



Technology and Digital Well-Being

In this class, we will reflect on technology's impact on well-being. We will also learn about dark patterns, and will test popular mobile games for dark patterns.

Preparation

Read and watch:

- [The Phone in the Room: We examine the raging debate about smartphones and teenage mental health.](#)
- [It's not you. Phones are designed to be addicting.](#)
- [These Genshin Impact Fans Spent \\$1,000 to \\$90,000 On Its Characters](#)
- [Meet the Man Who Has Spent \\$70,000 Playing a Mobile Game](#)

Prepare for class by taking notes about what stood out to you, what you particularly agreed or disagreed with, things you had questions about, etc.

Optional: Consider also reading/watching/listening to:

- [Why Are Teens in Crisis? Here's What the Evidence Says.](#)
- [Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?](#)
- [Lab for Scalable Mental Health: Project YES](#)
- [The World Health Organization's Definition of Mental Health](#)

In Class

Activity 1: Digital Well-Being Discussion

We will start class by discussing the readings.

Activity 2: Identify Dark Patterns in Games

In this activity, we will identify dark patterns in free-to-play (F2P) mobile games. We will focus on F2P games because dark patterns are prevalent and easy to identify in F2P games. Of course, dark patterns also exist in other types of apps and websites.

Read about:

- [Temporal Dark Patterns](#)
- [Monetary Dark Patterns](#)
- [Social Dark Patterns](#)
- [Psychological Dark Patterns](#)

After finishing the readings, discuss with a neighbor: **Have you seen these dark patterns in apps before? In which apps?**

Next, you will identify dark patterns in popular mobile games.

1. Browse the iOS App Store or the Google Play Store and view the top free mobile games.
2. Choose a game and [search for it on Dark Pattern Games](#). Don't read the reviews yet.
 - If you can't find the game on Dark Pattern Games, look for a different game. The game must be on Dark Pattern Games, or you won't be able to submit a review.
3. Once you've found a game on Dark Pattern Games, play the game for 5-10 minutes.
4. Finally, submit a review of the game on Dark Pattern Games. As part of your review, identify which dark patterns are present in the game.

When you have finished testing, write the name of your game on the board. Then, discuss with a neighbor: **What dark patterns did you discover? Why do you think the developer included these dark patterns? How harmful do you think these dark patterns are? Do you think these dark patterns are particularly harmful for certain users?**

Note: If you're concerned that you might get hooked on game when testing it, choose a game with a theme that doesn't appeal to you (e.g., a game targeted at children). Also, consider uninstalling the game when you've finished testing it.

Note: If you finish early, test and review several more games.

Activity 3: Record Smartphone Usage Data

For homework, you will analyze your own smartphone usage. To collect data about your smartphone usage, follow these instructions:

- [Enable Screen Time on iOS](#)
- [Enable Digital Wellbeing on Android](#)

If you have difficulty enabling these features, ask the instructor for help. If you don't have a phone with these features, the instructor will provide an alternate assignment.

Submit

If you didn't have Screen Time or Digital Wellbeing enabled on your phone, wait at least two days for data to be collected. This data will help you reflect on your own smartphone usage.

Write at least 300 words total, answering the questions shown in the template below. Refer to your [Screen Time](#) or [Digital Wellbeing](#) data when responding. Also, share any thoughts on how this activity could be improved in the future.

Template

- On average, how much time do you spend on your smartphone per day? How many times do you pick up your smartphone? How many notifications do you receive?
- Are there any apps you have an unhealthy relationship with? What dark patterns do those apps employ?
 - If you would prefer not to disclose an app's name, you can describe the general category of the app (e.g., a puzzle game, a dating app, etc.)
- These strategies may help you control your technology usage:
 - For problematic apps:
 - Disable their notifications

- Set time limits
- Move them off your home screen
- Uninstall them
- Unsubscribe from marketing emails
- [Make your screen grayscale](#)
- Turn off autoplay for videos (e.g., Netflix)
- Turn off your phone at night
- Scheduled Do Not Disturb times (e.g., when in class)
- Turn your phone on silent mode
- Can you think of other strategies to control your technology usage?
- Will you try any of these strategies? If so, which strategies? If not, why not?

Learning Goals

Students will:

- Reflect on technology's impact on digital well-being
- Identify dark patterns in mobile games
- Reflect on how they use technology
- Develop oral and written communication skills