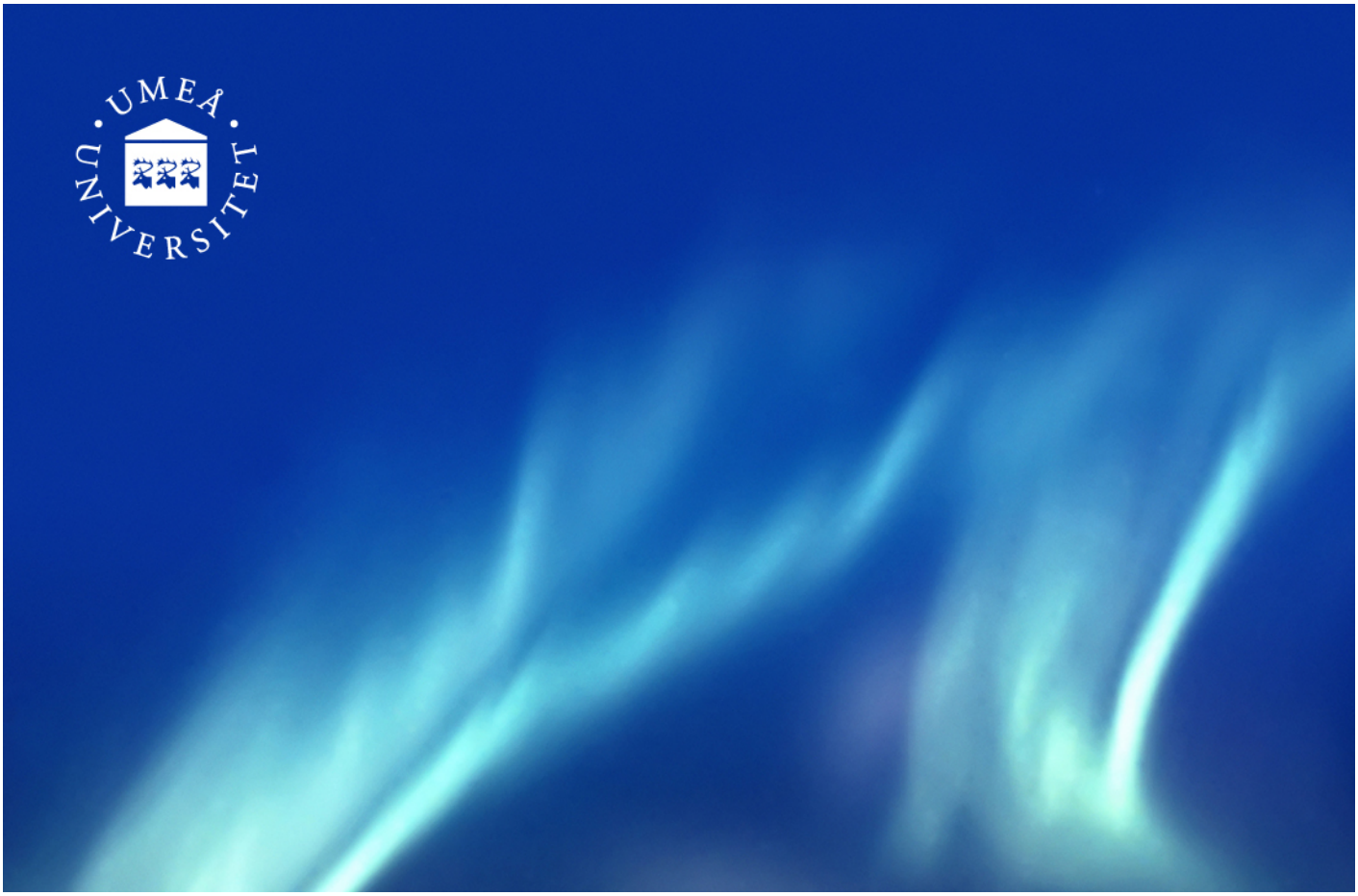

# Digital Detox Tourism: Why disconnect?

## What are the motives of Dutch tourists to undertake a digital detox holiday?

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Master's Programme in Tourism
Master Thesis, two-year, 30 credits
Spring Semester 2017

**Sworn statement:**
I hereby declare that I have personally and independently prepared this paper. All quotations in the text have been marked as such, and the paper or considerable parts of it have not previously been subject to any examination assessment.

Kristel Hoving

# Abstract

Digital detox technologies such as smartphones, tablets, and PDAs, have grown and developed at an extraordinary rate to become an essential part of everyday life. While ICT is a driving force in the contemporary tourism industry, some travel agencies and hotels have recently detected a niche market for those people who want to 'escape' from the digital life by offering 'digital detox travel packages', i.e. travel to remote areas that are highly disconnected of ICTs. While the current literature has investigated the tourists' experience of a forced disconnection, it has yet not sufficiently investigated what the rationales are for the tourists choosing to undertake a digital detox holiday. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate and understand the motives of tourists to undertake a digital detox holiday. To get an understanding of the motives to undertake a digital detox holiday, in-depth interviews among Dutch tourists have been conducted. The results of the study show that especially sociological, psychological and physic health factors motivated tourists to undertake a digital detox holiday.

**Key words**: Digital detox holiday, Dutch tourists, passive resistance, mindful rejection, selective rejection, motivations.

# Acknowledgements

This thesis has been written to complete the Master degree in Tourism at Umeå University. The purpose of the study was to investigate and understand the motives of Dutch tourists to undertake a digital detox holiday. While digital technology has grown and developed at an extraordinary rate to become for many people an essential part of contemporary society, the study enabled me to understand another aspect of ICT usage in contemporary society, namely people's experiences and motivations to disconnect from ICT for an indefinite period of time. With a lot of interest and enthusiasm, I have devoted myself to this study for a period of 5 months. Yet, without the participants it the interviewww, this study would not have been possible to make. Therefore I firstly would like to thank all the participants who have released the time to participate to the interview. Also, I am very thankful to those who have helped me to find respondents.

Furthermore, without the great support and supervision of Doris Carson, the study idea would not have turned into a thesis topic and therefore a great appreciation and big thanks to Doris Carson.

Last but not least, I am endlessly thankful to my friends and family. Not only have they supported me during the time of writing this thesis, they also have been able to let me keep the head above the water.

# Table of Content

# 1. Introduction

Digital technologies such as smartphones, tablets, and PDAs, have grown and developed at an extraordinary rate to become an essential part of everyday life (Buhalis & O'Connor, 2005). Especially the Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) including telecommunications and wireless Internet globally transformed work, leisure and travel contexts. In contemporary society, it even can be stated that tourists and the world of tourism have entered into a special relationship with digital technology. This relationship not only refers to technology tools as a passive object, but also to shape tourism experiences (Dickinson, Hibbert, & Filimonau, 2016; Munar & Gyimóthy, 2014; Schegg & Stangl, 2017).

A wide body of studies assumes that ICT connection has only positive traits for both the target audience as for the business (Dickinson, Hibbert, & Filimonau, 2016; Neuhofer, Buhalis, & Ladkin, 2014). Yet, recent research has indicated that the current usage of digital technology has passed to an addiction and has negative impacts on the human behaviour and health (Ceyhan & Ceyhan, 2008; Donnelly, 2012; Karapetsas, et al., 2015; World Health Organization, 2014). The adverse effects that can be determined include neurological complications, psychological disturbances, and social problems. With the expected growth in the use of digital technology, it is to be expected that a major part of the global population may be affected in the distant future by these negative effects (Cash, et al., 2012; Donnelly, 2012; Eurostat, 2017; Paris, et al., 2015). Because of this, various health experts indicated a growing need for occupational wellness activities, stress management, work-life balance workshops and digital detox retreats (Delecta, 2011; Smith & Kelly, 2006; Smith & Puczkó, 2015; Southward, 2014). Likewise, according to Neuhofer (n.d.), the rapid growth of digital technology will cause people to strive for extremely connected or disconnected experiences.

Even though ICT is a driving force in the contemporary tourism industry, some travel agencies and hotels have recently detected a niche market for those people who want to 'escape' from the digital life by offering 'digital-detox travel packages', i.e. travel to remote areas that are highly disconnected of ICTs (Emek, 2014; Smith & Puczkó, 2015). While the current literature covers a wide range of

research focused on enhancing tourist experiences with the aid of digital technology, the notion of digital disconnection is still in its infancy (Neuhofer, Buhalis, & Ladkin, 2014; Schegg & Stangl, 2017; Smith & Puczkó, 2015; Staboulis & Skayannis, 2003). As the market of digital detox just recently emerged in Europe as a new niche market, this study will, therefore, examine and deepen the understanding of Dutch tourists' experiences of an ICT disconnected holiday with the aim of this study is to get an understanding of the motives of Dutch tourists to undertake a digital detox holiday.

## 1.1. Outline of the thesis

This thesis report comprises seven chapters as shown in figure 1. Chapter one introduces the topic and the aim of the research. The second chapter deals with the theoretical background in which previous research on the topic digital detox tourism is identified. Also, the definition of relevant concepts for this study and relevant scholarly literature are described within this chapter. Having highlighted the research gap and important literature, the third chapter further outlines the research objectives and the significance of the study. Thereafter, the fourth chapter presents a description of the methods used to conduct the research. Chapter five will present and analyze the results of the qualitative study in which a theoretical model has been designed on the basis of the obtained results. Moreover, chapter six consists of a discussion, where a deeper analysis of the results is set against the literature. Finally, the seventh chapter will draw conclusions and will highlight areas for future research.

