meeting with colleagues, the parent can take care of household chores and in the background be a podcast in which he learns or listens to various aspects of interest. Topics such as gardening, arranging the balcony, creating a small corner of nature in a block of flats had great searches on Google during the isolation, and those who owned a blog or a niche site understood this trend very well and adapted very quickly.

Figure 6: Digital Audio Listeners in Romania – percent of internet users, by demografic (2019 vs 2020)

Digital Audio Listeners in Romania, H1 2019 & H1 2020
% of internet users, by demographic

	H1 2019	H1 2020
Gender		
Female	51.3%	69.7%
Male	63.3%	67.4%
Age		
16-24	88.3%	82.0%
25-34	60.3%	73.5%
35-44	48.6%	65.7%
45-54	42.9%	58.7%
55-64	44.1%	61.0%
Annual household income group		
High	60.9%	65.4%
Medium	54.5%	68.1%
Low	59.5%	73.7%
N/A*	51.4%	62.5%
Household location		
Urban	55.9%	67.6%
Suburban**	-	-
Rural	63.8%	71.5%
Total	**57.4%**	**68.6%**

Note: services include Apple Music, Audible, Deezer, Google Play Music, iTunes, Musify, SoundCloud, Spotify and/or others; respondents were asked, "In the last month, which of these services have you used to listen to/download music, radio or audiobook content? Please think about any sort of music, radio or audiobook content that you have listened to, streamed, downloaded or accessed in any other way."; *don't know/prefer not to say; **omitted due to small sample size
Source: GlobalWebIndex, Q1-Q2 2019 & Q1-Q2 2020, August 2020

T20871   www.eMarketer.com

Source: https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-statistics/ - accessed on 19.02.2021

The data show increases by several percent of audio applications in both rural and urban segments, the increases being similar in gender categories.

4. The concept of digital well-being

As it is easy to notice, both from statistics and a simple observation around us, digital is at every step and enjoys very fast development and adaptation. With the help of technology we communicate with our loved ones, we hold conferences at work, we access any type of information we want, we make our products and services known or we use technological tools for our promotion.

The device we enter today is no longer connected to an office, a physical space, and has a single element called a smartphone. If you take the desktop a bit harder with you with a suite of components needed to be useful, today we have only one gadget that includes writing programs, editing, social media, photos and, videos or you may too well keep a speech or even a course. Only on social platforms, a Romanian user spends on average 3 hours and 36 minutes a day, and "an ordinary adult checks his mobile phone about 50 times every day, while younger people do this much more often, over 80 times." (https://learndigital.withgoogle.com/atelieruldigital/course/digital-wellbeing/lesson/221#!#%2F – accessed on 17.02.2021)

The aspect can have both positive and negative valences, depending on the arguments brought and their solidity. On the one hand, we are talking about work efficiency through all applications and platforms with the variety of tools useful for each activity. The same discussion includes creating opportunities for leisure and the new forms of self-education and self-training should not be omitted either. We thus notice a changed, strongly digitized behavior that is seduced by the creativity of IT people. Aspects such as UI and UX (https://www.usertesting.com/blog/ui-vs-ux - accessed on 18.02.2021) make a significant impact on each user, causing them to stay there as long as possible. Justifiably the specialists, but also the users, ask themselves how good is the time spent online. Even when we talk about the one used for educational purposes, is the efficiency the same as in the case of classical study? The pandemic did not offer other alternatives, so there are certainly cases in which the platforms have reached their goal and others in which they have not. But except for the training and learning aspect, how long would it be appropriate to explore online? Where exactly do we put the boundary between beneficial and harmful? There is no valid general answer, which is why the concept of "digital well-being" has emerged, which in the opinion of Google specialists "involves creating and maintaining a healthy relationship with technology. The concept refers to the way in how technology helps us to achieve our goals, without distracting, interrupting, or being an obstacle in their way. If we have control over technology, we can reap its full potential and all its advantages" (https://learndigital.withgoogle.com/atelieruldigital/course/digital-wellbeing/lesson/221#!#%2F – accessed on 17.02.2021).

The interest in digital well-being has materialized through applications in most smartphones that monitor time spent online and are like assistants who warn the user that the time set by him for spending on social networks has been exceeded. All smartphones can indicate the time spent online and where you lingered the most, but

some apps work as online stay advisors based on your initial individual settings. However, the use of these tools is overshadowed by the possibility of extracting relevant data and percentages. What may seem useful to one user from one platform, to another may seem captivating in terms of entertainment, so application settings can count at most the time allotted and networks where users linger longer.

Although the desire and intention of digital well-being are already in discussions and applications, specialists have not come up with objective solutions to achieve it, other than the timing of time spent on one platform or another. So the solution of digital well-being also lies in the subjectivism of each individual and his perception of his existence online. In other words, although we have applications for almost anything, digital welfare metering is still at the discretion of each user and their management. So our analysis of the time spent online and the purposes for which we give the virtual area our time resource is visible in antithesis with the vast offer of social platforms.

One solution to support the user to be aware of the time allocated to online - in any form - would be to include in smartphone applications a series of periodic rankings based on their responses to the purpose for which they were in an application or another. Of course, this also involves the involvement of each user and the use of the same time resource that he can allocate to viewing photos on Instagram or videos on TikTok instead of giving answers to an application on the phone. At the same time, such an approach may seem intrusive, as the individual's first reaction is to defend or feel questioned, although the purpose of such a questionnaire would be for a long-term digital welfare strategy.

