

# Defining the Problem, Setting the Standard? Platform Narratives and Interventions for Digital Well-Being

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The concept of digital well-being has emerged from public concerns about the negative effects of online platforms on users. Researchers, online platforms, and non-profit organizations continue to debate what digital well-being encompasses and how it can be achieved. Beyond this, there remains a question of how online platforms conceptualize digital well-being and what interventions, if any, they offer in response. To answer these questions, we conducted thematic analysis and discourse analysis over a corpus of 170 publicly available documents that we collected from six major platform providers: Meta, Pinterest, TikTok, Snap, Amazon, and Google. Our analysis shows that (1) online platforms conceptualize digital well-being through the lens of usage quality. We argue that this conceptualization enables platforms to both contribute to well-being and pursue their profits. However, (2) there remains a gap between their conceptualizations and interventions. Drawing from our findings, we discuss the implications and paths forward for digital well-being design and governance.

CCS Concepts: • **Human-centered computing** → **HCI theory, concepts and models**; • **Social and professional topics** → **Governmental regulations**.

Additional Key Words and Phrases: digital well-being, online platforms, self-regulation

## ACM Reference Format:

Yu Yamashita, Lin Kyi, Changyang He, Ankolika De, Maria Antoniak, Yixin Zou, and Asia Biega. 2026. Defining the Problem, Setting the Standard? Platform Narratives and Interventions for Digital Well-Being. In *The 2026 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency (FAccT '26)*, June 25–28, 2026, Montreal, QC, Canada. ACM, New York, NY, USA, 24 pages. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3805689.3812409>

## 1 Introduction

Growing public concern over the negative effects of online platforms on users' well-being has prompted responses from multiple directions [75]. The design of digital technologies, from infinite scroll to autoplay, and from variable

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\*This work was conducted while the author was a postdoc at the Max Planck Institute for Security and Privacy.

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*FAccT '26, Montreal, QC, Canada*

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ACM ISBN 979-8-4007-2596-8/2026/06

<https://doi.org/10.1145/3805689.3812409>

reward mechanisms to notification systems, has been criticized for exploiting psychological vulnerabilities and encouraging compulsive use [1]. Former technology executives and advocacy organizations have drawn public attention to these manipulative design patterns, arguing that platforms are intentionally engineered to maximize engagement at the expense of user well-being [32].

The concept of “digital well-being” has emerged as a response to these concerns. Vanden Abeele [107] describes digital well-being as “*a subjective individual experience of optimal balance between the benefits and drawbacks obtained from mobile connectivity.*” Digital well-being remains an evolving concept, as researchers [14, 51], technology companies [98], and non-profit organizations [33] continue to debate what it encompasses and how it can be achieved. This lack of consensus has significant implications as regulators, platforms, and users attempt to navigate a landscape where the very problem they seek to address lacks a stable conceptual foundation.

Regulatory efforts around digital well-being are gaining momentum worldwide. The European Union’s Digital Services Act requires major platforms to assess any actual or foreseeable negative consequences of their services to users’ physical and mental well-being [27]. In the United States, numerous congressional hearings have criticized platforms for insufficient efforts regarding user safety and mental health [104]. In 2025, the Australian government implemented laws restricting users under 16 from accessing social media altogether [71, 81]. In 2026, Meta lost the trial over children’s safety on their platforms in New Mexico [44]. Additionally, Meta and Google lost a trial over their addictive designs in Los Angeles [45].

While there is growing political will to regulate platforms, there remains no consensus about *what to regulate* or *how to regulate effectively* for users’ digital well-being. Furthermore, countervailing pressures complicate the regulatory landscape. The technology industry has a history of responding to regulatory pressure through self-regulatory commitments that often serve to obstruct or shape incoming regulation. For example, industrial self-commitments to AI ethics principles, predating governmental AI regulation, have been critiqued as ethics washing [5, 18, 41, 95, 106]. Moreover, industries facing novel regulatory scrutiny have previously sought to define standards early, establishing benchmarks that later inform or constrain regulatory frameworks [34, 70]. These previously observed dynamics raise the possibility that platforms’ current digital well-being initiatives may function similarly—as attempts to set the terms of compliance before external standards are imposed.

With prior work focusing on the positioning of individual platforms, a gap remains in the existing understanding of how platforms more broadly conceptualize digital well-being in relation to the tools they offer in response. This gap matters because the narratives—as well as the underlying priorities and motives—of platforms may diverge from those of users and regulators. As prior work has shown in other digital contexts, companies may discursively and strategically frame their services to position themselves favorably, pursuing profits while navigating toward a regulatory sweet spot between beneficial protections and onerous obligations [36]. Because platforms operate under attention-economy business models, they have financial incentives to maximize user engagement [110] and to surveil their users, which may conflict with interventions that genuinely reduce compulsive use. Understanding how platforms frame digital well-being, and whether their tools align with their rhetoric, is thus essential for evaluating self-regulatory claims and informing evidence-based policy.

Our paper interrogates platforms’ narratives around digital well-being across two aspects. We ask:

- (1) **RQ1 (Conceptualizations):** How do online platforms conceptualize digital well-being?
- (2) **RQ2 (Interventions):** What interventions do platforms offer to address issues that harm digital well-being?

We collected publicly available materials on 170 documents from six major platform providers: Meta, Pinterest, TikTok, Snap, Amazon, and Google, classified as “very large online platforms” under the European Commission’s Digital Services Act [24]. Following established approaches [19, 38], we conducted a thematic analysis, followed by discourse analysis, to understand how platforms construct and justify their perspectives on digital well-being.

Through our analyses, we uncovered three sets of insights with implications for policy and design. First, we examine *gaps between platforms’ stated conceptualizations and their operational interventions*, that is, whether the

tools platforms offer adequately address the problems they claim to recognize. Second, we surface *differences between how regulators conceptualize digital well-being and how platforms frame it*, identifying where platform discourse diverges from external stakeholders' concerns. Third, we discuss *the risks that may arise should platforms' current framing and tools become the basis for self-regulation or early compliance standards*, considering how platform-defined benchmarks might serve industry interests while leaving user needs unmet. Our findings provide policymakers with an empirically grounded understanding of platform perspectives and interventions on digital well-being.

## 2 Background and Related Work

### 2.1 Understanding Online Platforms' Perspectives on Users' Well-Being

Prior work has conceptualized digital well-being and explored the theoretical connections and causal pathways between digital practices and well-being outcomes [8]. However, while a few studies have touched on online platforms' perspectives on digital well-being, as we discuss below, they focus on specific aspects of platforms and their public outputs. Overall, online platforms' perspectives on users' well-being remain insufficiently understood, even though understanding these perspectives is key to characterizing the digital ecosystems and implemented changes.

**Platforms taking responsibility for digital well-being.** Despite inconclusive scientific evidence about the effects of platform usage on individual well-being [72, 74, 82], online platforms have begun offering digital well-being tools without explicit regulatory requirements to do so. According to Beattie and Daubs [3], platforms strategically adopted public concerns about excessive screen time harming users, particularly young people, and introduced tools to help users manage their usage.