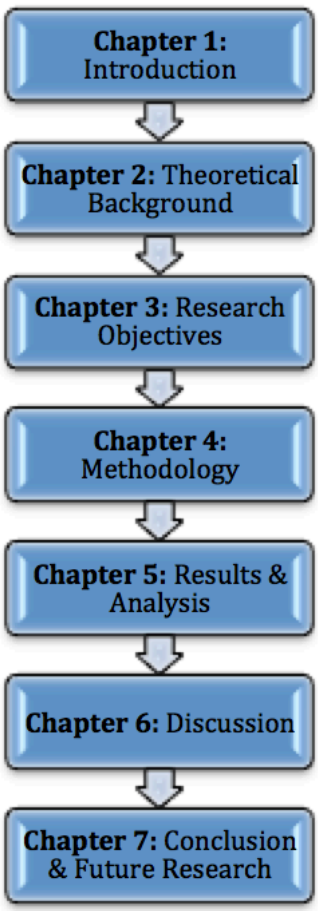


*Figure 1: Outline of the thesis.*
*Source: Own illustration*

# 2. Theoretical Background

In this chapter, the problem statement will be placed in a broader context in which concepts together with their definition and reference to relevant scholarly literatures are described. This chapter will first focus on the concept of digital detox holidays and its current market. Thereafter, previous studies in the field of digital detox tourism will be analysed to identify what has been done. Subsequently, an analysis of the key concepts selective rejection, mindful rejection and passive resistance will be explained with various factors described that could trigger tourists to undertake a digital detox holiday. Finally, from the theoretical background a conceptual framework is designed to display a visual representation of what will be investigated.

## 2.1. Digital detox and the market of digital detox holidays

One niche market that lately has been detected by travel agencies and hotels is the so-called 'digital detox' holiday (Emek, 2014). 'Digital detox', also in the current academic scholarly literature referred to as 'digital pushback' and 'digital disengagement', does not yet have an internationally agreed definition (Kuntsman & Miyake, n.d.; Morrison & Gomez, 2014). However, one cogent definition of 'digital detox' is given by the Technology Dictionary, describing 'digital detox' as: *''a state when an individual quits or suspends use of digital equipment and devices to utilize that time for social interactions and activities. It is a technique that enables an individual to relieve stress and anxiety incurred from being over occupied by a high utilization of digital devices''* (Techopedia, n.d.a.).

From the arising of digital detox tourism as a way to relieve stress and thus to enhance health, Puczkó & Smith (2015) have been going one step ahead and placed digital detox as a subcategory of health tourism referring to *''[…] a commercial phenomenon of industrial society which involves a person travelling overnight away from the normal home environment for the express benefit of maintaining or improving health, and the supply and promotion of facilities which seek to provide these benefits* (Hall, 2003, p. 274). Yet, in this study, a digital detox holiday will refer to its broadest sense as holidays without making use of digital technology.

While a certain market for digital detox holidays has already existed in the USA since 2013, it initiated Europe in 2015. Some studies indicate that especially wellness resorts have the greatest popularity as a destination for a digital detox holiday. Especially wellness resorts that offer complete 'digital detox holiday packages', where besides the use of the wellness facilities also mindfulness workshops take place (Emek, 2014; Oving, 2015).

In general, travel agencies are offering three different types of digital detox holiday packages (Digital Detox Holidays, n.d.):

1) Detox packages, where the traveller is self-responsible for not carrying digital devices to the destination. The destination will have ICT connection and the accommodation might even provide digital devices as facilities such as television;
2) Tech-free attitude packages referring to accommodations that do not offer digital devices, but nearby locations provide ICT connection and;
3) Highly disconnected packages, referring to destinations that are highly remote from ICT connections

## 2.2. Previous studies on digital detox

A myriad of studies focuses on digital connectedness in the field of tourism, such as the digital tourism experience where it regards the enhancement of connectivity of ICTs. Also, there are a number of studies on digital detox in the fields of education that is focused on students, and behavioural sciences that is mainly focused on digital addiction among children (Helding, 2011; Kounavis, Kasimati, & Zamani, 2012; Ugur & Koc, 2015). Within the study area of tourism, only a few studies have focused on the experiences of tourists and travellers being ICT disconnected.

The research of Duncan (2014) is one example of a recent study that focused on tourism ICT disconnection. Duncan (2014) has examined disconnectivity and the tourism experience at museums. Central to the research has been the disconnectivity at museums to enhance a mindful experience among visitors. According to the research, museums do not go completely off-grid, but instead, visitors are able to attend different programs, one of which is the mindfulness-style

programming, which does not involve any digital technology. Because of this, museums gained more visitors, as it became a haven for reflection and stress relief.

Furthermore, the study by Dickinson, Hibbert & Filimonau (2016) focused on ICT-disconnection of camping tourists in Purbeck, a rural area in the United Kingdom, where a forced disconnection took place at the campsite due to the lack of those service facilities. By using a sequential mixed methodology strategy (a quantitative survey where the questions were based on the identified issues of the prior in-depth interviews), the study explored the desire for digital (dis)connection during camping. According to Dickinson, Hibbert, & Filimonau (2016), the reasons for going off grid mainly related to structural issues such as the lack of signal availability, mobile charging facilities, and concerns about loss or damage of expensive devices due to the lack of service facilities. Yet, also some personal preferences were observed that included: escape from day-to-day life, maintaining connectivity and managing intrusion from work.

Likewise, Pearce & Gretzel (2012) investigated the mind-set and reaction of tourists experiencing an unexpected disruption of their normal digital connectivity with their social and informational world. Here Pearce & Gretzel (2012) focused on technological 'dead zones' that refer to ICT-disconnected areas, caused by various factors such as difficult terrains and dispersed populations. As a base for the altered conceptions of tourists with reference to a non-expected disruption of habituated ICT-connection, the research addressed two key concepts: First, they used the 'threshold metaphor', referring to changing the traditional view of a vacation, i.e. challenging tourists by disconnecting them from their traditional home world (ICT access). According to Pearce & Gretzel (2012), do tourists cross a threshold when being ICT disconnected as within the traditional home world, tourists are used to have 24/7 ICT access. As a result, tourists are plunged into a metaphor, a space in which tourists get new insights, sometimes transform and which is often a challenging space. Second, they referred to 'digital elasticity', which can be defined as ''*tourists remaining electronically linked to their home worlds as they explore their identity and the worlds of others*'' (Pearce, 2011, p. 41).

As figure 2 depicts, these three concepts (the threshold metaphor, the digital elasticity, and the dead zone tourism) can be regarded as three different kinds of

spaces of tourists' relationships with digital (dis-)connection. The research of Pearce & Gretzel (2012) focused on the third kind of space, the dead zones (Jager, 1996). The final experiences of the tourists that participated in their experiment resulted in a four quadrants of technology-induced tensions, which have also been described and discussed by Paris et al. (2015): 1) Social communication tensions where the tourists were confronted with the expectations to be always online, 2) Work communication tensions where an unexpected disruption of ICTs led to fear of missed opportunities, 3) Security escape tensions, which concerns a rise of anxiety about safety and health concerns and finally 4) Immediacy connectedness tensions, where the participants were required to focus on the present moment rather than awaiting text messages.

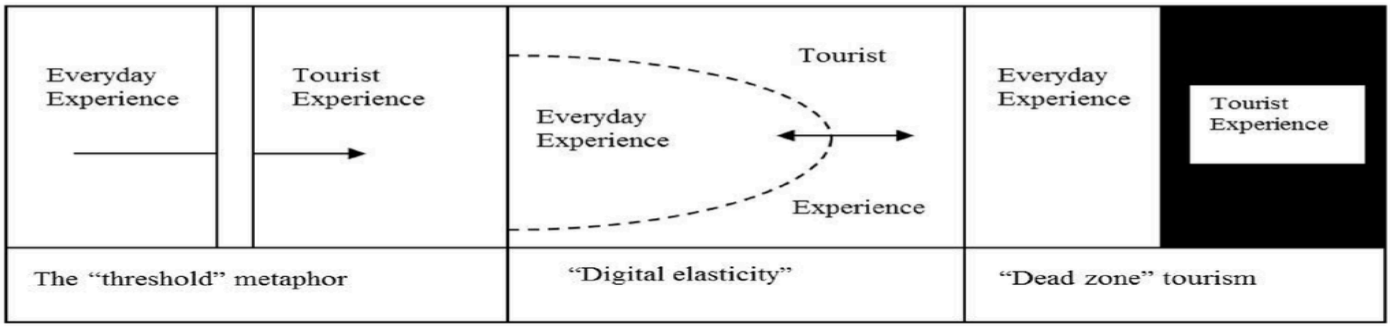


***Figure 2: Changing conceptions of tourists' connections to their home base. Source: Pearce & Gretzel (2012, p. 4).***

Lastly, one of the most recent studies in the field of ICT-disconnection and tourism is the study of Neuhofer & Ladkin (2017). The study was aimed at investigating whether employees are able to switch off from ICT technology while travelling. The findings showed that the extent to which employees are able to switch off is determined by the type of work (knowledge work or manual work) and the work mode (part-time, full-time, flexible hours and work location). More importantly, the study formulated six themes of distinct areas for future research, one of which is about getting a better understanding of the experiences of and preferences for disconnectivity and digital detox. According to Neuhofer & Ladkin (2017), digital detox has emerged as a temporary solution to switch off, as connectivity could become an obstacle to escapism, thus prompting tourists to desire a momentary absence. Yet, further research is needed to develop a better, and more nuanced, understanding of the motivations that drive people off grid.

As with the above, it can be stated that the studies mainly focused on the digital elasticity space and the dead zone tourism space. Therefore, this study will take its departure from the threshold metaphor space, where tourists challenge themselves to disconnect themselves from their traditional world (ICT disconnection) to be plunged into a metaphor, a space to release the daily (old) habit of ICTs and experience a new world without ICTs.

