HUMAN FLOURISHING LAB
THE ARCHBRIDGE INSTITUTE

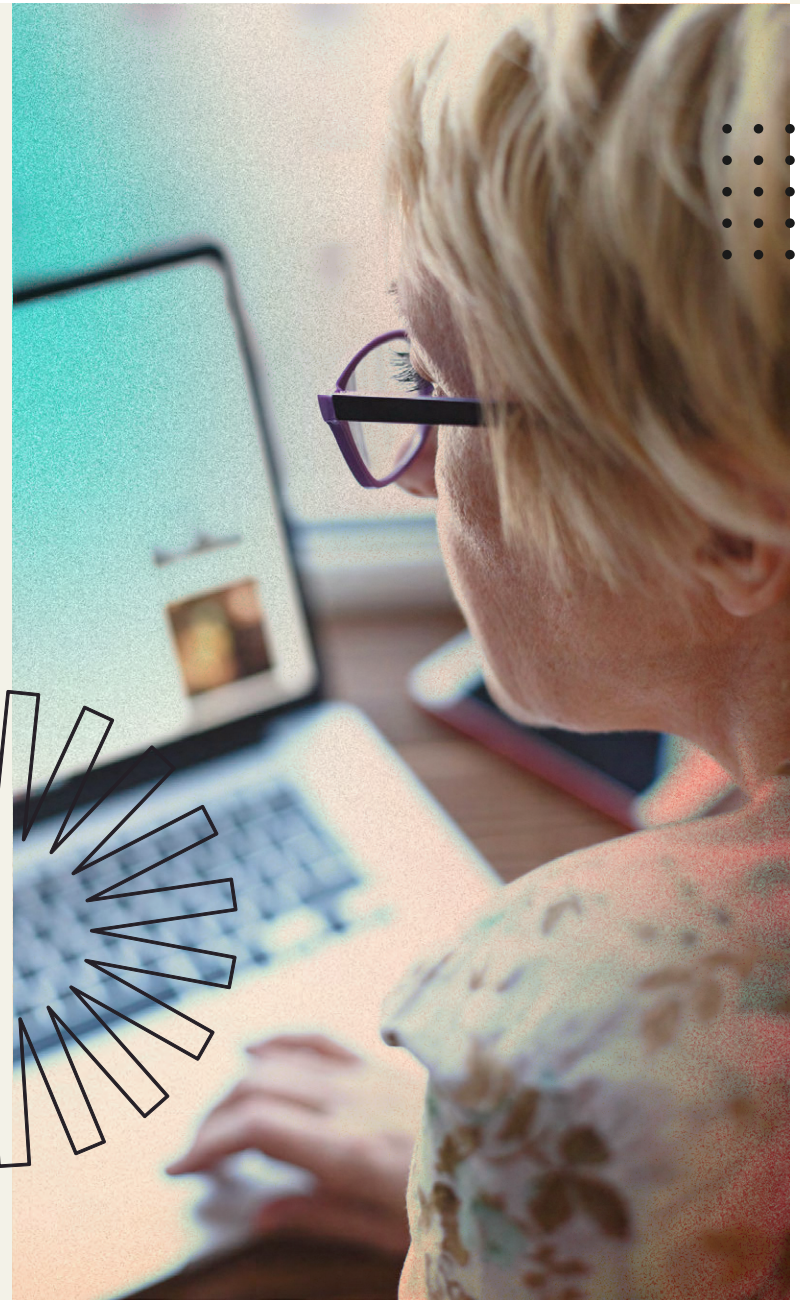
DIGITAL FLOURISHING

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO IMPROVING LIFE ONLINE

With evidence-based tips from researchers

SOPHIE JANICKE-BOWLES +
CLAY ROUTLEDGE

WHAT'S INSIDE



WHAT IS DIGITAL FLOURISHING?

Digital flourishing refers to feeling good about how we interact with others online and the choices we make in our digital lives.

Most people experience a variety of benefits from using digital technology.

For example, it can help you connect with others, feel socially and emotionally supported, become inspired, network and find professional opportunities, or even build a movement.

Digital flourishing pushes back on negative effects of technology and puts you in control of your time and experiences online, with the goal of improving your overall well-being.

WHY SHOULD WE CARE ABOUT DIGITAL FLOURISHING?

Having positive experiences online helps you feel more satisfied with your life and increases feelings of meaning and purpose.

People who are digitally flourishing find their social relationships more rewarding and feel happier overall.

This helps them better handle the challenges of digital technology. They are also more optimistic about the future, engaged in daily activities, and able to contribute to the well-being of others. Importantly, digital flourishing is related to better mental health. By focusing on positive ways to use digital technology, we can limit the challenges many generations face navigating the online world.