**Self-control tools for managing platform usage.** Digital well-being research has focused heavily on self-control tools—features that help users manage their usage, such as screen timers, usage dashboards, and reminders [55, 83]. These tools are available both through third-party applications and directly on platforms [54]. Monge Roffarello and De Russis [65] evaluated common self-control features through user studies and found that while useful in specific situations, they fail to cultivate long-term healthy usage patterns. This gap has prompted researchers to design more effective self-control interventions [52].

**Digital well-being as an individual responsibility.** Although online platforms often claim to work for users' well-being, some studies have argued that platforms shift their responsibility to individual users [3, 20, 21]. For example, Docherty [21] analyzed statements made by Meta's executives, finding that these statements imply a form of *neoliberal responsabilization*, where users have to take personal responsibility for their well-being through self-controlled engagement [22]. Similarly, Dennis [20] called big platforms' attitude the *McDonald's Model*, likening it to the fast-food industry: online platforms frame themselves as safe and good for well-being *if* individuals use them in a healthy way. Under this model, platforms may blame individuals for digital well-being issues while absolving themselves of responsibility.

While previous papers [3, 22] critique how platforms conceptualize digital well-being and challenge the ideological foundations of that framing, our goal is to empirically document the gap between what platforms claim and do in the context of ongoing regulatory mobilization. To this end, our work draws on a comprehensive analysis of narratives from six major platform providers, shedding light on the tensions between platform conceptualizations and the interventions provided.

### 2.2 The Regulatory Landscape of Digital Well-Being

There has been mounting criticism over concerns about users' mental health, safety, and privacy in online spaces, and many people have called for regulatory intervention to guide, standardize, and enforce these well-being practices across the industry. We show examples of regulatory actions worldwide in Table 3 in the Appendix.

**Congressional hearings on platform responsibility for user well-being.** The US Congress has held numerous hearings examining online platforms’ impact on user well-being, safety, and mental health, with particular focus on young users. Platforms have faced criticism for both inciting and failing to address harms such as online abuse and violence [104], and lawmakers have questioned their accountability and interventions for user safety [102, 103]. For example, whistleblower Frances Haugen testified that Facebook prioritized profits over user well-being, disregarding internal research and employee warnings about platform harms [42, 100].

**Regulating addictive designs and harmful content.** Various bills have been proposed to regulate problematic designs, especially for young users. The Social Media Addiction Reduction Technology Act proposed in Missouri would ban addictive features, such as infinite scroll and video autoplay, on social media platforms [43]. The European Commission implemented the Digital Services Act (DSA) in 2022 to create a safer online space for EU residents [24], requiring major online platform providers to assess any actual or foreseeable negative consequences of their platforms to the person’s physical and mental well-being (Article 34, 1. (d)) [29]. They investigated Meta and TikTok under the law and ordered them to submit risk assessment reports [25, 26]. Brazil enacted the Digital Statute of the Child and Adolescent in 2025 to protect children online [69].

**Banning social media platforms for young users.** In recent years, restricting young users’ access to social media has become a global trend. In 2025, the Australian government implemented a social media ban for those under 16, with concerns about design features that encourage young people to spend more time on screens and content that can harm their health and well-being [71, 81]. After this, many countries started to consider similar regulations. For example, the Indonesian and Malaysian governments currently plan to ban social media for those under 16 [57]. However, these bans also destroy online privacy in ways that are not undesirable to companies whose profits come from surveillance.

Governments’ and online platforms’ narratives about digital well-being conflict, and it is important to clarify the difference between them. In our work, we analyzed platforms’ public statements and the framing of digital well-being issues, enabling clearer comparison with governmental rhetoric and regulation.

### 3 Methods

Our analyses focused on how major platforms discussed digital well-being relevant to our two research questions. To answer our research questions, we used critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a method, combining it with facets from thematic analyses [19, 38].

| Company   | Example target platforms | Number of documents |
|-----------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Meta      | Facebook and Instagram   | 68                  |
| Pinterest | Pinterest                | 5                   |
| TikTok    | TikTok                   | 7                   |
| Snap      | Snapchat                 | 15                  |
| Amazon    | Alexa and Fire Tablets   | 49                  |
| Google    | Android and YouTube      | 26                  |

Table 1. Web pages of platforms analyzed to understand platforms’ perspectives. These pages were collected on Aug. 22, 2025 except for Google’s pages. In total, we analyzed 170 documents. We show the details in Table 4.

#### 3.1 Data Collection

We started by analyzing online platforms designated as “very large online platforms” under the European Commission’s criteria—platforms with at least 45 million monthly active users in the EU [24]. We reviewed the webpages of these platforms and their parent companies, retaining only those that explicitly referenced

“digital well-being” or “digital wellness.” We used only these terms without considering other relevant terms for several reasons. First, we landed on a more constrained set of search terms, since terms like “safety” could yield a large volume of out-of-scope content (e.g., related to data security). Moreover, by using other keywords we presume to be relevant, we risk retrieving documents biased by our own assumptions, and impacting the validity of our analysis that will examine how platforms relate digital well-being to other concepts. As a result, six online platform providers met our inclusion criteria: Meta, Pinterest, TikTok, Snap, Amazon, and Google.

Several of these providers operate multiple platforms. For instance, Meta operates Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, and articulates their well-being perspectives across these platforms through publicly available documents. Table 1 presents a summary of companies’ (platforms’ providers), target platforms, and the number of documents we analyzed.

We gathered platforms’ web pages about (digital) well-being, where they explain their perspectives and efforts for individuals’ well-being on their platforms [19]. The final webpage collection occurred in August 2025. While Google maintained an official digital well-being page during our preliminary data collection in September 2024, they subsequently removed it. Nonetheless, we decided to incorporate the Google pages available at that earlier time.

Our final dataset consists of 170 documents, all saved using Save Page WE [23] in HTML format for analysis. Our dataset is available on OSF <sup>1</sup>.

### 3.2 Data Analysis

We drew platforms’ conceptualizations and interventions from thematic and critical discourse analyses [17, 19, 31, 47, 105].

**Thematic Analysis.** As a preparatory analytic step, we conducted a thematic analysis [6] of platforms’ public webpages to identify recurring topics relevant to our research questions. Three authors independently read an initial subset of webpages to surface themes. Through team deliberations, these themes were consolidated into an initial codebook that captured the range of topics present in the texts.

This codebook was refined iteratively through multiple rounds of individual annotation and collective discussion, with the goal of establishing an overview of what issues were present in the discourse and where they appeared. Once subsequent readings no longer produced new themes or required revisions to the codebook, we determined that thematic saturation had been reached. We present the final codebook in Table 5 in the Appendix.

**Discourse Analysis.** Building on the thematic groundwork, we then conducted a discourse analysis of the annotated material [19, 38]. In this phase, the focus shifted from identifying topics to interpreting how those topics were constructed, framed, and positioned within the platforms’ public-facing communication.

The first author examined the thematically annotated excerpts, attending to discursive features such as framing strategies, implicit assumptions, silences and omissions, attribution of responsibility, and the positioning of actors. Upon deliberation with other authors, they described some of the key discursive elements that were manifesting in the documents. This interpretive analysis especially focused on how language choices, emphasis, and contextualization shaped the meaning of the identified themes—aligned with the detailed analyses stage of critical discourse analysis.