## 2.3. (Mindful) rejection and passive resistance

For the purpose of this thesis, it is important to understand the distinction between digital natives and digital immigrants. As stated by Guo, Dobson & Petrina (2008), digital natives – also termed as the 'net-generation' - are those who have grown up with digital devices and engaged with ICTs from a young age. In contemporary society, the digital natives are those who are born after 1980. On the contrary, digital immigrants are those who were born before 1980 and thus did not grow up in the digital world, but adopted the new technology at some point later in life (Bennett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008; Margaryan & Littlejohn, 2008; Prensky, 2001).

Digital natives are often the group related to passive resistance when being digitally disconnected. Passive resistance refers to a forced disconnection and therefore, users often suffer from anxiety tensions when being disconnected. According to Olavarria (1998), the social conditions of techno-inaccessibility are often the key drive for resistance. Yet, also digital immigrants can be related to passive resistance as psychological conditions such as cyberphobia, a fear of working with digital technology, are engaged (Urban Dictionary, n.d.). Rejection, on the other hand, is autonomous and includes a rejection of digital devices due to the technological complexity or switching costs. A rejection often concerns a selective rejection (a careful choice of being disconnected without taking the negative effects into account). Rejection, however, can also be mindful. Mindful rejection assumes that a person who fully embraced digital technology for an indefinite period (private life) or at certain times (work-related), determines through conscious evaluation that the use of digital technology has a negative effect on his or her life and therefore stops or rejects the use of digital technology for a definite or indefinite period. These negative factors mainly include health and sociological factors (Olavarria, 1998).

Thus, motivations for undertaking a digital detox holiday for digital immigrants may be related to psychological factors (cyberphobia), technological factors (technological complexity) and physical health factors (the negative health effects of ICT usage). On the other hand, motivations for digital natives to go off grid might relate to psychological factors (anxiety tensions when not able to connect). While the aim of the study is to get an understanding of the motives of Dutch tourists to undertake a digital detox holiday, it is of great significance to get a better picture of the different factors and its most associated issues with regards to the use of ICTs. Therefore, the following sub-sections will delve further into the psychological-, sociological-, technological-, and physical health-factors.

### *2.3.1. Physical health factors*

The health factors are the physical risks caused by excessive use. A myriad of studies have investigated the health issues to which frequent digital device users are exposed to (Gerr et al., 2002; Jensen et al., 2002). One of the most increased health risks to which digital users, especially computer users, are being exposed to are musculoskeletal symptoms (MSS) and disorders (MSD), referring to *"Joint diseases, rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis, spinal disorders, low back pain, and severe trauma"* (World Health Organization, 2003).

The second and also most common health issue occurring from the use of digital devices is sleeping problems. Research has indicated that especially the blue light of smartphone screens emits diodes that influence the circadian system, the body's timekeeping system that regulates the needs of sleep (Donnelly, 2012; Lin, et al., 2014; Paris, et al., 2015; World Health Organization, 2014). According to Thomee (2012), the Swedish National Survey of Public Health in 2010 reported that intensive use of computer and mobile phones (intensive: more then 2 hours without breaks) have been prospectively associated with sleep disturbances among both men and women.

Another health issue that can be designated is obesity. As stated by the World Health Organization, is obesity expected to rise dramatically in the distant future (World Health Organization, n.d.). Several studies have shown that the reason for this can be explained by looking at the population's lifestyle, such as food habits

as well as the use of digital devices (in particular television and the computer) reducing the extent of alternative physical leisure activities. For instance, Wake, Hesketh, & Waters (2003) investigated the relationship between children's body mass index (BMI) and the intensive use of television and computer among those children. The study results concluded that a high BMI was related to television but not to video gaming or computer time. On the contrary, the study by Vandelanotte, Sugiyama, & Owen (2009) concluded that the leisure time of the Internet and computer use among children should be decreased to reduce prevalence of overweight and obesity (World Health Organization, 2014).

The last health issue that can be related to the use of digital technology is the computer vision syndrome, also referred to as Digital Eye Strain. According to research of the American Optometric Association are people who spend 2 or more hours per day in front of a digital screen in risk of Digital Eye Strain, eye and vision related problems (American Optometric Association, n.d.).

### *2.3.2. Psychological factors*

Psychological factors with regard to digital devices are often related to addiction. One of the most common forms of a digital addiction in contemporary society is Internet addiction. According to the World Health Organization, there are two typical psychological factors, including the so-called 'withdrawal' referring to *'feelings of anger, tension, anxiety and/or depression when the Internet/computers are inaccessible'* (World Health Organization, p. 13), and 'negative repercussions' or 'conflict' indicating *'self-imposed social isolation and disintegration, lying, arguing, poor academic and occupational achievement and fatigue'* (World Health Organization, 2014, p. 14).

As noticed in the studies by Pearce & Gretzel (2012) and Paris et al. (2012), tensions that could occur by inaccessibility of digital devices are social communication tensions, work communication tensions, security escape tensions, and immediacy connectedness tensions. However, inaccessibility to ICTs may even lead to suicide ideation. Kim et al. (2006) examined the relationship between Internet addiction, depression, and suicidal ideation in adolescents. The study concluded that the high dependence on the Internet among Internet addicts was more related to suicidal ideation than depression.

### *2.3.3. Sociological factors*

In this thesis, the sociological factors are defined as: *''the facts and experiences that influence individuals' personality attitudes and lifestyle''* (Business Dictionary, n.d.). Thus, factors that affect the human mind of thoughts and the human behaviour in social situations. According to the current literature, one very common sociological issue resulting from digital addiction concerns problems in the relationships. Research in the UK has indicated that people with a digital addiction often face difficulties in their relationships (Donnelly, 2012). Yet, the current literature also asserts that a digital addiction often causes online affairs (Coget, Yamauchi, & Suman, 2002; Young, 2004). Young (1998) has determined that 53 percent of the users being digital addicted led to marital discord, separation, and divorce.

Another common problem related to digital addiction that can be designated are job-related problems. While on one hand, employees benefit from digital devices in the workplace as it makes the communication flow easier, there is the concern that it is on the other hand also a distraction among employees (Young, 2004). For instance, according to Stewart (2000), employers lose billions of revenue due to the Internet abuse of employees at the workplace causing less productivity. Furthermore, in social terms, employees more frequently lack quality time with the family after working hours due to being 24/7 ICT-connected and reachable by the employer. As stated by Neuhofer & Ladkin (2017, p. 350), a 'healthy' work-life balance is an amalgamation of health, good personal relations, mental welfare and productivity and satisfaction in life and work. Because of this, several European political parties demand a legislative proposal that employees no longer have to be reachable after working hours (Asscher, 2017).

The last sociological factor that can be appointed is loneliness: *''a situation in which one lives either alone or without communication with those around him''* (Karapetsas et al., 2015, p. 5). According to the research of Karapetsas et al. (2015) that examined digital addiction among Greek students, there is a high positive correlation between the addiction of digital devices and the feeling of loneliness. Also, other studies have shown that one with poor communication skills is more prone to digital addiction than those with better interpersonal skills. With its negative impacts on work or relationships, one is expected to isolate even more from healthy social activities and therefore, leading one to more loneliness

(Ceyhan & Ceyhan, 2008; Coget, Yamauchi, & Suman, 2002; Junghun, LaRose, & Peng, 2009).

### *2.3.4. Technological factors*

In Europe, the innovation in ICTs is well established. Many countries in Europe today are creating governmental interventions to further accelerate ICT innovation within and beyond national borders (King et al., 1994; Schaffers, 2011). For instance, the European Commission has been striving for more than a decade for decreased telecommunication charges for customers travelling abroad. Since 2007, the roaming prices have been reduced by 90 percent and from June 2017 roaming costs will end for individuals travelling periodically in the European Union (European Commission, 2016). Yet, this has also led to digital fatigue or the so-called techno fatigue, the tiredness of the constant use of digital devices. It is stated that techno fatigue affects especially elderly people (Griffiths, 2007). Though, taking into consideration all ages, the digital fatigue became recently noticeable in the electronic book world where sales have lately decreased tremendously. According to Kozlowski (2016), the decrease of e-books is a cause of the customers' realization to have a lack of concentration and conceptual understanding while reading from an e-reader device (Kjee, 2016).

Moreover, while the worldwide number of social media users is increasing annually (The Statistics Portal, n.d.a.), market research indicates that active behaviour on social media sites have been declining since July 2009 (Bright, Kleiser, & Grau, 2015; Gartner, 2011). One reason for this is social media fatigue, defined as: *''social media users' tendency to pull back from social media when they become overwhelmed with too many social media sites, too many friends and followers and too much time spent online maintaining these connections.*
*Boredom and concerns about online privacy are also linked to social media fatigue''* that often occurs among early adopters (Techopedia, n.d.b.). Hence, in all age categories could an aversion to technology appear due to various reasons.

In the last decade, in response to the different studies emphasizing the negative effects of ICTs on people's life, various companies started to institute changes in the way employees' use ICTs at work and outside of work. As previously mentioned, not only European political parties demand a legislative proposal that

employees no longer have to be reachable after working hours, many employers in France already begun to prohibit employees to reply emails out of office hours. In addition, companies such as Facebook, Apple, Square, Twitter, Google, Airbnb, and VMware have even gone a step further and have sent employees on tech-free retreats for the sociological and physical health well-being (Michaels, 2016). Either way, physical health factors, psychological factors, sociological factors and technological factors are a four quadrant of factors that might influence Dutch tourists to go off grid.

Additionally, apart from the motivational factors, also two constraints that might influence a digital detox holiday could be determined. The next sub-section will discuss those constraints further.

