



EXPLORING THE **DIGITAL DETOXING** MOVEMENT

acxiom™

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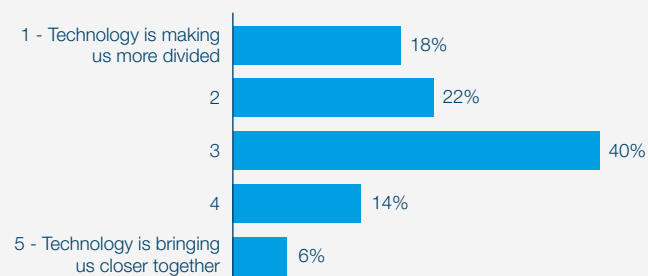
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“The biggest benefit of the technological revolution would be the ability to connect people from all over the world and allow people to form friendships and relationships that would have otherwise not been possible due to geographical hurdles”

New tech - connecting or disconnecting



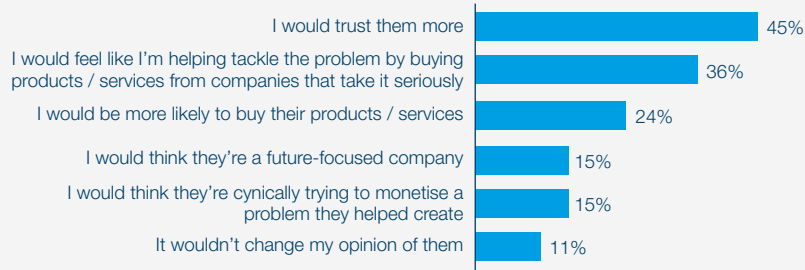
That’s the view of one young woman in the UK who has taken a digital detox in the last year, along with almost 12m others in the UK according to our research. Therein lies the contradiction that many people face: technology facilitates connection but is making many people feel disconnected. There are now more people in the UK that lean towards the idea that “technology is making us more divided” than those who think “technology is bringing us closer together”, but most people have mixed feelings. These digital detoxers provide some insight into that contradiction.

That young woman, like many others, felt social media often made her feel insecure and worse about herself. She asked herself “how have I wasted so much time on social media today?” and thought “the amount of time I’m spending looking at screens can’t be healthy” and “I can’t focus with so many devices to distract me”. Not only has she thought these, but she worries it will have a long-term impact on her mental health. She thinks that depression, anxiety, social isolation and insomnia are becoming more prevalent as a result of over-use of technology.

She took ownership by limiting her use of social media long-term. While taking a digital detox she felt clear-headed, focused, more in control and physically healthier. When imagining an ideal kind of digital detox experience, she imagined a day in nature, in a place where there is no signal and you can enjoy your natural surroundings without electronic devices.

Of course, she hasn’t completely disconnected from the world. For starters, at work she sits behind a computer all day. She also looks at her phone every 30 minutes when she thinks in an ideal world she would only look at her phone every few hours, if she could just resist the urge to answer messages as soon as she receives them. Here is where she thinks tech companies should help.

Effect of big tech companies taking steps to solve it



50%

of digital detoxers are happy for big tech companies to share personal data

She believes people need to take individual responsibility, but big tech companies can help too, with simple nudges like session reminders to notify people on how long they've been using the device or platform for. For big tech companies that did help tackle the problem, she would think they're a future-focused company. However, she is distrustful of big tech companies, and would be unwilling for the likes of Google, Apple and Facebook to share personal data about her, even if it is designed to build a more complete understanding of how people use technology and to guard against dangerous levels of usage, because she doesn't believe big tech companies care about her health.

The good news is that she is in the minority in that regard, particularly among others in her generation. Roughly half of digital detoxers are happy for big tech companies to share this kind of information, and that increases to 60% of Gen Z. The danger is that this distrust of big technology companies will become more commonplace and the personal data ecosystem that fuels many of these companies will become at risk if these problems are perceived to grow under their influence.

Only a small number of digital detoxers think that big tech companies are solely responsible for people over-using their devices or platforms, but even fewer think that they should not take any responsibility for it. This presents an opportunity for tech companies taking the long-term perspective. Nearly half of digital detoxers said they would trust companies more if they were seen to be tackling the problem, more than one-third said they would feel like they're helping tackle the problem if they buy products from companies that take it seriously, and one-quarter said they would be more likely to buy their products as a result. This report explores some of these challenges, opportunities and attitudes among the portion of the population closest to this trend: digital detoxers.