The discussions will probably be divided for a long time from now on and until there is real cooperation between users and specialists in digital health and well-being. Even if some existing applications for digital well-being are improved, application and platform developers may see this as a threat to their products and services, and this will put even more pressure on perfecting user experiences enough to seduce them for as long as possible.

At the same time, the last generations are more and more digitalized and this context is normal for today's young people, they do not raise the issue of digital welfare in any way and call for an application for most of their activities. Without going into the psychological effects of this phenomenon, it is increasingly visible that today's society must counteract this profound digitization of young generations with truly captivating offline options.

5. **Conclusions**

In a society hard hit by a pandemic that no one had predicted, we are all unwittingly subject to rules that, even if we find it difficult to integrate them into our economy of life, are meant to make us better and for a return to normalcy with which we were already comfortable. For now, no one can say clearly when we will return to normal, so the adaptability to each new experience brought by the current situation is all we have at hand.

Online is the word for any interaction between several individuals, and those who prefer face-to-face communication and the exchange of ideas without any technological support have fully felt this challenge of the virtual that has taken the place of offline. But as it was one of the few measures that seemed to be the best for a

return to normal as soon as possible, individuals created/improvised their corner of the house where they could mark their presence and bring their contribution to a job or free time. The explosion of media platforms overlapped over the first period of the lockdown, which was a shock for most and which they had to mitigate or overcome in their way.

The world of IT, however, very quickly adaptable to user requirements, came with a quick response, creating the necessary tools so that the transition from offline to online can take place in optimal conditions. They adapted platforms that did not support a very large number of users, changed interfaces on the fly, and made them more friendly to those for whom, even if they did not need them, they at least had time to allocate it out of curiosity.

An application that no one gave much importance to its launch, which seemed to target audiences teenagers who want to create fun content and share it with others, has grown unexpectedly long, and a quarter of users today is people over 50 years old, who constantly post and open the application almost daily. The desire not to just watch the content of others led to the creation of their short videos through which people manage to escape from everyday life with increasing numbers of infections.

Another application created right in the pandemic brings a new utility - one in which everyone can take the floor can reveal their voice without having the pressure of many eyes on him. The platform seems to respond psychologically to experts in certain fields who can make significant contributions to the area in which they operate, but who suffer from the fear of public speaking. This fear is known to be the strongest after the fear of death, therefore, the creators of IT have combined the elements of utility with those of psychology and have covered a seemingly unmet need so far.

Traditional social networks and their related applications have remained predictably in the charts, also adapting their functionalities to the new data of reality. With a much larger volume of time spent online than offline, there is the problem of finding a mechanism to count the time spent online, but also its usefulness, its efficiency. Some brands have included in their phone settings applications that bring together a new concept, digital well-being, but have not found the necessary tools to attract people to declare there how much time spent online has been effective and how not. We are not referring here to the very small percentage of users who search for such applications and carefully monitor their online activity, analyzing it pragmatically and acting immediately. The direction of this approach is the large mass of people who are seduced by the online environment without making their work more efficient or improving their well-being but especially without being aware of the large time allocated online. Awareness of the time allocated to the virtual environment is especially important because it can send the user to subjective reflections on the usefulness of the hours and minutes spent on an application or platform. This reflection on one's user behavior leads him to perceive the concept of digital well-being and to understand the need to improve this aspect.

References:

1. *** https://learndigital.withgoogle.com/atelieruldigital/course/digital-wellbeing/lesson/221#!#%2F – accessed on 17.02.2021
2. *** https://www.usertesting.com/blog/ui-vs-ux – accessed on 18.02.2021
3. ***   https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-statistics/ - accessed on 19.02.2021
4. *** https://www.forbes.ro/tiktok-now-tiktok-forever-155038)
5. *** https://www.globalwebindex.com/hubfs/Downloads/global-media-intelligence-report-2020.pdf?utm_campaign=Generic%20nurture%202019&utm_medium=email&_hsmi=97800303&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-96bz1_kggFkOQ7vV-FxIMfafbf3CvPERfonqd5NzlyoK0V8UtXqTkbKD9yb4kR7hULgmlxlsU8KoD0BtLUtcm_w_ks-A&utm_content=97800303&utm_source=hs_automation – accessed on 17.02.2021
6. *** https://www.startupcafe.ro/marketing/romani-retele-sociale.htm - accessed on 12.02.2021.
7. *** https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-romania - accessed on 19.02.2021
8. ***https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?query=BOOKMARK_DS-053730_QID_-758A9195_UID_-3F171EB0&layout=IND_TYPE,L,X,0;GEO,L,Y,0;TIME,C,Z,0;UNIT,L,Z,1;INDIC_IS,L,Z,2;INDICATORS,C,Z,3;&zSelection=DS-053730INDICATORS,OBS_FLAG;DS-053730UNIT,PC_IND;DS-053730INDIC_IS,I_IUSNET;DS-053730TIME,2019;&rankName1=UNIT_1_2_-1_2&rankName2=INDICATORS_1_2_-1_2&rankName3=TIME_1_0_0_0&rankName4=INDIC-IS_1_2_0_0&rankName5=IND-TYPE_1_2_0_0&rankName6=GEO_1_2_0_1&rStp=&cStp=&rDCh=&cDCh=&rDM=true&cDM=true&footnes=false&empty=false&wai=false&time_mode=ROLLING&time_most_recent=true&lang=EN&cfo=%23%23%23%2C%23%23%23.%23%23%23 – accessed on 12.02.2021