### *2.3.5. Economical and Geographical factors*

Economical and geographical factors are two factors that could be seen as constraints. Even though economical and geographical factors do not specifically link to digital detoxing, there are two factors that have to be listed when considering motives for a digital detox holiday. Economically, when one books a holiday, the price is one of the most important factors affecting the choice of the destination. Also, the economic wellbeing of a person often relates to the type of travel (domestic or international) and the type of accommodation (a luxury resort fully anticipated on digital detox or a budget-friendly accommodation). Geographically, the accessibility of the location is an important facet, but also the climate and neighbouring facilities could often be the leap to the choice (Goodall, 2004; Hoving & Steijger, 2014; Vickerman, 1978; Wang, et al., 2006).

Besides that the choice of a digital detox holiday destination could be on one hand related to economical or geographical constraints, the geographical location can be on the other hand seen as an important factor for detoxing. Not only were the eldest forms of travel focused on the improvement of health and the human wellbeing, in this era - 2000 years ago which is also known as the time of the first pilgrims, there was also a desire to travel to the Peloponnesus, a region in southern Greece, which is known as the birthplace of Asclepius, the god of healing. From Roman times, many ruins of spa waters are still visible, which were at

that time popular with respect to the physical benefits and so a place where many people travelled to (Meštrovićn, n.d.).

Nowadays, travelling for the physical wellbeing is still visible. In example, many tourists specifically choose to travel to the Mediterranean for a Mediterranean diet (Hjalager & Corigliano, 2000). Therefore, tourists also might choose specifically for highly remote areas to undertake a digital detox holiday. It can be stated that there is a worldwide geographical digital divide. For instance, in 2016 the number of mobile phone users was estimated to be 4.61 billion, i.e. 60 percent of the world population (The Statistics Portal, n.d.b.). Regarding Internet access, in 1995 less than 1 percent of the world population had Internet access, while nowadays 40 percent (3,42 billion) of the world population has an Internet connection. This shows that the majority of the world's population has no Internet access (Internet Live Statistics, n.d.). As figure 3 shows, China has the world's largest number of Internet users but also a relative low Internet penetration rate. The map also illustrates that Africa has the smallest number of users with a low Internet penetration rate. This digital division is mainly caused by structural inequality in society such as the global divide, the gender divide, the ethical divide, the income divide and the educational divide (Fuchs & Horak, 2008).

Nevertheless, from old times up to today, people specifically travel to a certain place for the physical well-being, tourists undertaking a digital detox might also choose specifically to travel to continents with the lowest Internet penetration rate such as Africa and Latin America and therefore, both the economical and geographical factors are also besides the physical health factors, psychological factors, sociological factors and technological factors two important factors to understand tourists experiences of an ICT disconnected holiday.

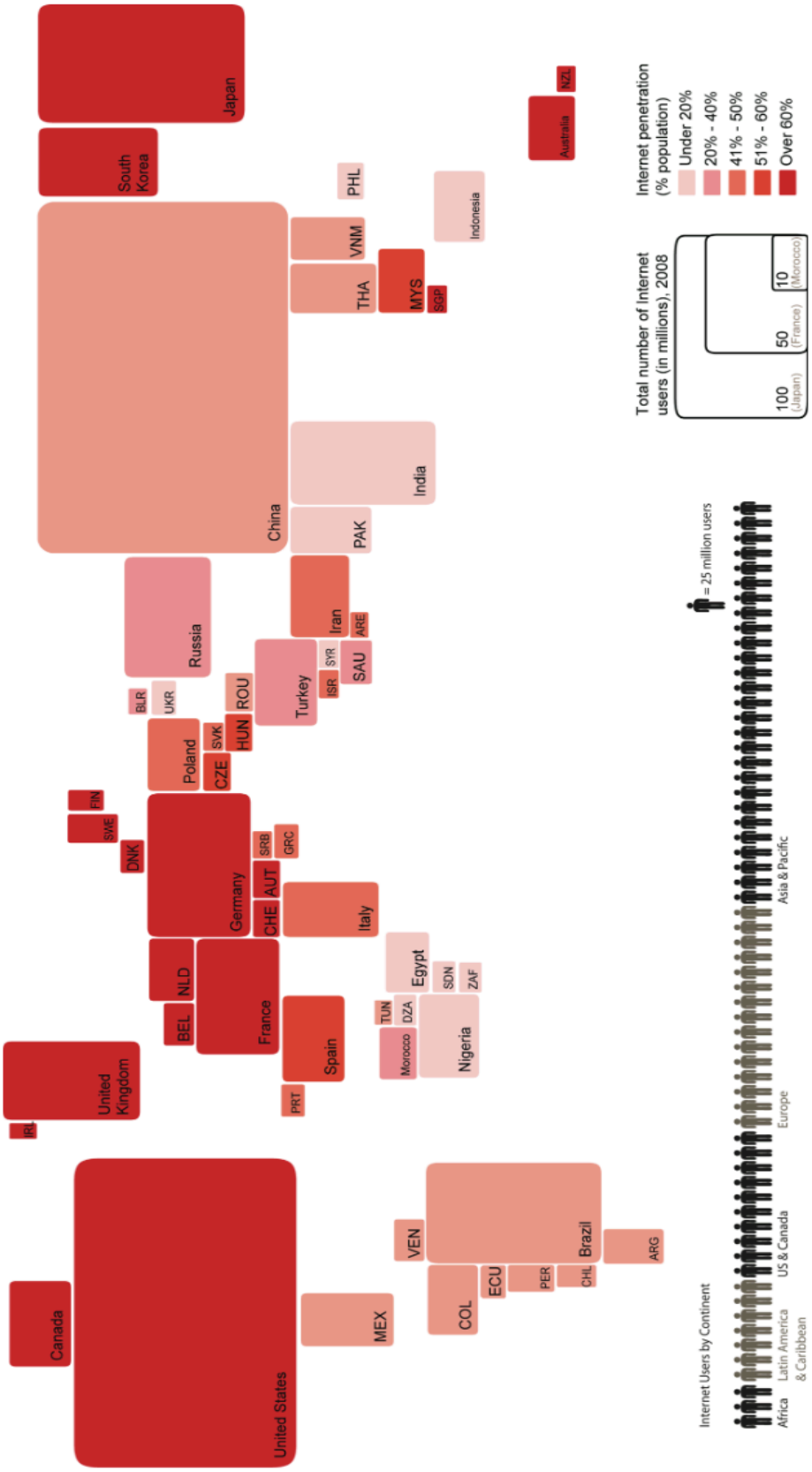


*Figure 3: Featured graphic: Digital divide - the geography of Internet Access. Source: Graham, Hale, & Stephens (2012, p. 1010).*

## 2.4. Conceptual framework

From the theoretical background, a conceptual framework has emerged. The conceptual framework brings together the different theories and is thus a visual representation of what will be investigated. The model, as shown in figure 4, displays the two different groups (digital natives and digital immigrants), the three main concepts relating to digital disconnection (passive resistance, rejection and mindful rejection), the four quadrant motivational factors (physical health, psychological, sociological and technological factors) that could drive tourists to undertake a digital detox holiday and the two constraints (geographical and economical factors) that could restrain tourist to undertake a highly disconnected holiday.