In this phase, we systematically examined excerpts within each thematic category, attending to discursive features such as framing strategies (e.g., presenting well-being as a matter of individual responsibility), rhetorical constructions (e.g., emphasizing empowerment and choice), silences and omissions (e.g., absence of discussion of platform accountability), and the positioning of actors (e.g., users as autonomous decision-makers versus vulnerable subjects). These interpretations were iteratively discussed and refined with the research team to ensure analytic rigor.

<sup>1</sup><https://osf.io/evsyt/overview>

From Table 5, our discourse analysis examined how these themes were constructed across platform narratives. For instance, themes related to autonomy and quality of engagement were consistently framed in ways that emphasized individual user responsibility, while minimizing platform accountability. Similarly, safety was often articulated through absolutist and aspirational language, positioning platforms as protective actors despite acknowledged harms. Across themes, we observed recurring discursive strategies including the individualization of responsibility, the strategic omission of platform design impacts, and the redistribution of accountability to users and parents.

Insights from this process were used to reconstruct broader patterns in how platforms articulated and justified their positions in relation to the study's research questions.

## 4 Findings for RQ1: Platform conceptualizations of digital well-being

### 4.1 Digital well-being is commonly conceptualized as high-quality usage by platforms

Definitions of digital well-being varied across platforms (see Table 6), reflecting the absence of a standardized definition. Despite this variability, a unifying theme emerged: all platforms conceptualize digital well-being through the lens of usage “quality” rather than quantity.

**Focus on quality, not quantity.** We observe a shift from quantitative to qualitative metrics which extended across the platform ecosystem. Rather than focusing on time spent, platforms consistently emphasized that high-quality user interactions matter more than duration.

Google's approach to digital well-being has evolved significantly since 2018. Initially, they prioritized managing screen time, emphasizing the importance of balancing online and offline activities: “*we made time to discuss how our users can find a balance by using technology more intentionally (and that might mean using it less)*” [49]. This focus shifted substantially around 2020, when Google reoriented toward usage quality. As one director explained: “*For the past two years we've spent our time defining what 'digital well-being' means. More recently, we've tried to pivot from a focus on screen time as the most important metric to really empowering people by default.*” [58]

Meta articulated this position through research findings: “*Our own research tells us that this isn't a binary question of 'how much time online is good or bad' but that it's more important to look at how time is being spent*” [39]. Similarly, Snap's study of user well-being on social media platforms concluded that “*Digital well-being is more dependent on the nature and quality of online interactions and less dependent on how much time is spent on social media*” [89].

**Safety.** Social media platforms in our analysis frequently frame well-being alongside safety and mental health as interconnected concerns. Our analysis revealed that platforms' well-being pages are often embedded within broader safety sections, suggesting they conceptualize well-being as one component of safety, alongside security and privacy.

This integration is evident in platforms' messaging. For example, Snap states: “*At Snap, nothing is more important than the safety and well-being of our Snapchat community*” [89]. This integration of safety and well-being appears strategic: facing sustained criticism over harms such as online abuse [104], platforms have positioned safety initiatives, which encompass well-being concerns, as central to their user protection efforts.

**Mental health.** Platforms consistently position mental health as a core dimension of digital well-being. TikTok explicitly defines the concept as “*the state of one's mental and physical health in the context of digital or online activities*” [98]. This framing reflects broader usage patterns: mental health and well-being are frequently discussed in parallel, and sometimes used interchangeably across platforms, government agencies, and academic literature [14, 81, 98]. Platforms have responded to mental health concerns by positioning themselves as active supporters of users' psychological well-being [13].

**Positive online experiences.** Platforms also frame digital well-being in terms of users' experiences and relationships with online environments. Snap, for instance, references "*hopes and ideals for more positive and rewarding online experiences*," while Meta describes "*Digital wellness is part of your family's overall relationship with online platforms*" [62]. Notably, platforms emphasize that these experiences and relationships should feel "right" or "good" to users, language that positions digital well-being as fundamentally subjective and based on quality of usage, grounded in personal judgments rather than objective metrics such as screen time.

## 4.2 Dimensions of digital well-being

Online platforms mentioned autonomy, social relations, and empowering users as common dimensions for digital well-being, aligning with frameworks in prior research [76]. Importantly, platforms present these not merely as abstract principles but as tangible benefits their services provide, describing specific mechanisms through which their platforms enhance user well-being.

**Autonomy and sense of agency.** Platforms position *user autonomy*, the sense of control and agency over platform use, as central to digital well-being. TikTok articulates this perspective: "*Having a positive relationship with digital devices and apps isn't just about measuring screen time, it's also about feeling in control of how we use technology*" [35].

This concept of control is demonstrated in platforms' emphasis on "mindful" or "intentional" usage. Google, for instance, states that "*the current state of the world requires an evolution in our understanding of how we can mindfully use tech*" [58]. These terms to describe usage are not neutral; they introduce connotations with mental health and wellness discourse and relocate responsibility onto users. Platforms treat feeling in control and practicing mindfulness as interconnected, and sometimes interchangeable, dimensions of user autonomy.

This move may also displace questions of design responsibility. If well-being is tied to mindful engagement, then harms can be framed as lapses in user practice rather than outcomes of platform architecture. In this sense, the discourse of autonomy may also function to individualize responsibility while leaving underlying systems of influence intact.

**Social relations.** Social media platforms position themselves as facilitators of meaningful connection, framing positive social interaction as beneficial to well-being. A Meta researcher explains: "*actively interacting with people – especially sharing messages, posts and comments with close friends and reminiscing about past interactions – is linked to improvements in well-being*" [39].

This framing can serve a dual purpose: while grounded in research evidence, it also provides platforms with a justification for encouraging sustained engagement. By emphasizing "active" usage as beneficial, platforms can reframe time spent on their services not as potentially problematic but as a health-promoting social connection.

**Competence and empowerment.** All platforms frame their services as empowering users and enhancing their lives, language that aligns with *competence*, the sense of feeling capable and effective [76]. Snap explicitly mentions this in its mission: "*to empower people to express themselves, live in the moment, learn about the world, and have fun together*" [88].

Google's evolution exemplifies this framing. After pivoting from screen time reduction to user empowerment, the company repositioned its platforms as tools that support offline wellness activities: mindfulness, exercise, and sleep. This reframing is encapsulated in their principle: "*We believe technology should improve life, not distract from it.*" The shift is notable: rather than minimizing platform engagement, Google presents its services as enablers of holistic well-being.

## 4.3 Metrics for digital well-being

To measure digital well-being, platforms called for a shift from screen time to quality of usage, using metrics such as a psychological well-being score, and feeling in control.

**Psychological well-being score.** Social media platforms use psychological well-being metrics to assess overall digital well-being. Snap, for instance, uses a multidimensional model measuring positive emotion (e.g., “*Often felt proud*”), engagement (e.g., “*Have had more good times than bad times online*”), relationships (e.g., “*Was very satisfied with my personal relationships online*”), negative emotion (e.g., “*Worried a lot that other people might not like me*”), and achievement (e.g., “*Stayed informed so I felt in touch with what’s happening in my community and the world*”) [89]. Meta also cited an academic paper using psychological well-being in explaining the effect of social media on well-being [9, 39].