THE FIVE DIMENSIONS OF DIGITAL FLOURISHING

This guide explores five dimensions of digital flourishing discovered by researchers.

- Authentic Self-Disclosure
- Community Connectedness
- Positive Social Comparison
- Civil Participation
- Self-Control

POSITIVE SOCIAL COMPARISON

Feeling motivated to pursue goals when comparing yourself to others online.

The digital world, especially social media, is filled with curated images and videos from other people's lives on- and off-line. In positive cases, these examples can motivate and inspire you to improve your own life.

- ☑ Follow people who inspire you to pursue your goals and leave you feeling happier.
- ☑ Unfollow any accounts that make you feel envious or bad about yourself.
- ☑ Treat social media as a community board—not a scoreboard.
- ☑ Use social media to connect rather than compare.
- ☑ Participate in groups with shared experiences.

Percent of Americans flourishing in this dimension:
(Human Flourishing Lab, 2024)

Gen Z 61% | **Millennials** 59% | **Gen X** 45% | **Boomers** 33% | **Silents** 43%

CIVIL PARTICIPATION

Feeling capable of engaging in online civil discourse.

Digital media has given us greater access to information and places to voice and hear other views. When used well, it can be a useful tool for civil discourse and building peaceful movements.

- If you feel emotionally riled up, pause before responding. Give yourself time to think about what you want to say.
- Reflect on the person(s) receiving your message: What is it you want them to understand? How would you feel on the other end of the conversation?
- Humanize your communication by using the person's name in your response.
- Avoid making assumptions.

Percent of Americans flourishing in this dimension:
(Human Flourishing Lab, 2024)

Gen Z 78% | **Millennials** 83% | **Gen X** 84% | **Boomers** 86% | **Silents** 87%

SELF-CONTROL

Feeling able to self-regulate the amount of time you spend online.

As the tools and technology available to us have grown, so has the amount of time we spend online. It is important to feel balanced and in control of how much time you spend online *and* what you spend your time doing there.

- Explore the "Do Not Disturb" option on your phone, especially if you notice yourself checking your phone out of habit in times without stimulation (in the car, while eating, in bed, etc.)
- Practice taking mindful breaths instead of automatically reaching for a device.
- Create phone-free spaces or activities in your home. For example, no phones in the bedroom or no phones during dinner.
- Utilize website-blocking apps and disable autoplay and infinite scroll features. If you feel like you are using certain apps too much, move them away from your Home Screen and into a folder titled "Do I want this now?"
- Check the screen time app (iOS) or digital wellbeing app (Android) to track your phone usage.

Percent of Americans flourishing in this dimension:
(Human Flourishing Lab, 2024)

Gen Z 77% | **Millennials** 83% | **Gen X** 90% | **Boomers** 92% | **Silents** 83%

COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS

Feeling connected to online communities.

One of the most popular features of digital media is the ability to connect with people across different geographic areas. These may be people you know off-line or communities that are built online around shared interests and ideas. Healthy online communities can generate meaning and stifle feelings of loneliness.

- Ask meaningful questions. For example, start online conversations with: What made you happy this week?
- Model vulnerability and invite reciprocity by sharing personal struggles.
- Use support networks to connect and receive help when needed.
- Share images or media that move you or make you think of the other person.
- Send messages of gratitude to people in your social network. A simple: "I appreciate when you did X today" goes a long way in building feels of connection and happiness.

Percent of Americans flourishing in this dimension:
(Human Flourishing Lab, 2024)

Gen Z 77% | **Millennials** 74% | **Gen X** 67% | **Boomers** 58% | **Silents** 67%

AUTHENTIC SELF-DISCLOSURE

Feeling comfortable presenting your true self online.

The online world often urges us to present staged versions of ourselves. However, the more we showcase our true, unedited selves to others, the better off we are.

- Avoid portraying only a curated image of yourself online.
- Only share information or posts you genuinely care about. Before posting, ask yourself: Would I still share this if it only got 3 likes?
- Use values as a filter for what and how to post. Model the values that are most important to you.
- Align your online and off-line personas.