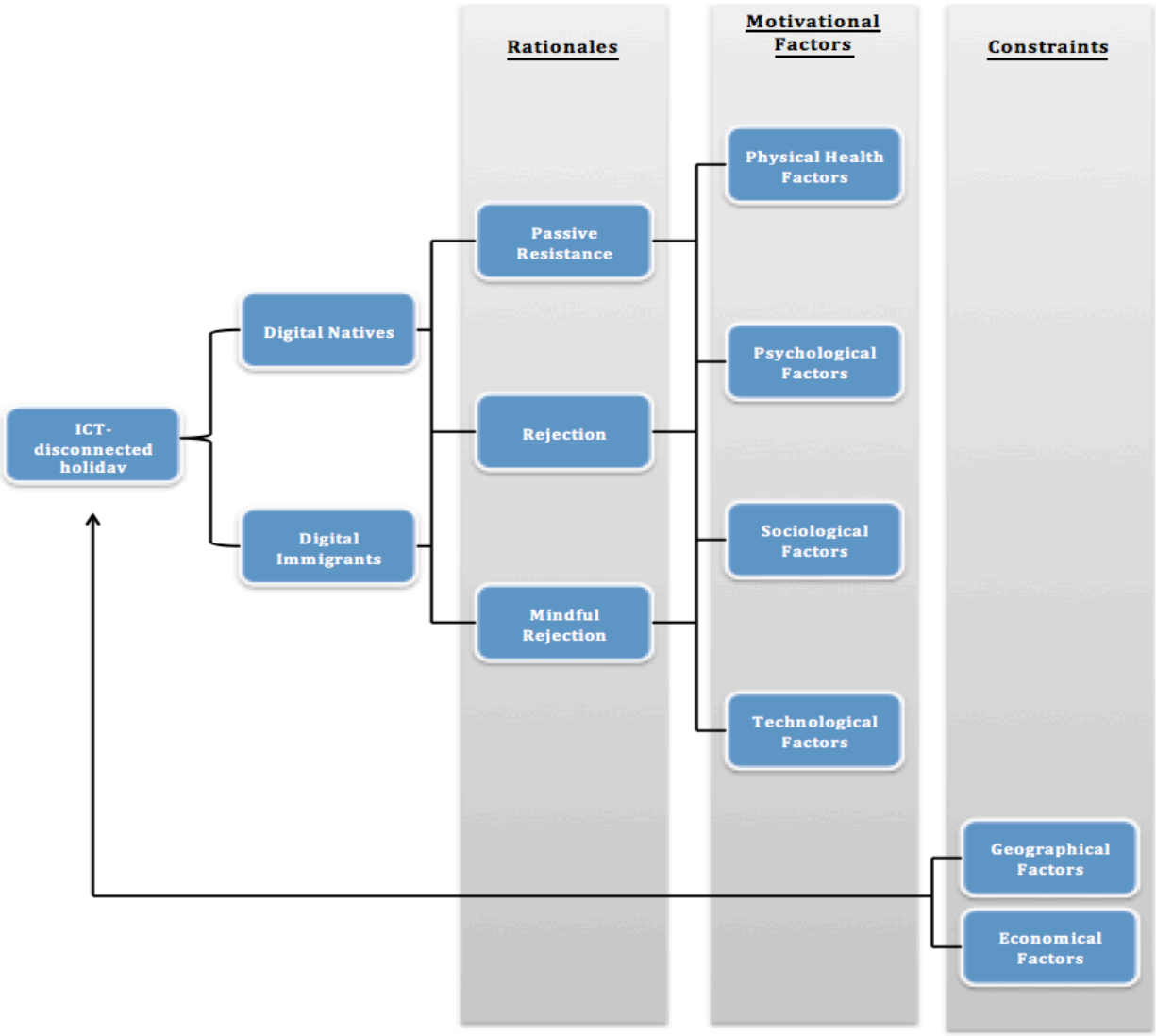


*Figure 4: Conceptual framework. Source: Own illustration.*

# 3. Research objectives

The aim of the study is to investigate and get an understanding of the motives of Dutch tourists to undertake a digital detox holiday. The study focuses on Dutch citizens from the age of 18, while according to Central Bureau of Statistics; youngsters between the ages 0-17 usually go on holiday in companion of their own parents or the parents of a friend. Besides, parents are primarily the ones choosing the destination or propose a number of destinations from which the youngsters can choose. Hence, the factors of the rationales to travel are mostly the decision of the parents and not of the youngsters (The Telegraph, 2015; Van Miltenburg, n.d.).

The main question of the study is as follows:

***‘ What are the motives of Dutch tourists to undertake a digital detox holiday?***

To support the main question, the following sub-question are developed:

- ✓ Which factors could be related to the expectations of a digital detox holiday?
- ✓ Which factors play a role to passive resistance?
- ✓ Which factors play a role to selective rejection?
- ✓ Which factors play a role to mindful rejection?
- ✓ How does the geographical location for a digital detox holiday matter?
- ✓ Is there an urgent need to re-connect after a definite time of disconnection?

## 3.1. Significance

The research project has a clear relevance to the field of tourism and mobility studies. It obviously adds a new dimension to tourism geography by examining emerging niche travel motives and mobility patterns, caused by the ever-increasing development of digital technology and usage. It is a new niche area that is still under-researched, with only few studies having address this topic so far

(Smith & Puczkó, 2015; Dickinson, Hibbert & Filimonau, 2016; Neuhofer & Ladkin, 2017). While these studies have mainly only focused on forced disconnection (passive resistance), this study will focus both on a passive resistance, selective rejection and mindful rejection and therefore the results are potentially valuable for further theoretical and empirical development in the field. From a societal point of view, due to the increase of digital technology, it is expected that a major part of the population will be affected by various negative effects, such as neurological complications, psychological disturbances and social problems. Therefore, the topic is worth examining since it addresses a growing issue that may potentially concern a large part of our society and may become even more important in a future society where innovation and technology development play a crucial prospective role (Cash, et al., 2012; Dickinson, Hibbert & Filimonau, 2016; Olavarria, 1998; Smith & Puczkó, 2015). The results from this research may help travel agencies and tourism service providers to understand the needs and motivations of customers seeking to disconnect, which is essential in order to align the supply and demand and which can be taken as first principle to develop targeted marketing strategy for newly emerging niche markets.

# 4. Methodology

With the study's purpose being to deepen the understanding of Dutch tourists experiences of an ICT disconnected holiday with the aim to get an understanding of the motives of Dutch tourists to undertake a digital detox holiday, a qualitative research approach was chosen as the most suitable for this study. While a quantitative approach could have been suitable for identifying general traits and habits from a group, it is not seen appropriate for understanding individuals' experiences and feelings. To answer the research question and the sub-questions of this study, it is important to allow participants to explain the complexities, underlying reasons, opinions, feelings and motivations of their digital detox experiences (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2008; Valentine, 2005; Veal, 2011). As contended by Mason (2002), the exploration of social processes, interpretations, social relations, social practices, experiences and understandings are particularly matched to qualitative research. Likewise, as stated by Frochot & Batat (2013), within the study area of tourism, mainly qualitative research has been used to study different aspects of tourism experiences by gaining in-depth insight into the behaviour attitudes, expectations and perceptions of tourists. With this inclusion, a qualitative research approach was chosen as the most appropriate for this study.

Additionally, digital detox holidays are a new niche area that is still under-examined with only a few studies having addressed this topic so far. According to Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, (2008), exploratory studies are particularly useful to address clearly under-examined research areas because of its flexibility for newly emerging themes that haven't been previously identified in the literature. Therefore, the research design of this study has been explorative. Gaining an understanding of the underlying motives that drive people off grid, or in other words, investigating the 'why', was the main rationale for this study, thus justifying an exploratory qualitative study design (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2008; Veal, 2011).

## 4.1. Methods

Among qualitative research, there are different data collection techniques. For this study, in-depth interviews were employed. Instead of in-depth interviews, also focus group interviews could have taken place, where the participants could comment and discuss their motivations for a digital detox holiday from their personal experiences. Yet, a focus group can cause that not every participants' perspective come through equally. Also, an under-reporting of participants' personal views and opinions could occur if participants' are not expressing a contradictiory opinion or view, or are not willing to express highly personal motivations in front of the other participants'. While the motivations for a digital detox holiday might be personal to some of the participants, in-depth interviews were the best choice for this study as it gives the possibility to gather facts and stories to shed light on the topic and to provide a deeper insight into the respondents' experiences, feelings and attitude (Conradsen, 2005; Coombes et al., 2009; Flowerdew & Martin, 2005; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

The in-depth interviews that have been held were semi-structured. A list of key questions was prior to the interview conceived and was based on the conceptual framework. Yet, the key questions allowed sufficient flexibility for participants to come up with their own themes and answers and it allowed the researcher to be responsive to relevant issues raised spontaneously by the interviewee. While the original list of key questions was in Dutch, a translated English version is included in Appendix 1.

### *4.1.1. Sampling Method*

This study has focused on Dutch tourists undertaking a digital detox holiday. To focus the study explicitly on Dutch tourists enabled the researcher to gain access easily to the customers of a Dutch travel agency and to limit miscommunications during the process of recruiting and interviewing interviewees. In total four interviewees booked a digital detox holiday via a travel agency and five compiled the travel together themselves.

Furthermore, digital detox tourists are still an elusive niche market and are therefore difficult to find and recruit. Due to the difficulty of finding respondents for the interview, different sampling methods have been used. Potential

interviewees were first contacted with the aid of a person working at a travel agency in the Netherlands that offers digital detox holidays. An e-mail was sent to the customers of the travel agency explaining the aim of the thesis and providing the contact details of the researcher in case they wanted to participate in an interview.

In addition, interview invitations were advertised via the researcher's own social network of Facebook, and detailed information about the research was posted in various Facebook groups where potential interviewees could be present. Such potential Facebook groups included among others the 'Dutch travel and holiday group', the 'digital detox holiday group tours' and the 'Dutch digital detox group'. Finally, also the snowball sampling was used to recruit interviewees, whereby initial participants could recommend new participants from their own social networks. In total, two interviewees were recruited via the snowball sampling, four via a travel agency and three via Facebook.

Thus, in total nine interviews were conducted. Even though the sample size is quite small, it was satisfactory considering the explorative focus of the study on a small demarcated and still quite unknown niche market, and the short timeframe of the study. Therefore, nine interviews are a reasonable number and resulted in a good coverage of different motives for undertaking a digital detox holiday.

While six of the interviewees were born in the Netherlands, two were from the Flemish part of Belgium and one from the Dutch Antilles. Yet, all three were living and registered in the Netherlands. Also, all nine interviewees were geographically spread over the Netherlands in north, west, middle and south. Among the interviewees, six were female and three were male.

Lastly, the ages differed from 24 to 61. Two of the interviewees were so-called digital natives and seven of the interviewees were digital immigrants. An overview of the presentation of the interviewees is depicted in table 1.

| Number of interviews | Date of interview | Type of interview | Recorded or noted | Gender | Nationality | Age | Digital native or immigrant |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | 13.03.2017 | Face-to-face | Recorded | Female | Dutch | 24 | Native |
| **2** | 21.03.2017 | Skype | Recorded | Male | Antillean | 59 | Immigrant |
| **3** | 24.03.2017 | Skype | Recorded | Female | Dutch | 48 | Immigrant |
| **4** | 27.03.2017 | Skype | Recorded | Female | Belgian | 56 | Immigrant |
| **5** | 29.03.2017 | Face-to-face | Recorded | Male | Dutch | 61 | Immigrant |
| **6** | 13.04.2017 | Phone | Noted | Male | Dutch | 54 | Immigrant |
| **7** | 14.04.2017 | Skype | Recorded | Female | Dutch | 37 | Native |
| **8** | 18.04.2017 | Skype | Recorded | Female | Belgian | 49 | Immigrant |
| **9** | 21.04.2017 | Skype | Recorded | Female | Dutch | 48 | Immigrant |

***Table 1: Presentation of the interviewees***

### *4.1.2. Data Collection*

The interviews were conducted between the 13th of March and the 21st of April. The first interview was a pilot interview. After the first interview, two key questions were revised and additional questions that were seen as important were added. Due to a limited travel budget and the geographical spread of the interviewees across the Netherlands, only two interviews were conducted face-to-face; six were made as video calls by Skype and one by phone. Eight of the interviews have been with permission recorded with the aid of the iPhone and callnote, and from one interview notes have been made.