These frameworks draw on eudaimonic conceptions of well-being, which emphasize human flourishing and optimal functioning rather than merely hedonic pleasure or displeasure [84]. Critically, positive relationships constitute a core component of psychological well-being [85], an element that platforms naturally describe as a primary benefit of their services. This framework choice allows platforms to generate composite scores that balance potential harms against social benefits, effectively positioning relationships as a counterweight to concerns about excessive use or negative experiences.

**Sense of control.** Some platforms operationalize “feeling in control” as a measurable outcome for digital well-being. TikTok, for instance, incorporates this metric into its well-being assessments [35]. Google similarly centers this concept, featuring street interviews in a YouTube video on its digital well-being page that pose the question: “*Do you feel like you’re in control of technology or is technology in control of you?*” [40].

This metric has traction in academic research as well, where scholars use perceived control to evaluate how specific design features, such as autoplay, influence user agency [53].

#### 4.4 Distribution of responsibility for digital well-being

Digital well-being is a contentious topic, involving many stakeholders. Platform narratives reveal how companies conceptualize and allocate responsibility for digital well-being:

**Digital well-being is a shared responsibility between platforms and users.** Platforms begin by affirming their own responsibility for user well-being, employing language that signals priority and commitment. TikTok, for instance, states: “*The safety and well-being of our TikTok community members is our top priority*” [35] and “*we take very seriously our responsibility to keep TikTok a safe space for these important conversations*” [108]. This rhetoric of responsibility is reinforced through action-oriented language—platforms describe how they “invest,” “commit,” “work,” “offer,” “help,” and “support” well-being initiatives. Pinterest declares: “*We’re committed to well-being on social media*” [79], while TikTok announces “*a number of steps today to help support our community’s digital well-being*” [35].

This acknowledgment of platform responsibility exists alongside an emphasis on user agency. Platforms position the autonomy they provide as both a contributor to well-being and a basis for user responsibility. Users, they suggest, must exercise self-control to achieve digital well-being; platforms merely enable this through tools and features. Meta demonstrates this framing: “*This will give people more control over their feed and hopefully make their experience more positive*” [39]. The conditional framing (“hopefully”) is an example of hedging, where platforms cannot be fully sure users will have improved experiences. This kind of language also subtly redistributes responsibility.

This dual framing establishes digital well-being as a shared responsibility, one in which platforms provide infrastructure and support, but users are ultimately accountable for their own experiences.

**Heightened parental responsibility for children’s digital well-being.** While platforms frame adult digital well-being as a shared responsibility, they position parents as primary guardians of children’s online experiences, a shift that effectively transfers accountability from platforms to families. Platform language emphasizes parental duties through directives to “oversee,” “approve,” “control,” “manage,” and “supervise” children’s usage.

Meta exemplifies this approach, advocating for policies that place gatekeeping responsibilities on parents: “we support federal legislation that requires app stores to get parents’ approval whenever their teens under 16 download apps” [61]. The company frames its parental controls as tools for “giving parents even more ways to supervise their teens on Instagram” [60], positioning oversight as fundamentally parental work that platforms merely facilitate.

Some platforms go further, advising parents to calibrate supervision based on children’s developing maturity. Amazon advises: “Make sure to rethink the use of any supervision and monitoring tools from time to time, especially as your children get older and show that they are capable of using technology responsibly” [56]. This framing places the burden of digital well-being assessment and adjustment on parents.

## 5 Findings for RQ2: Platform Interventions for Digital Well-Being

### 5.1 Challenges to Digital Well-Being

Platform narratives construct digital well-being challenges in which threats are framed as external to the platform, originating in user behavior or with harmful third parties, and position companies as solution providers offering interventions and tools to mitigate external threats to well-being. Critically, platforms frame these challenges as problems they help users address rather than harms they might cause or exacerbate.

Platforms acknowledge various issues that can compromise users’ digital well-being, primarily threats to usage quality, though concerns about usage quantity and timing also appear in their narratives. By focusing on quality over quantity, platforms imply that the issue is not that users spend time on the platform, but how that time is spent. This framing moves the focus to defining what counts as good or bad use, rather than engagement-maximizing algorithms, lack of moderation, or other features that can affect well-being.

**Problematic usage patterns.** Platforms identify certain user behaviors as detrimental to digital well-being. For example, Google emphasizes temporal and attention-based concerns: platforms can distract users from offline activities, sleep, study, face-to-face conversation, leading to unintended time expenditure and loss of control. Meta similarly expresses concern about youth usage during critical periods, particularly late-night engagement that displaces sleep or interferes with academic focus.

Beyond quantity and timing, Meta distinguishes between usage modalities based on their well-being impacts [39]. Drawing on academic research, the company characterizes passive consumption, scrolling and reading without interaction, as harmful, contrasting it with active engagement. A Meta researcher explains: “In general, when people spend a lot of time passively consuming information — reading but not interacting with people — they report feeling worse afterward.” This framing positions certain types of platform use as inherently negative while validating others, effectively differentiating between “good” and “bad” engagement with their services.

**Harmful communities and content.** Platforms identify negative social interactions and problematic content as threats to usage quality and digital well-being. Our analysis revealed substantial overlap between these categories: harmful communities often produce or circulate harmful content, and vice versa.

Regarding harmful communities, platforms emphasize their stance against online abuse—including bullying, harassment, and financial sextortion scams. They position these behaviors as policy violations and frame protection, particularly of young users, as a priority. Meta states: “We do not allow bullying and harassment on our platform, but when it does happen, we act” [16]. The acknowledgment that abuse “does happen” despite prohibitions implicitly recognizes the gap between policy and enforcement.

On harmful content, platforms focus on material related to self-harm, suicide, eating disorders, and other mental health concerns, as well as age-inappropriate content. TikTok illustrates this expanding scope: “While we already remove content that promotes eating disorders, we’ll start to also remove the promotion of disordered eating” [48]. This language reveals ongoing content moderation evolution—platforms progressively broaden definitions of harm as they respond to criticism and research.

**Mental health challenges.** Given the conceptual overlap between mental health and digital well-being, platforms address mental health concerns as part of their well-being initiatives. However, this focus emerges within a context of criticism, where platforms have been accused of causing or exacerbating mental health problems among users [104].

In response, platforms reframe themselves as resources for users experiencing mental health difficulties rather than as potential contributors to these challenges. They emphasize their connective capacity—the ability to link struggling individuals with supportive communities. Meta articulates this positioning: “*Facebook is in a unique position — through friendships on the site — to help connect a person in distress with people who can support them*” [13]. This framing strategically repositions the platform from potential harm source to mental health infrastructure, leveraging social connection as both the platform’s core feature and its contribution to user welfare.

## 5.2 Interventions

To address these challenges above, online platforms have tried addressing them through various interventions.

**Collaborative partnerships for digital well-being.** Platforms position themselves within broader ecosystems of stakeholders, collaborating with experts, users, parents, and content creators to address well-being concerns.

Expert consultations are prominent in platform narratives. Companies emphasize partnerships with both internal specialists (in-house researchers, social psychologists, sociologists) and external authorities (academic researchers, organizations like the World Health Organization). Meta states: “*We employ social psychologists, social scientists and sociologists, and we collaborate with top scholars to better understand well-being and work to make Facebook a place that contributes in a positive way*” [39]. Platform communications frequently cite research studies, whether conducted internally or externally, and quote expert perspectives to lend credibility to their well-being initiatives.

