

Disconnected

“It never ceases to amaze me: we all love ourselves more than other people, but care more about their opinion than our own. But eventually, happiness of life should depend upon the quality of own thoughts, because you don’t control the power of outside events.” This is an extract of *Meditations* of Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius (161 till 180 BC), and it reflects his extensive study of Stoic philosophy.

His personal writings can be easily related to today’s 21st century, where external events, validations and judgements have troubled our personal point of view. The never-ending stream of messages and demands require immediate answers. Digitalization has disturbed the thought process of all generations, but made the most clear impact on generation Y (born from 1980s till 2000) and generation Z (born from 2000 till present). The use of tablets has increased from 22% in 2013 to 62% in 2015 for instance, mostly for children between 13-19, according to a study done by Ipsos. [1](#)

Are the amount of likes, shares and requests the new source of recognition and happiness, similarly to the consumerism in the 1920s, to validate our status? The question is, as Marcus Aurelius noted, if the extrinsic approval is not just a distraction of what is really worthy of attention in life.

In my opinion, the power of portable devices and the uncontrolled use over it, is firmly connected to our desperate need for approval and avoidance of self-interest. Increasing activity on the internet, leads to a higher dependence on others, misunderstandings and faster interpersonal conflicts. Smartphones were introduced in 2007, and by 2015 92% of teens and young adults owned a smartphone. The rise in depressive symptoms under teenagers is significant, [2](#) and disconnecting from social media is a scary thing to do for our generation, letting us feel socially isolated. A clinical psychologist at the Child Mind Institute, Alexandra Hamlet points out, “The more superficial the contact is, the less likely it’s going to cause you to feel connected, which is something we all need.”

Already in the 19th century, the philosopher Kierkegaard acknowledged the following: *Anxiety is the dizziness of freedom*. The more freedom, choices or opportunities we have, the more anxious or lost we seem to be in real-time decision making. It is easy to see that our freedom is restricted nowadays by the use of the phone, but I am not certain if this has helped us to move forward. With Twitter’s limitation of the 140 characters, it is likely that messages will be received as misunderstood or provocative. Especially in the era where internet is a highly effective tool on an educational, political and entertainment level, we should try to seek values and freedom outside of the virtual reality. Disconnecting from the digital “happiness” will help us to strengthen our own autonomy, authenticity and will also helps us to create a deeper understanding of our own nature, next to the ones of others. A liberating choice, isn’t it, to let our mind run on what we have already, instead on what we lack?

[1 https://www.ipsos.com/en-nl/generation-y-millennials](https://www.ipsos.com/en-nl/generation-y-millennials)

<https://www.google.nl/amp/s/www.blogdumoderateur.com/etude-ipsos-junior-connect-2015/amp/m>

[2 https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2167702617723376](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2167702617723376)

[3 https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/8501511-think-not-so-much-of-what-you-lack-as-of](https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/8501511-think-not-so-much-of-what-you-lack-as-of)