All nine interviews were held in the Dutch language. This was chosen primarily to prevent language barriers, but also because speaking in the native language would preserve specific cultural connotations and expressions that would be omitted if the interview had been conducted in the English language. While the interviews were transcribed manually in the Dutch language, some illustrative quotes presented in the results of this thesis were translated into English. Even though the researcher has tried to translate the quotes as thoroughly as possible to preserve the original meaning, some Dutch proverbs could not be translated into English, as they do not exist in English.

### *4.1.3. Data Analysis*

According to the literature, quantitative research typically utilizes the deductive approach, where there is already a theoretical standpoint before initiating the collection of data, i.e. hypothesis will be tested. Conversely, the inductive approach is often associated with qualitative research, where a theory will be developed after data have been collected, i.e. the data comes first and the explanation later. As the research follows a qualitative approach, where first insights and facts about the motives of Dutch tourists to travel to ICT disconnected places is gained before the explanation follows, it can be stated that the study follows the inductive approach. With the research following a qualitative and inductive approach, the results of the study are not intended to be generalized, but expressively to understand the deeper motives that drive Dutch tourists off grid (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2008; Veal, 2011).

To analyse the interview transcriptions, a thematic analysis method was used, which in this study refers to a qualitative analytic method to identify, analyse and report patterns (themes) within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While innovative researchers are increasingly using electronic methods for coding data, a limited budget and therefore no access to licensed software caused that the coding was done manually. Even though manual is tedious and time-consuming, the sample was relatively small, so manual was quite easy (Basit, 2003).p

### *4.1.4. Ethical Considerations*

Ethical issues should be considered in any kind of research (Flowerdew & Martin, 2005; Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2000). Therefore, before the interviews were conducted, the following ethical considerations were taken into account (Flowerdew & Martin, 2005; University of Glasgow, n.d.):

- Before the interview, a detailed explanation about the topic and purpose of the interview were explained in both written and oral form to the interviewees to ensure informed consent to participate.
- The interviewees were offered different alternatives to a face-to-face interview (Skype, Face Time and a phone interview) to ensure that interviewees could be interviewed at a time and location they were comfortable at.

- An important ethical consideration has been the personal confidentiality. The interviewees and interviewer have agreed that the interviewees will be kept anonymous and that interviewees wee allowed to withdraw from the study at any time without explanation.
- The interviewees that were recorded were asked for permission first, ensuring that the taped would not be shared with any third parties.
- A plain language summary of the thesis will be written in the Dutch language and sent by E-mail to the interviewees after the completion of the thesis to ensure that participants who declared having interest in the outcomes of the research would have access to the finding.

# 5. Results and Analysis

In this chapter, the results and analysis are presented. The chapter is divided into four sub-sections: 1) expectations, 2) factors that play a role to passive resistance, selective rejection and mindful rejection, 3) geographical and economical factors, and 4) urge to re-connect. Finally, all the results are brought together in a theoretical framework.

## 5.1. Expectations

The results of the study showed that Dutch tourists had different expectations for a digital detox holiday. As shown in table 2, were the different factors related to the expectations of a digital detox holiday: geographical factors, physical health factors, technological factors and psychological factors.

| Factors | Motivations |
|---|---|
| **Geographical** | • Activities (e.g. sightseeing tours)<br>• Being highly remote |
| **Physical Health** | • Spiritual well-being (yoga and meditation)<br>• Stress relief |
| **Technological** | • Technological fatigue (no need to use expensive devices) |
| **Psychological** | • Concentrating on non-digital leisure activities (e.g. reading a book). |

***Table 2: Factors related to the expectations of a digital detox holiday.***

Geographically, interviewees indicated various activities they undertook during the digital detox holiday that motivated them to undertake a digital detox holiday:

> *"We always dreamt about visiting ruins of ancient civilizations. [..]… An important experience for us was being able to participate in sightseeing tours. […]… We have visited Yucatán, the city of the Mayans. […]… The memory of Yucatán is worth a thousand words for us. We enjoyed every second we walked around at Yucatán"* (Interviewee 5).

*''We have rented a sailboat and been sailing for a few days. During those days we have been mooring in diverse ports and visited those different villages. Before the holidays we searched information about the opportunity to rent a sailboat and devising the villages we would visit'' (Interviewee 6).*

*''We booked an accommodation close to [name of Spanish village], an inland area in Spain. The area is well-known for its peaceful setting what appealed to us''* (Interviewee 7).

Thus, interviewees mentioned that they expected to overstay in a natural and peaceful surrounding, being able to participate in sightseeing tours, and the opportunity to visit different villages while sailing.

With regards to the physical health factors, the spiritual well-being and stress relieve through yoga and meditation were mentioned as digital detox expectations:

*'' My husband and I have been undertaking a digital detox holiday before… a 10-day cleanse in Portugal which we liked a lot. In the first instance, we wanted to go again for a 10-day cleanse until [name of person], my sister in law who works at [name of travel agency], told us about digital detox holidays. The concept appealed to us… participating in various workshops in on- and offline communication… no kids at the resorts… no stress of work at our minds... […]… Our expectation was to be it a spiritual journey… being able to find ourselves and relieve stress by joining yoga and meditation classes''* (Interviewee 9).

Also, one interviewee stated that during backpacking in Africa, there was no need to use technological devices, as the main purpose of the trip was to live the life of the locals:

*'' […]… For me the main expectation was… once being able to explore a culture fully, engaging fully with the locals and live a life like them… a life without those expensive devices we constantly are using''. […]… During my trip in Africa, I learned a lot, not only about myself but also about life in general. I*

*learned that using laptops, mobiles, televisions and such actually limits us to see something of the world. Something beautiful we cannot experience through media or pictures but only by engaging ourselves into it* [Interviewee 1).

As interviewee 1 stated, living the traditional life of the locals was expected to happen when being digitally disconnected. Besides, interviewee 1 claimed that becoming part of the locals only would be possible when acting like the locals.

Another expectation that was mentioned by one interviewee was psychological factors – concentrating on non-digital leisure activities:

*''The Dordogne offers mountains where the range is bad. Mandatory relaxing with a book in the nature with the possibilities for hiking and cycling in the mountains''* (Interviewee 3).

As Interviewee 3 indicated, various activities such as hiking and cycling, but also the opportunity for other non-digital leisure activities created the image of a digital detox holiday.

## 5.2. Factors that play a role to passive resistance, selective rejection and mindful rejection

With regards to which factors play a role to passive resistance, selective rejection, and mindful rejection, various factors can be designated. Table 3 shows which factors played for the interviewees a role to passive resistance, selective rejection, and a mindful rejection.

| Rationales | Factors | Motivation |
|---|---|---|
| **Passive resistance** | • Technological factor | • Forced disconnection (in-accessibility to connect) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Selective rejection** | • Informational factors<br>• Sociological factors<br>• Psychological | • Obtained information from a travel agency or closest ones<br>• Escape fierce arguments<br>• Improve social communication<br>• Knowing what it feels like without digital devices |
| **Mindful rejection** | • Physical Health factors<br>• Psychological factors | • Spiritual well-being<br>• Recovering from a disease<br>• Eliminating radiation range<br>• Relieve stress<br>• Working tensions |

***Table 3: Factors that contribute to the rationales to undertake a digital detox holiday***

The results showed that a passive resistance occurred due to a forced disconnection. The forced disconnection related to technological factors (the in-accessibility to connect at the campsite):

> *''Bikini, sunscreen, tablet… everything was packed for the holiday. […]… So we arrived at the arrival desk to check in after a long ride. [Name of daughter] wanted to inform grandfather that we arrived safely. Asking at the arrival desk how to connect to the Wi-Fi in order to make use of WhatsApp, we got informed that the campsite did not provide Wi-Fi access''* (Interviewee 8).

A selective rejection has occurred by informational factors. Some of the interviewees stated that a close friend or family provided information about either the existence or the possibility to undertake a digital detox holiday. As one interviewee stated:

*''A friend of mine has been on a digital detox holiday. From her enthusiastic stories and experiences, I also wanted to experience it. {…]… Sometimes you just become motivated to do something by others''* (Interviewee 1).

Also, before booking a digital detox holiday interviewees indicated that they searched for information. Furthermore, sociological factors such as the improvement of social communication and the escape of fierce arguments have been mentioned as part of a selective rejection to undertake a digital detox holiday:

*''I currently live alone, but I am moving in with my boyfriend from next month on. When visiting my boyfriend [name of boyfriend] or when he is visiting me, we sometimes mention to each other how cosy it is when one is distracted by the mobile phone. I hope this will not cause problems between us in the future when we live together. […]… At my parent's place, I do not have those issues as my parents barely use their mobile phones and being at their place neither me''* (Interviewee 1).

*''Going out of dinner with my wife while she lives in her iPhone rather than communicating with me, a person who sits on the opposite site of the table. […]… Yes, many time we argued about the use of digital devices''* (Interviewee 2).

*'' My both children are using a smartphone and tablet throughout the day. The use of those devices diminishes the communication within the homely circle. They often sit like zombies, they just do not hear you if you ask them something. [...]... Recently, it all ended in a fight where [name son] threw the tablet on the table... broken... [...]... Since that day I refuse to buy a new tablet''* (Interviewee 6).

Additionally, also a psychological factor can be designated to a selective rejection. One interviewee wanted to find out what it is like to have no digital communication devices:

*''[…]… As I said, I am definitely not against the smartphone, laptop or other digital communication devices, but the temptation, the fear of missing*

*something. It limits us to live the now. A digital detox holiday for me has been a great opportunity to find out what it is like to have no digital communication devices with me''* (Interviewee 4).