BACKGROUND

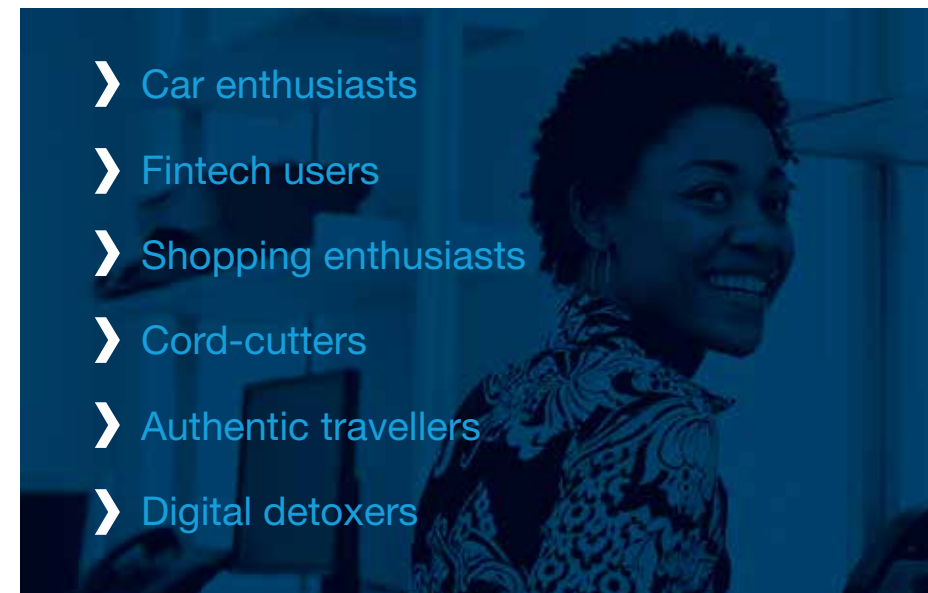
A nationally representative sample of 4,000 people were surveyed to measure some of the established megatrends – environmentalism, desire for authenticity, connected worlds creating disconnected societies – and explore how they connect to sector-specific trends.

This was within 6 key sectors:

- 1 Automotive
- 2 Consumer electronics
- 3 Financial services
- 4 Telecoms
- 5 Retail
- 6 Travel

The overarching objective was to understand what direction society is moving and how businesses in these industries should prepare for this, both in terms of risk mitigation and innovation.

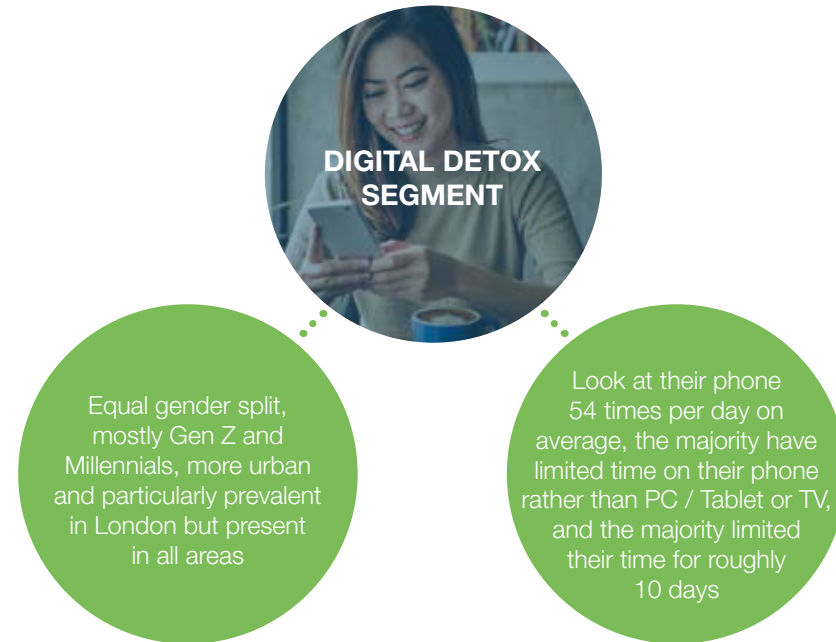
This was followed up by surveying a sub-section of the population in each industry that were particularly close to the trends, to dig deeper into what is driving them and understand what the early adopters or enthusiasts believe are most worthy of attention. The sub-section included:



In this case, the focus is on digital detoxers. You can find a profile of them to the right. They will be the key feature of analysis, as we asked them the most probing questions, and their interest in the subject allowed them to give more thoughtful answers than your average person.

A secondary feature of the analysis will be the nationally representative audience, with a particular focus on how attitudes and behaviours differ across generations. Here is a profile of each generation from the nationally representative survey.

This will be supported by secondary research from a variety of sources, to provide an international and historical context with hard numbers where possible. They will be cited throughout the report.



Profile of each generation from the nationally representative survey

	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Baby Boomers	The Silent Generation
Years born	1997-2004	1981-1996	1965-1980	1946-1964	1928-45
Age	16-22	23-38	39-54	55-73	74-91
Relationship status	Mostly single	Mostly married	Mostly married	Mostly married	Mostly married
Working status	Mostly students	Mostly employed full time	Mostly employed full time	Mostly retired	Mostly retired
Independence vs. Obedience	Independence	Independence	Independence	Mixed	Obedience
Security vs. Convenience	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed	Security	Security

GROWING NEED FOR DIGITAL DETOX

Roughly one-quarter of the population have taken a digital detox in the last year, which as defined as anything from limiting the time spent on your phone right up to going on an isolated retreat, disconnected from everything. And while this figure might seem relatively small, just over a decade ago it was barely on the radar.