Platforms also engage directly with users and families. Snap, for instance, convened a council of young users to gather firsthand accounts of their “*online experiences, hopes, and ideals*.” TikTok similarly references working “*closely with experts, partners, and mission-driven organizations around the world*” [96]. These partnerships serve dual purposes: they inform platform design while reinforcing the notion of a shared responsibility for digital well-being among platforms, parents, and educators.

Finally, platforms leverage influencers and creators as intermediaries to disseminate well-being resources. Pinterest describes how “*The organization will join dozens of creators in sharing their ideas and best practices on mindfulness, living with intention and digital wellness*” [77]. This approach effectively uses popular voices to promote platform-endorsed well-being practices.

**Connecting users to mental health resources and support networks.** Platforms address mental health challenges through two primary strategies: providing resources developed by experts, and facilitating peer support.

On resources, platforms curate content offering techniques to manage negative emotions, anxiety, stress, and promote psychological well-being. These materials typically originate from credible sources such as the World Health Organization, lending external authority to platform mental health initiatives. Meta provided mental health pages that share techniques and tips for mental health-related problems, e.g., tips about navigating grief and loss [59].

Regarding peer support, platforms leverage their core functionality, social connection, to link users experiencing difficulties with a supportive community. Beyond organic connection, platforms have developed intervention mechanisms: reporting tools that allow users to flag concerning posts about mental health struggles, and AI-based detection systems that proactively identify at-risk users based on their content, even before peer reports occur.

These systems position platforms as both facilitators of human support and automated guardians monitoring for signs of distress.

|                                     | Better Use                                       | Better Community                                         | Better Content                                              |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Issues                              | Offline activities distraction<br>Passive use    | Online abuse                                             | Mental health concerns content<br>Age-inappropriate content |
| <b>Enabling user control</b>        | Turn off autoplay ✓<br>Customize notifications ✓ | Block/Mute users ✓<br>Restrict comments/posts/messages ✓ | Customize recommendations ✓                                 |
| <b>Platform re-design</b>           | Change feed algorithm                            | Remove users                                             | Remove content<br>Diverse AI-generated images               |
| <b>Technology-assisted guidance</b> | Screen dashboard/timer ✓<br>Night reminder ✓     | Alert potential scammers ✓                               | Nudity protection ✓<br>Restrict content ✓                   |

Table 2. Example digital well-being tools to support better usage (left), better community (center), better content (right), corresponding to issues. We found common design mechanisms across these digital well-being tools: *enabling user control* (top) – empowering users to customize or disable specific platform features, *platforms re-design* (middle) – nudging users toward positive behaviours, and *technology-assisted guidance* (bottom) – supporting positive usage patterns through technological intervention. ✓ shows that we confirmed that a tool was implemented on at least one platform. The confirmation was conducted by an author on a smartphone (Android) and social media platforms on Mar 23, 2026. Regarding *platform re-design*, we could not check how these changed designs worked from the user side.

**Platform-provided tools and interventions.** Table 2 displays some tools provided by online platforms to promote healthier usage, improve online communities, and create better content. We confirmed that these tools were actually implemented on online platforms (see Table 2). Our analysis identified four design mechanisms underlying tools:

**Enabling user control:** These tools empower users to customize or disable specific platform features, enhancing their sense of agency, a key component of well-being identified in our analysis. Meta emphasizes this approach: “One of our core News Feed values is giving people more control” [66]. By foregrounding user control, this mechanism implicitly shifts responsibility for digital well-being onto users themselves. For usage management, platforms allow users to disable potentially distracting features: YouTube offers *Video Autoplay* toggles, while Android and social media platforms enable notification customization. For community management, users can control their social interactions by blocking or muting accounts and restricting comments, posts, or direct messages through user or keyword filters. For content curation, platforms grant users control over what appears in their feeds; Instagram and Facebook let users specify content they do not want recommended.

**Platform re-design:** Rather than offering opt-in tools, some platforms modify core designs to nudge users toward positive behaviors. For usage quality, Facebook restructured its feed algorithm to prioritize posts from close connections, encouraging active engagement over passive scrolling: “We’ve made several changes to News Feed to provide more opportunities for meaningful interactions and reduce passive consumption of low-quality content...We optimize ranking so posts from the friends you care about most are more likely to appear at the top of your feed” [39]. For community safety, platforms ban repeat policy violators. For content quality, they remove harmful material and adjust algorithms. Pinterest, for instance, made its recommendation and search systems more inclusive by improving body type representation [78]. This mechanism places greater responsibility on platforms, as they exert direct control over user experiences.

**Technology-assisted guidance:** These tools actively support positive usage patterns through technological intervention. For usage management, platforms offer screen time dashboards, timers, and break reminders that

help users monitor and regulate their screen time. For community protection, platforms alert users to potential scammers. For content safety, they blur potentially sensitive material. Meta's AI-based system, for example, automatically blurs potentially nude images in direct messages. Many of these tools employ AI to proactively identify and mitigate risks. This represents a form of human-AI collaborative decision-making: the system recommends or nudges toward beneficial behaviors, but users retain final control [50]. Responsibility is thus distributed between platforms (which provide guidance) and users (who make ultimate choices).

**Parental controls and child protections:** Platforms offer specialized tools for managing children's digital well-being, reflecting the heightened parental responsibility framework discussed earlier. Through *user control* mechanisms, parents can customize their children's notifications and manage their social connections. Through *technology-assisted* features, parents can access dashboards to set timers for their children. These tools position parents as primary guardians of their child's well-being. Additionally, platforms implement child-specific defaults and restrictions: screen timers, break reminders, and sleep notifications are preset for young users; social media platforms prevent unknown adults from messaging minors; and potentially sensitive content is automatically hidden. Through these controls—parental tools combined with platform protections—responsibility is distributed between families and companies.

## 6 Discussion

Our analysis confirmed a pattern highlighted by prior work: platform narratives emphasize quality of usage over quantity as the central frame for digital well-being. We furthermore found that the quality-focused conceptualization shapes both *how* platforms define the problem and *what* solutions they offer. The tools platforms provide indeed primarily target usage quality, aiming to promote meaningful interactions with others, active engagement, and positive online experiences. However, their narratives and actions pre-defined what is good (e.g., active engagement) and bad (e.g., passive engagement) for users' well-being, and further scientific scrutiny is needed to determine whether these definitions are comprehensive and address all substantive issues relevant to user well-being, or whether there are dimensions that may be systematically overlooked.

In comparison, platforms offer few native tools for reducing the time spent on their services. This absence is perhaps unsurprising given that time-reduction directly conflicts with attention-based monetization models. Platforms have little incentive to help users disengage, and our findings suggest they have instead reframed digital well-being in terms compatible with sustained engagement.

Regulatory efforts, by contrast, have largely targeted the quantity dimension directly through screen time limits or outright bans for certain age groups. The appeal of such interventions lies partly in their simplicity: time is measurable, and restrictions may seem relatively straightforward to mandate (excluding the heavily debated issue of age verification). Furthermore, the evidence base for time-focused restrictions remains contested.

Existing research on the relationship between screen time and well-being is weak and inconclusive, and debates about the efficacy of usage limits continue [73]. Encouragingly, several studies (including a randomized controlled trial [4]) examining the effectiveness of social media bans and time restrictions are currently underway [73], which may soon provide regulators with stronger empirical foundations for evidence-based proposals.