Moreover, physical health factors and psychological factors contributed to the rationale of a mindful rejection. As the results show, interviewees mindfully decided to undertake a digital detox holiday with motives of spiritual well being, recovering from a disease, eliminating radiation range, and to relieve stress:

*''After chemotherapy, the choice was made quickly. A distant journey… a journey to recover… a journey without radiation around. […]… After such a heavy disease you as a person begin to look different to the world. Some people start doing extreme activities and want to try out everything in life. I have chosen to disconnect myself from harmful radiation. Reducing the chance that the disease will grow back* (Interviewee 5).

*''I work as a recruitment consultant at [name of company] and use a computer and phone all the time at work. I cannot do my work without. The frequent use of a computer often causes me to have red eyes at the end of the day. […] Coming home I again crawl directly behind the computer to do the necessary administrative work. […]… My job is about making deals between client and customer. In this job, you don't want to miss out an opportunity for making a deal. It chases you day and night''* (Interviewee 7).

## 5.3. Geographical and economical factors

Despite the above, tourists mentioned that the geographical location also matters, whether or not directly. The study results show that the climate of the location, the distance, the natural surrounding and the activities at the destination were important aspects to consider:

*''Sun, sea, beach and a delicious cocktail. That's vacation. […]… When we decide to go on holidays, we look for sunny destinations. That's what everybody does right? When not considering the weather, we also could have stayed in the Netherlands''* (Interviewee 6).

*'' I drove together with my two children to the Dordogne. All alone! […]… The journey took about 12 hours. It should not have been longer''* [Interviewee 3).

*''Within a few hours, we are at [name of a resort], where we enjoyed as usually the wellness area for the entire weekend. […]… I have a fear of flying so any destination on short driving distance is the perfect match''* (Interviewee 2).

*''We always go by car to Spain. Mainly around the northern area as it is doable by car. More south we would take the plane and leave the caravan behind''* (Interviewee 8).

Hence, interviewees indicated that especially sunny destinations were mainly considered for a digital detox holiday. Yet, for two interviewees the driving distance had been of great importance due to the type of holiday (camping). For another interviewee the driving distance had been of great importance due to a fear of flying. Besides, one interviewee indicated that travelling by plane with young children was not regarded as the best travel option.

Furthermore, one interviewee indicated to work at the agricultural land in order to sustain during the travel. Thus, an economical factor also can be designated:

*''I have planned my trip to Africa well in advance. I wanted to experience a holiday…I mean… experiencing the wild nature… the locals... life… […]… To supply myself I worked at different places in the agriculture for a short period of time. Working together with the locals gave me the opportunity to experience the real African life. […]… When I had enough money earned to sustain myself for a while I hitchhiked to the village I wanted to visit''* (Interviewee 1).

## 5.4. Urge to re-connect

When considering tourists urge to re-connect after being disconnected for a definite period of time, the results showed that technological factors related to social media fatigue can be designated as a motive to not re-connect directly after returning from holidays:

*''If you have been absent for a while then there is no urgent need to get re-connected right away... maybe also the fear to get overwhelmed played a role to that''* (Interviewee 1).

On the other hand, the results show that the interviewees that feel the urge to re-connect directly after coming home are mainly related to psychological factors like social communication tensions (the need to let family/friends know about the return), and working communication tensions (upcoming fear that important calls from work were missed):

*''After coming home I directly checked my work e-mail. […]… After a digital detox holiday, life unfortunately goes on again''* (Interviewee 7).

From the above results, the theoretical model shown in figure 5 has been designed. According to the obtained results and as shown in figure 5, an interviewee indicated to undertake a digital detox holiday due to the lack of ICT facilities and thus a passive resistance (a forced disconnection) occurred due to techno-inaccessibility (a technological factor). Yet, a forced disconnection cannot be seen as a motivational factor and thus is regarded as a constraint. Not only as interviewee 8 indicated that undertaking a digital detox holiday was actually not opted, but also as interviewee 8 indicated when having a choice, the travel would have been preferred to a destination providing ICT facilities.

From the perspective of a selection rejection, the results indicated that a selective rejection could be linked to informational, sociological and psychological factors. Interviewees indicated that they searched information about a digital detox holiday or got information from a friend or relative (informational factor) but further did not took any health benefits into account. While some interviewees indicated to undertake a digital detox holiday to escape fierce arguments and to improve social communication with partner or family members (sociological factor) other interviewees indicated that they wanted to know how it feels without digital devices (psychological factor).

Furthermore, interviewees also indicated to undertake a digital detox holiday for health benefits. Motives that were given were spiritual well being, recovering from

a disease, eliminating radiation range and relieve stress. Thus, a mindful rejection of ICT for health benefits. Besides, also a psychological factor – relieving working tensions were mentioned.

Finally, both geographical factors (climate, distance, and the natural surroundings) as economical factors (the need for working opportunities) were mentioned and included in the model as constraints. As interviewees indicated, while geographical factors were not considered as part of the motivation to undertake a digital detox holiday, various factors such as the driving distance and the type of holiday constrained some interviewees to a specific geographical location.

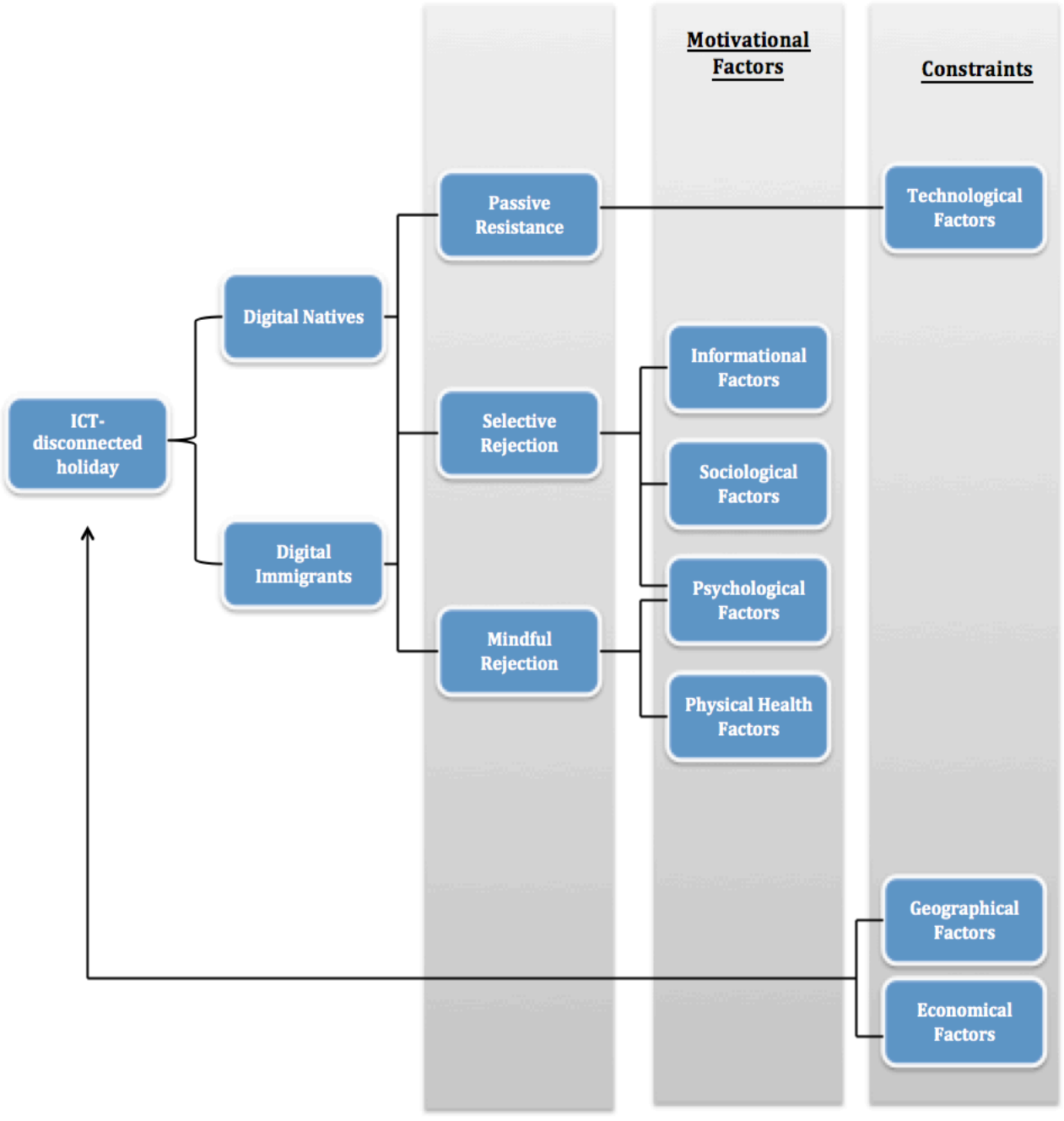


*Figure 5: Theoretical framework. Source: Own illustration.*

To summarize, table 4 depicts all the factors and their belonging motivations or constraints for a digital detox holiday. While informational, sociological, psychological and physical health factors directly influenced the interviewees to undertake a digital detox holiday, others were forced by technological factors (techno inaccessibility) and constrained to a specific geographical location due to economical factors and severe geographical expectations or constraints as the driving distance.

| **Factors** | **Motivations** | **Constraints** |
|---|---|---|
| Physical Health factors | • Spiritual well-being<br>• Recovering from a disease<br>• Eliminating radiation range<br>Relieve stress | |
| Psychological factors | • Relieving working tensions (relaxing)<br>• Knowing how it feels without digital devices<br>• Concentrating on reading a book | |
| Sociological factors | • Escape fierce arguments<br>• Improve social communication with partner/family | |
| Technological factors | | • Techno-inaccessibility (forced disconnection) |
| Informational factors | • Obtained information from a travel agency or close ones | • |
| Geographical | | • Climate<br>• Distance<br>• Natural surrounding<br>• Being highly remoted<br>• Activities (sightseeing tours) |
| Economical | | • Work opportunities |

***Table 4: Factors and its motivations and constraints to undertake a digital detox holiday***

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# 6. Discussion

The results from this study do not show clear differences of how digital natives versus digital immigrants feel about ICTs in contemporary life. Even though a few interviewees stated that the world has changed rapidly and they sometimes face problems using digital devices. Yet, both the digital natives as digital immigrants were users of different digital devices such as the smartphones, satellite TV, laptops, and tablets. Therefore, it can be stated that it is out of question that any of the interviewees leads to cyberphobia.

