

Chapter 8: Quitting

Discussion case #1

Maria is an influencer with 200,000 followers on Instagram and TikTok. She's been outspoken about the environmental costs of data centers, the manipulative design of attention economies, and corporate surveillance. In fact, that's her whole brand: she defends a minimalist lifestyle based on environmental-sustainability considerations and concerns about privacy online. She makes her living on these platforms, having monetized chiefly from ad revenue, affiliate links, and her Patreon account.

For some time now, followers have urged her to leave social-media platforms to take a stand. Recently, these calls have become very loud. While some people argue her voice is too important to lose, she has started to feel like she's a hypocrite.

1. Is Maria a hypocrite for staying on social media? Should she quit?
2. Could Maria be more effective at protesting social media while on these apps, or is protest always more effective from the outside?

Discussion case #2

Dani is a college student in Michigan, and for some time now, she has considered quitting social media. She completed a class on the ethics of social media, and she has concluded that quitting is the right thing to do. Her class came at the same time as reading about labor abuses at major tech companies, and this only strengthened her resolve. Yet, she grows more conflicted whenever she thinks about the activists in many foreign countries for whom WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, and X are essential lifelines. She worries that boycotting these apps might actually be harmful; part of her wants to see these companies go out of business, but another part of her fears about what would happen if they did.

1. Is it wrong to boycott platforms that some people need?