Regulating usage quality presents a different challenge. While many researchers increasingly agree that improving the quality of user experience is central to digital well-being [51, 52, 86], there is no consensus on what good quality means and how to measure it [51]. Without concrete metrics and validated interventions, quality-focused regulation remains difficult to operationalize.

This gap appears particularly consequential given our finding that platform-developed quality interventions consistently externalize responsibility: users are expected to manage their own experiences, and parents are positioned as primary guardians of children's digital well-being. This framing is reinforced by platforms' long-standing defense of their role as mere *intermediaries* [37], which redistributes accountability away from platform

design and governance. Our findings also align with scholarship arguing that it is problematic for responsibility for digital well-being to be consistently framed as residing primarily with users [22].

If regulation is to address usage quality, it must go beyond simply endorsing existing platform practices as standards for compliance and instead shift incentive structures and/or mandate interventions that center platform accountability, requiring changes to UI/UX designs, algorithms, and defaults rather than relying on user self-management. Providing evidence for such regulation will require further research into quality dimensions, effective interventions, and appropriate metrics.

## 6.1 Gaps Between Platform Conceptualizations and Interventions

Our analysis revealed that online platforms primarily conceptualize digital well-being through the lens of usage quality, emphasizing how users interact with platforms rather than the amount of time they spend. Platforms treat safety, mental health, and positive online experiences as interconnected dimensions of this concept. To improve users' digital well-being, platforms claim to focus on enriching usage quality by strengthening three elements: user autonomy, social relations, and competence.

Platforms focused more on threats to the quality of usage than the quantity of usage: problematic usage patterns (e.g., passive consumption), harmful communities, harmful content, and mental health challenges. Platforms publicly commit to addressing these issues through various interventions, including collaboration with experts and the provision of mental health resources. When they do offer well-being tools, these are built on four design mechanisms: enabling user control, re-designing platform features, providing technology-assisted guidance, and implementing parental controls and child protections.

When platforms prioritize quality of time spent, rather than quantity, it contributes to the attention economy. This is beneficial for the primary business model of many platforms [7], including social media platforms, which collect users' behavioral data (e.g., tagging and liking) and sell it to third-parties, such as advertisers. By monetizing behavioral data, they turn user data into a form of payment to access these platforms for "free" [7].

**6.1.1 *Limited control despite autonomy rhetoric.*** While platforms emphasize autonomy and intentional usage, user control remains limited in practice. Research shows users feel powerless over core features like recommendations and trending lists [53], common designs across many online platforms. The platform mechanisms provide limited architectural control. Users can mute specific accounts, snooze keywords, or adjust notification settings. They cannot, in most cases, disable algorithmic curation entirely, control what content is promoted or suppressed, or fundamentally alter how the platform presents information.

**6.1.2 *Gaps within broader safety frameworks.*** Platforms' integration of well-being within broader safety frameworks that focus on protection from harmful content and abusive communities is necessary for users' digital well-being. Yet, it also directs attention away from harms that may be intrinsic to platform design. Content moderation and anti-bullying policies address major harms. However, they overlook the possibility that engagement-maximizing algorithms, attention-capturing interfaces, and data extraction business models might themselves undermine well-being, regardless of the specific content.

## 6.2 Gaps between Platform and Regulator Conceptualizations of Digital Well-Being

Our analysis reveals several differences between how platforms and regulators (see Table 3 in the Appendix) conceptualize well-being, as well as gaps between platform rhetoric and interventions. Taken together, these results invite a reflection on different narratives about digital well-being, the risks of allowing platform-defined frameworks to shape emerging regulatory standards, and the need for independent analysis.

**6.2.1 *Quantity versus quality.*** Worldwide, regulations that focus on quantitative dimensions of platform use, such as screen time limits, outright bans, and exposure to addictive design features, are popular. The California

Protecting Our Kids from Social Media Addiction Act (SB 976) mandates default time limits and notification restrictions during school hours [12]. Australia has mandated a complete restriction of access through a social media ban for users under 16 [81]. In the US, a bill to ban autoplay videos and endless scrolling was proposed in 2019, targeting features that are designed to increase engagement time [43].

While seemingly convenient to define, these regulations (1) are difficult to implement and achieve compliance (as seen with the Australian social media ban [10]), (2) carry enormous privacy costs, and (3) might fail to address the broader well-being harms that the narrow focus on “addiction” might obscure. Current efforts include the EU’s Digital Services Act, which is broader in scope due to its provision on “systemic risks.”

As mentioned above, platforms, by contrast, have systematically reframed digital well-being around quality of use. In academia, there has been a growing call to move beyond screen time as well [51, 52]. For example, Lukoff et al. [52] found that many users’ goals are to improve the quality of time spent (e.g., watching educational videos, not recommended videos) rather than reducing screen time. More research is necessary to develop engagement quality-enhancing designs, as well as to understand how to bridge the quality-quantity dichotomy both in platform design and regulation.

**6.2.2 Locating harm and responsibility.** Regulators tend to locate potential harms in platform design itself. Congressional hearings have questioned whether platforms are “designed to be addictive” [43], and whistleblower testimony has alleged that companies knowingly maintain harmful features [42, 100]. Regulatory proposals targeting infinite scroll, autoplay, and algorithmic recommendations reflect an understanding that platform architecture, not merely user behavior, drives problematic outcomes.

Platform narratives, however, externalize harm. Our analysis found that platforms frame challenges to digital well-being as problems they help address, rather than harms they might cause or exacerbate. Problematic usage patterns are attributed to user behavior; harmful content and communities are positioned as external threats that platforms combat.

The distribution of responsibility follows a similar framing. While regulators increasingly seek to impose obligations on platforms, our findings show that online platforms’ narratives and tools frame digital well-being as a shared responsibility. While platforms support users’ well-being by offering interventions, users need to control their own usage, either independently or with the tools that platforms provide. In the case of minors’ well-being, platforms suggest parents should take responsibility by managing and supervising their children’s usage. This framing is reinforced by platforms’ longstanding defense of their role as mere intermediaries [37], which enables the redistribution of accountability away from platform design and governance. An open question is how regulations can encourage platforms to take greater responsibility for users’ well-being.

### 6.3 Risks of Platform-Defined Regulatory Standards

The divergences discussed above call for closer examination in the current regulatory moment. As policymakers worldwide develop digital well-being frameworks, platforms’ existing conceptualizations and interventions risk becoming de facto standards — either through self-regulation or through early compliance benchmarks that shape subsequent regulatory development.

This dynamic has precedents in other areas of technology governance. The technology industry has a history of responding to regulatory pressure through self-regulatory commitments that often serve to obstruct or shape upcoming regulation. Industrial self-commitments to AI ethics principles, predating governmental AI regulation, have been critiqued as ethics washing [5, 18, 41, 95, 106]. Scholars have documented how such principles often lack specificity, accountability mechanisms, and enforcement, serving primarily to manage public perception and delay regulation. We extend these critiques of “ethics washing” by showing how digital well-being operates as strategic positioning, simultaneously responding to public concern and stabilizing engagement-based business models by reframing well-being as “positive use” without the tools to center platform responsibility.