While according to the literature review, digital natives are often the group related to passive resistance when digitally disconnected, the results indicated that the digital natives both selectively and mindfully rejected digital devices for a definite period of time. Yet, a selective rejection was related to informational, sociological and psychological factors and a mindful rejection has been related to physical health factors and psychological factors.

Moreover, only a few of the interviewees indicated to undertake a digital detox holiday for the second time. The digital detox holiday initiated the European market in 2015, and therefore it is not surprising that many of the interviewees got to know about the existence of digital detox holidays through a friend, family, an article in the newspaper and lifestyle magazine and by advertisements on social media. Yet, less than half of the interviewees booked their holiday with the aid of a travel agency. The digital detox holidays that were compiled by the interviewees themselves consisted mainly of travels to ICT disconnected places such as the mountain area or to wellness resorts. The digital detox holidays that were booked via a travel agency mainly consisted of detox packages where the travellers were self-responsible for not carrying digital devices to the destination. Popular locations were especially the mountain and rural areas, but also beach areas close to the habituated world were popular.

Furthermore, various factors and motives for undertaking a digital detox holiday can be identified. The factors that contributed to the drive of tourists to undertake a digital detox holiday are informational-, sociological-, physical health-, and

psychological-factors. Not directly related to the motivation to undertake a digital detox holiday, but factors that tourists considered as well when booking or planning the holiday were geographical and economical factors. Yet, while some interviewees indicated that the location of a digital detox holiday was often constrained by the distance and for one interviewee by work opportunities, both geographical and economical factors could be regarded as constraints.

While researchers such as Pearce & Gretzel (2012) and Paris, et al. (2015) concluded that an unexpected disruption of digital connectivity resulted in social communication tensions, work communication tensions, security escape tensions, and immediacy connectedness tensions, this study showed that those tensions led people to undertake a digital detox holiday. Social communication tensions that drove interviewees to undertake a digital detox holidays were reduced communication between partner/family at home due to the use of digital devices and the escape of fierce arguments. The work communication tensions led people to undertake a digital detox holiday to relieve stress and to have the mind off from work. The immediacy connectedness tensions relates to the fact that some interviewees indicated the urgent need they have to reply messages, phone calls and/or E-mails directly. Some interviewees indicated they wanted to escape this. Finally, security tensions were also indicated, which in this study can be indicated by the results of interviewees taking on a digital detox holiday a mobile phone with them to use in case of an emergency.

With regards to the results, a theoretical model has been designed (figure 5), that describes which factors are related to the rationales (passive resistance, selective rejection and mindful rejection) contributing to undertake an ICT-disconnected holiday or a so-called digital detox holiday. Yet, more research in the area of digital detox holiday could expand the model and factors over time.

While the market of digital detox holidays is still a quite unknown market in the Netherlands, and which is still under-examined with only a few studies having addressed the topic so far, the results of this study adds clearly a new dimension in tourism geography. Besides, the results of this research will be helpful for travel agencies and accommodation providers to understand the needs, motivations, and constraints of customers, which is essential in order to align the supply and demand and which can be taken as first principle to apply targeted marketing.

# 7. Conclusion & Future Research

This chapter is divided into two subsections. Section 7.1 will highlight the purpose of the study and will answer the sub-questions and the main question. Section 6.2 will thereafter designate the gaps of the study and points out areas for future research.

## 7.1. Conclusion

The main purpose of the study was to examine and deepen the understanding of Dutch tourists' experiences of an ICT disconnected holiday with the aim to get an understanding of the motives of Dutch tourists to undertake a digital detox holiday. Due to that digital detox tourism has been tremendously under-examined due to that the market of digital detox recently initiated in Europe, the study has been explicitly an explorative research. The sub-questions that had to be answered were:

- ✓ Which factors could be related to the expectations of a digital detox holiday?
- ✓ Which factors play a role to passive resistance?
- ✓ Which factors play a role to selective rejection?
- ✓ Which factors play a role to mindful rejection?
- ✓ How does the geographical location for a digital detox holiday matter?
- ✓ Is there an urgent need to re-connect after a definite time of disconnection?

According to the results, Dutch tourists had geographical expectations (sightseeing tours and being highly remoted), physical health expectations (a spiritual place that allows to participate yoga and meditation), and technological factors (technological fatigue related to no need to use expensive devices during the holiday)

Furthermore, the research showed that technological factors (technological in-accessibility) contributed to passive resistance. A selective rejection contributes to informal factors (obtained information about the existence of a digital detox holiday), sociological factors (the improvement of social communication and the escape of fierce arguments) and psychological factors (knowing how it feels

without digital devices). Physical health factors (spiritual well-being, recovering from a disease, eliminating radiation range) and psychological factors (knowing how it feels to without digital devices, relieving stress) can be seen as contributions to mindful rejection.

Moreover, according to the results of the study, the geographical location matters when booking a digital detox holiday. The results of the study showed that almost all of the interviewees travelled beyond borders. Factors that were considered as important for the choice of the destination were the climate, distance, natural surrounding and activities at the destination or not at least at the accommodation. Even though interviewees claimed that the geographical factors did not play a role to the main motivation for undertaking a digital detox holiday, geographic factors however, seemed to play a tremendous role for the choice of the destination. Considering the distance given as a geographical factor, the factor also could be therefore seen as a constraint to the type of holiday (detox package, tech-free package or highly disconnected package). Yet, to claim this, further research however is necessary.

When considering tourists urge to re-connect after being disconnected for a definite period of time, the results showed that technological factors related to social media fatigue can be designated as a motive to not re-connect directly after returning from holidays. On the other hand, the results also show that the interviewees that feel the urge to re-connect directly after coming home are mainly related to psychological factors like social communication tensions (the need to let family/friends know about the return), and working communication tensions (upcoming fear that important calls from work were missed).

Finally, according to the results, the motives to go on a digital detox holiday were related to selective rejection and a mindful rejection. A mindful rejection in the way to improve health (physical health factors) and overcome psychological factors (as the work communication tension) and a selective rejection in the form of sociological factors, to reach better communication with the partner/family and/or spend more time with the family/partner.

## 7.2. Further Research

Digital detox tourism is a complex area to study while there is not yet an agreed definition of the topic. Besides, as digital detox tourism recently initiated in the European market, it has been clearly understudied in academia terms. Especially quantitative research to quantify the market is an area that never has been examined. The market could be quantified in two different ways: the supply side and the demand side.

Moreover, the study area lends itself to examine further the aftermath of a digital detox holiday. While this study gives some insights into the motives that drive people to go off grid for a definite period of time, the aftermath has not been deeply examined. Interesting could be a medical or psychological study examining the physical health of tourists before a digital detox holiday and after. However, this would concern a long-term study to designate the health issues that play a role to undertake a digital detox holiday and designating the benefits of a digital detox from a medical side.

In addition, even though this study attempted to understand the choice of the destination for a digital detox holiday to a certain extent, the decision-making process is missing. Research in this field could help the supply side to further understand customers' needs and to respond to the need. As well, examining further how constraints in relative to motivational factors influences a digital detox holiday experience could be further examined.

Lastly, even though this study have mentioned the concepts of digital natives and digital immigrants, a comparison study between the two groups could be made and a quantitative research could be held which links the two groups to the motivations to understand the causal variables.

To conclude, digital detox is a study area that is still highly under-examined. Therefore, the study area lends itself from many different perspectives for future research. This study has given the base for understanding tourists' motivations for undertaking a digital detox holiday however; future research also could further deepen the understanding of tourists' constraints and motivations by applying different research techniques such as quantitative research.

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# Appendix

## Appendix 1: Key Questions

| | |
|---|---|
| **Background** | • Could you tell me something about yourself? Are you living alone, having a family, children?<br>• How often do you use digital devices in your everyday life? (Work and/or private)<br>• How do you feel about ICTs in nowadays-contemporary society?<br>• Do you ever face problems handling digital devices?<br>• Does the use of ICTs influences your daily life or family life? |
| **Choice of type of holiday (digital detox holiday)** | • How did you get to know about the existence of a digital detox holiday?<br>• Why did you decided to go on a digital detox holiday?<br>• Were there any specific expectations? |
| **Choice of travel/holiday** | • To where did you travel and for how long?<br>• Did you travel alone or did you have travelling companions with whom u went on holiday?<br>• Did you booked the digital detox holiday via a travel agency or did you compile the travel yourself/via a friend/together with someone?<br>• Was your travel destination fully disconnected from ICTs?<br>• Did you brought any devices with you on the holiday? |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Has it been your first digital detox holiday or have you been going more often on a digital detox holiday? |
| **Choice of accommodation and geographical location** | • Were there any specific criteria that influenced the choice of the destination and/or accommodation? (Facilities, climate, costs, distance…)<br>• Did the holiday accommodation provided some possibility to use any form of ICTs?<br>• Did you plan to undertake any activities during the digital detox holiday?<br>• Did you undertake any specific activities during the holiday |
| **Experience & Future** | • How did you feel after an ICT-disconnected holiday? Did you have the need to directly to connect?<br>• What did the most appeal to you during the digital detox holiday? What did the less appeal you during the digital detox holiday?<br>• Have you used during the holiday any ICT devices?<br>• Would you consider another digital detox holiday again in the future? |