Percent of Americans flourishing in this dimension:
(Human Flourishing Lab, 2024)

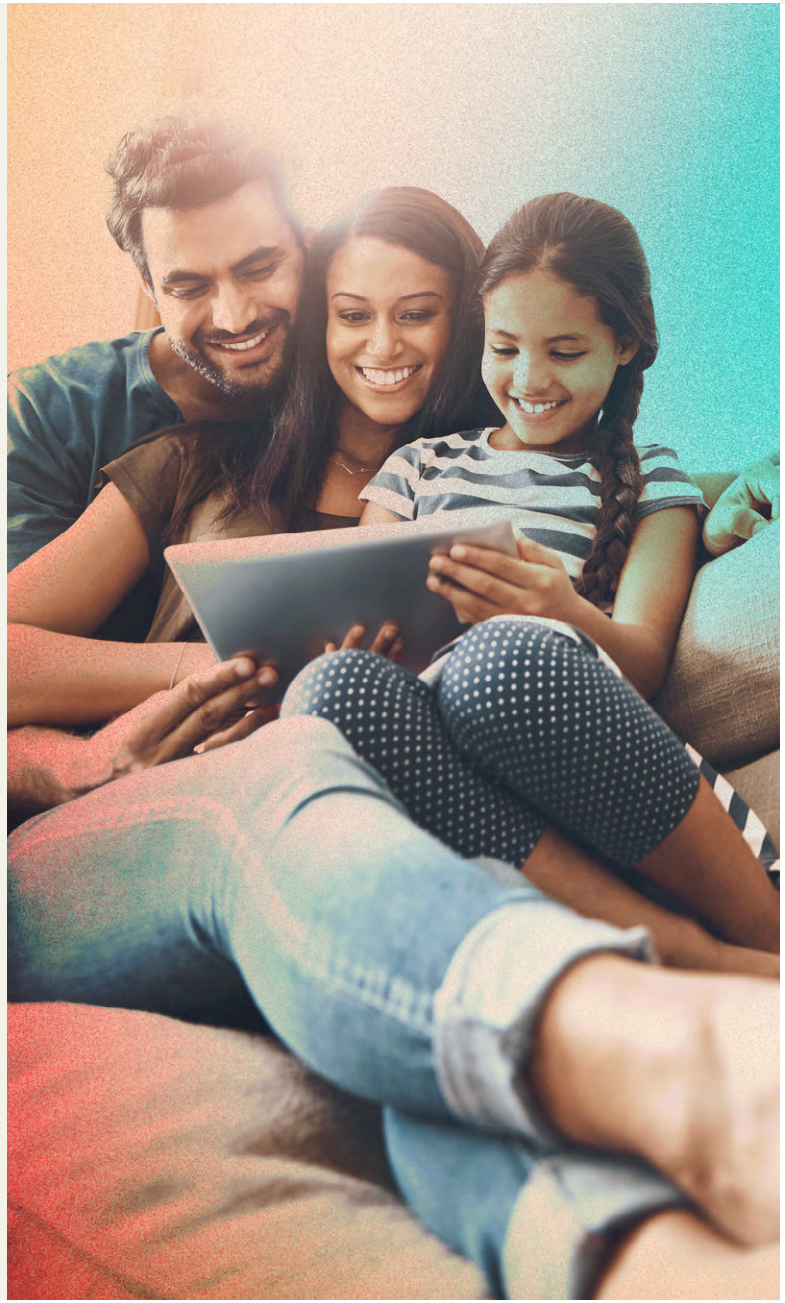
Gen Z 78% | **Millennials** 82% | **Gen X** 87% | **Boomers** 86% | **Silents** 90%

SUMMARY

Digital flourishing doesn't have to be hard. You can improve your relationship with technology and boost your happiness online with simple daily practices:

- [x] Only follow people who inspire and uplift you.
- [x] Pause before responding to emotional content.
- [x] Make room for phone-free time in your life.
- [x] Connect with others and ask meaningful questions.
- [x] Reflect on your values before posting.

As our lives have become more and more digitized, it is important to find ways to optimize our digital experiences to increase our well-being and thrive online.



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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Sophie Janicke-Bowles, PhD

SOPHIE JANICKE-BOWLES, PHD, is a positive media psychology fellow at the Archbridge Institute's Human Flourishing Lab. Dr. Janicke-Bowles is also an Associate Professor at Chapman University, California USA. Her research focuses on what type of usage and content of media can increase well-being, connectedness, transcendence, and prosociality across a variety of media platforms.

bowles@chapman.edu

@SophieB33451

Clay Routledge, PhD

CLAY ROUTLEDGE, PHD, is the Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer (COO) at the Archbridge Institute, where he leads the Human Flourishing Lab. As a leading expert in existential psychology, his work focuses on helping people reach their full potential and build meaningful lives.

croutledge@archbridgeinstitute.org

@clayroutledge

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The Human Flourishing Lab—a project of the Archbridge Institute, a non-partisan, independent, 501(c)(3) public policy think tank—is dedicated to the study and promotion of human flourishing, as well as exploring the connection between human flourishing, civilizational progress, and freedom. We conduct original research, identify and highlight existing knowledge, and provide resources for researchers, the media, and the general public.

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