Platforms' current approach to digital well-being raises several concerns from a policy standpoint. First, regulations built around "meaningful use" may currently prove difficult to enforce without further research on how this construct should be concretely operationalized. At the same time, regulations built around "reduced use" may fail to address the broader well-being harms users face.

Second, the shared-responsibility model, if codified in regulatory frameworks, would limit platform obligations and expand user burdens. Policies requiring platforms to provide tools for user self-management will differ from those centering platform responsibility for user well-being. The former accepts platform architecture as given and asks users to navigate it. The latter questions whether that architecture should exist in its current form.

Third, the metrics platforms have put forward, such as well-being scores that incorporate social connection and feelings of control, may appear rigorous while embedding assumptions favorable to the platforms. Metrics that weight social connection heavily, for instance, will, by construction, rate social media use more favorably than metrics focused on other well-being dimensions. Open questions remain for how to design well-being metrics that comprehensively capture different dimensions of positive user experience.

These risks do not imply that platform perspectives should be ignored in the regulatory development process. Platforms have relevant technical expertise, user behavior data, and implementation capacity. However, policymakers should approach platform-defined frameworks with awareness of the interests they may serve and the assumptions they embed, for example, through analyses like ours that interrogate differences between platform discourses and actions. Relevant policies should furthermore be continually adjusted to address new evidence [73] regarding the nature of the problem and the efficacy of existing interventions.

## 7 Limitations and Future Work

We acknowledge that using "digital well-being" and "digital wellness" as the sole terms for gathering documents could limit documents relevant to our analysis. We see our current approach as providing insights into how platforms incorporate additional concepts and keywords to describe digital well-being, laying the groundwork for future work that employs a more comprehensive search.

Our findings are limited to a comparison between platform digital well-being conceptualizations and what interventions online platforms offer. Investigating the effectiveness of platform-provided interventions is beyond the scope of this paper, but we believe this is a potential direction for future work.

There is a growing legislative debate treating digital well-being, in particular autonomy, as a workplace right [15, 30]. Our findings indicated that online platforms did not conceptualize digital well-being as a workplace right, suggesting a gap between this debate and their conceptualizations. Investigating this gap further in the future could clarify some of the debates.

## 8 Conclusion

This paper examined how online platforms conceptualize digital well-being and what interventions they provide. Consequently, we identified notable gaps between platform rhetoric and practice: despite invoking user autonomy, control over core features remains limited; and despite acknowledging responsibility, accountability is redistributed to users and parents. These findings suggest that digital well-being initiatives on platforms may serve as a strategic positioning tool, responding to public concerns while preserving existing designs.

As regulation in this space is being debated, policymakers should approach platform-defined frameworks critically, recognizing the interests they may serve and the assumptions they embed. Interrogating the narratives, responsibility models, interventions, and metrics is crucial for understanding how to align regulations with substantive digital well-being harms.

## 9 Endmatter

### 9.1 Generative AI Usage Statement

The authors used Anthropic's Claude chatbot solely for editing their own text. No original content or arguments were generated by AI.

### Acknowledgments

The research was partially funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) under Germany's Excellence Strategy - EXC 2092 CASA - 390781972 and project number 538873437. We would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers and Dr. Magdalena Krysztoforska for their valuable feedback.

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## A Regulatory vs. Online Platforms' Effort

| Date    | Government | Platform | Event                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|---------|------------|----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2018.01 | US         | Meta     | <b>P</b> : Mark Zuckerberg's announcement that Facebook focuses on "time well spent" of people on their platform [111]                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 2018.05 |            | Google   | <b>P</b> : Announcement of digital wellbeing initiatives and tools at Google I/O 2018 [68]                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 2018.06 |            | Apple    | <b>P</b> : Announcement of screen time tools at WWDC 2018 [94]                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 2019.06 |            |          | <b>H</b> : Hearing on optimizing engagement and the use of persuasive technology on online platforms; how algorithmic decision-making and machine learning on platforms might be influencing the public [102]. Testimony: Center for Humane Technology, AI Now Institute, Google, and Wolfram Research |
| 2019.07 | US         |          | <b>B</b> : Bill, Social Media Addiction Reduction Technology Act, that would ban certain features that are designed to be addictive, would require choice parity for consent, and give users the power to monitor their time spent on social media [43]                                                |
| 2021.10 | US         |          | <b>H</b> : Hearing to Frances Haugen, a whistleblower of Meta, about the negative effect on young people [42]                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|         | US         |          | <b>H</b> : Hearing on the protecting kids online; how tech companies treat young people, including how algorithms and design choices can amplify harms, addiction, and intrusions into privacy [103]. Testimony: Snap, TikTok, and YouTube                                                             |
| 2022.06 |            | TikTok   | <b>P</b> : Offering digital well-being features [35]                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 2022.10 | EU         |          | <b>L</b> : Digital Services Act to make the online world safer [28]                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 2023.03 | US         |          | <b>H</b> : Hearing on data privacy and protecting children from online harms [101] Testimony: TikTok                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 2023.04 | US         |          | <b>H</b> : Bill, Protecting Kids on Social Media Act, that would require social media platforms to verify the age of account holders and limit access to such platforms by children [87]                                                                                                               |
| 2023.08 | China      |          | <b>B</b> : Draft regulation, minor mode, that would limit access to content and device usage based on the child's age [109]                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 2023.10 | UK         |          | <b>L</b> : Online Safety Act that requires providers to implement systems and processes to reduce risks their services are used for illegal activity, and to take down illegal content [99]                                                                                                            |
| 2024.01 | US         |          | <b>H</b> : Hearing on the online child sexual exploitation crisis [104]. Testimony: Discord, Meta, Snap, TikTok, and X                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 2024.07 | California |          | <b>L</b> : California Age-Appropriate Design Code Act that requires platforms that are likely to be accessed by children to comply with certain requirements [11, 12]                                                                                                                                  |
| 2025.01 | California |          | <b>L</b> : Protecting Our Kids from Social Media Addiction Act that prohibits providing an addictive feed to young people [12]                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 2025.09 | US         |          | <b>H</b> : Hearing on examining whistleblower allegations that Meta buried child safety research [100]                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|         | Brazil     |          | <b>L</b> : Digital Statute of the Child and Adolescent for protecting children online [69]                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 2025.12 | Australia  |          | <b>L</b> : Online Safety Amendment to ban on social media for those under 16 [81]                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

Table 3. Examples of regulatory and online platforms' efforts for digital well-being, focusing on platforms like phones and social media. Online platforms started adapting the concept and offering tools around 2018. The EU, the Australian governments, and the UK implemented laws: the Digital Services Act, the Social Media Ban, and the Online Safety Act. There have been many bills and hearings in the US. Meta changed its company name from Facebook in October 2021. Hearing: **H**, Bill/draft regulation: **B**, Law (date when the law is effective): **L**, and Platforms' effort: **P**. Apart from smartphones and social media, regulations regarding (online) gaming are also popular. The Chinese government released a rule to reduce the time spent by young people on video games in 2019, limiting them to only play games for 90 minutes a day and until 10 pm on weekdays [46]. The Kagawa prefecture in Japan also implemented a regulation for young people in 2020, limiting them to 60 minutes of gaming on weekdays [67].

## B Data Resource

| Company   | Example Platforms      | Resource                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Number of documents |
|-----------|------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Meta      | Facebook and Instagram | digital wellness page [62], well-being tools page [63], and official news with the “Youth Well-Being” tag [64] (66 news); publication years range from 2012 to 2025. Although the tag is youth well-being, these articles mention the well-being of everyone on their platforms as they described [64]. The tag was just “Well-Being” at our preliminary data collection (Sep. 2024). Adding youth might show that they focus more on young users’ well-being recently. | 68                  |
| Pinterest | Pinterest              | wellbeing page [80] and official news with “well-being” or “wellness” in the news title. In addition, an article [78] without these keywords was added since the article was linked by the wellbeing page [80]. In total, there were four news posts; publication years range from 2022 to 2023.                                                                                                                                                                        | 5                   |
| TikTok    | TikTok                 | well-being page [98] and official news with the “Safety” tag [97]; since our interest was well-being, we excluded safety news without “well-being” in the news title, resulting in six news posts; publication years range from 2021 to 2025.                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 7                   |
| Snap      | SnapChat               | digital wellbeing page [89–91, 93] and official news in Safety and Impact [92]; we excluded news without “well-being” in the news title, resulting in eight news posts; publication years range from 2021 to 2025.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 15                  |
| Amazon    | Alexa and Fire Tablets | family digital wellbeing page [2] and official news that were linked by the digital wellbeing page [2], resulting in 48 news posts.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 49                  |
| Google    | Android and YouTube    | digital wellbeing page and official blogs with the “Digital Wellbeing” tag (24 blog posts); the published year of blog posts is from 2018 to 2024.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 26                  |

Table 4. Web pages of platforms on analyzed to understand platforms’ perspectives. These pages were collected on Aug. 22, 2025 except for Google’s pages. In total, we analyzed 170 documents.

## C Themes

| Theme              | Sub-theme                   | Description                                                                              | Example Quote                                                                                                                                                                  |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Conceptualizations | Quality over quantity       | Quality of time spent on online platforms is more important than quantity of time spent. | “Our own research tells us that this isn’t a binary question of “how much time online is good or bad” but that it’s more important to look at how time is being spent.” (Meta) |
|                    | Safety                      | Online platforms are safe for everyone.                                                  | “At Snap, nothing is more important than the safety and well-being of our Snapchat community.” (Snap)                                                                          |
|                    | Mental health               | Users maintain positive mental (and physical) health online and offline.                 | “Digital well-being refers to the state of one’s mental and physical health in the context of digital or online activities.” (TikTok)                                          |
|                    | Positive online experiences | Users have a positive online experience and relationship with online platforms.          | “hopes and ideals for more positive and rewarding online experiences.” (Snap)                                                                                                  |

|               |                                           |                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|---------------|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|               | Dimensions: autonomy                      | Users feel autonomy and the sense of agency over platform use.                                             | <i>“Having a positive relationship with digital devices and apps isn’t just about measuring screen time, it’s also about feeling in control of how we use technology.” (TikTok)</i>                                           |
|               | Dimensions: social relations              | Users connect with each other in positive ways on social media platforms.                                  | <i>“actively interacting with people – especially sharing messages, posts and comments with close friends and reminiscing about past interactions – is linked to improvements in well-being.” (Meta)</i>                      |
|               | Dimensions: competence                    | Online platforms empower users and enhance their lives.                                                    | <i>“to empower people to express themselves, live in the moment, learn about the world, and have fun together” (Snap)</i>                                                                                                     |
|               | Metrics: psychological well-being score   | Platforms use psychological well-being metrics.                                                            | <i>“The study produces a Digital Well-Being Index (DWBI): a measure of Gen Z’s online psychological well-being.” (Snap)</i>                                                                                                   |
|               | Metrics: sense of control                 | Platforms measure the sense of control.                                                                    | <i>“Do you feel like you’re in control of technology or is technology in control of you?” (Google)</i>                                                                                                                        |
|               | Responsibility: shared responsibility     | Online platforms and users should be responsible for digital well-being.                                   | <i>“The safety and well-being of our TikTok community members is our top priority.” (TikTok)</i>                                                                                                                              |
|               | Responsibility: parental responsibility   | Parents have more responsibility for their children’s digital well-being.                                  | <i>“we support federal legislation that requires app stores to get parents’ approval whenever their teens under 16 download apps.” (Meta)</i>                                                                                 |
| Interventions | Challenges: problematic usage patterns    | Problematic usage patterns, e.g., passive consumption.                                                     | <i>“In general, when people spend a lot of time passively consuming information – reading but not interacting with people – they report feeling worse afterward.” (Meta)</i>                                                  |
|               | Challenges: harmful communities           | Harmful communities, e.g., online abuse.                                                                   | <i>“We do not allow bullying and harassment on our platform, but when it does happen, we act.” (Meta)</i>                                                                                                                     |
|               | Challenges: harmful content               | Harmful content, e.g., eating disorder-related content.                                                    | <i>“While we already remove content that promotes eating disorders, we’ll start to also remove the promotion of disordered eating.” (TikTok)</i>                                                                              |
|               | Challenges: mental health challenges      | Mental health challenges.                                                                                  | <i>“Facebook is in a unique position – through friendships on the site – to help connect a person in distress with people who can support them.” (Meta)</i>                                                                   |
|               | Interventions: collaborative partnerships | Online platforms cooperate with different groups of people: experts, users, parents, and content creators. | <i>“We employ social psychologists, social scientists and sociologists, and we collaborate with top scholars to better understand well-being and work to make Facebook a place that contributes in a positive way” (Meta)</i> |

|                                  |                                                     |                                                                                                                                                |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Interventions: sharing resources | Platforms share mental health resources with users. | <i>“Connecting People With Mental Health Resources and Building a Safer Community” (Meta)</i>                                                  |
| Interventions: tools             | Online platforms provide tools.                     | <i>“Our free Parent Dashboard makes it easy for adults to manage a child’s screen time and digital content in one central place.” (Amazon)</i> |

Table 5. Codebook: themes emerged in our thematic analysis

## D Definitions

| Company   | Definition                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Meta      | “Digital wellness is about remaining <b>safe</b> and <b>mindful</b> of your online experiences. It can include exploring parts of your identity by <b>connecting with people in positive ways</b> across the internet...” [62]                                             |
| Pinterest | “Building a more positive platform” “We’re championing change to make the internet a <b>safer</b> , more positive and more inspirational place.” [80]                                                                                                                      |
| TikTok    | “We want you to <b>feel in control</b> of your TikTok experience and interact with technology in a way that feels right for you.” “Digital well-being refers to the state of one’s <b>mental and physical health</b> in the context of digital or online activities.” [98] |
| Snap      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Amazon    | “We’re here to help you create digital experiences you can <b>feel good</b> about.” [2]                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Google    | “Find a <b>balance</b> with technology that feels right for you.”<br>“We believe technology should <b>improve life, not distract</b> from it... <b>life, not the technology in it, stays front and center.</b> ”                                                           |

Table 6. Online platforms’ definitions of digital well-being, emphasis ours. Definitions depend on platforms. Yet, there are a few common keywords, such as safety, when describing digital well-being.

Received 13 January 2026; revised 25 March 2026; accepted 16 April 2026