“Digital detox” is now 10 times more popular as a search term than it was in 2005, and even since 2015 it has doubled in popularity¹. This is a growing trend driven by younger generations: Gen Z are 5 times more likely than Baby Boomers to have taken at least one.

The reasons for it? People feel like they are living in a virtual world more often than the real world, screen time analytics are telling people they averaged eight hours a day on their phone, families are struggling to connect with each other, more and more evidence is being shared about the impact of technology on mental health, emotional wellbeing, social relationships and much more.

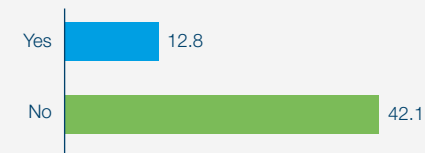
Gen Z

“ It was getting to the point where I was on my phone so much it was getting in the way of my studies and my daily life, I was living more of a virtual life than in real life.

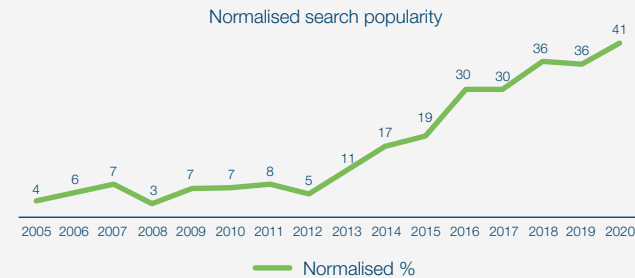
Millennials

“ The fact that my screen time analytics said that I averaged 8 hours a day on my phone.

Taken digital detox this year (in millions)



Google trends search for 'digital detox'



Source: Google Trends <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=all&geo=GB&q=%2F011c8bxy>

¹ Adults Media Use and Attitudes 2019 (Ofcom)

Gen X

“ Myself and my children were using technology and screens far too much for entertainment and we all decided to try and reduce it by getting out more doing physical activities for a while.

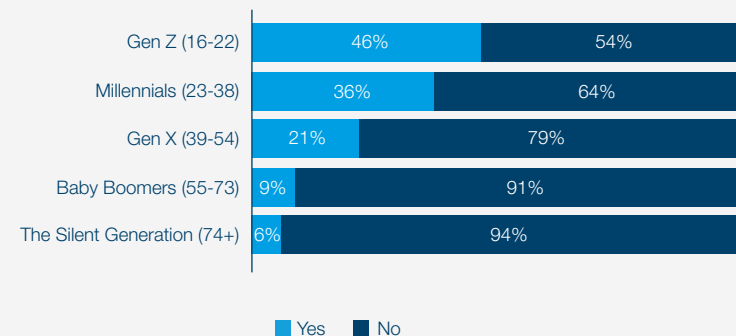
Baby Boomers

“ Evidence of the impact on digital use on mental health, emotional well-being and relationships between people. My experience of becoming ‘addicted’ to digital services and its negative impact on my sense of well-being. Also the impact on my personal relationships and social life.

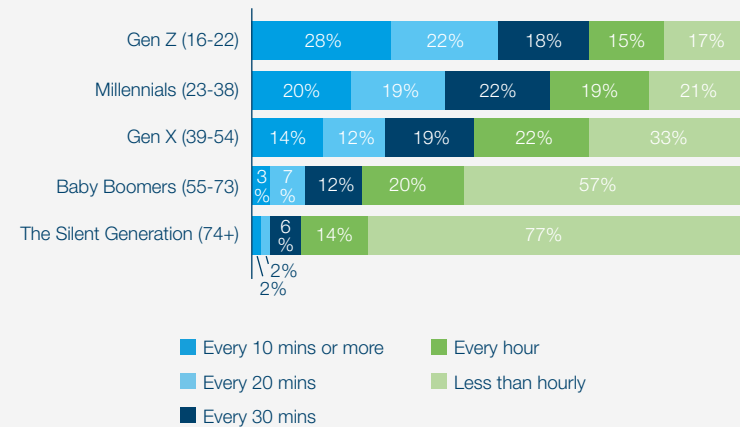
While people have become very attached to TV, gaming, social media and other technologies over the years, nothing has matched the ubiquity of smartphones. And while we all know “young people” use their phones more often, the numbers are still very striking.

78% of Baby Boomers and 90% of the Silent Generation use their phone hourly or less, compared to just 32% of Gen Z and 40% of Millennials. More than one-quarter of Gen Z check their phones every 10 minutes or more, and half look at it every 20 minutes or more. As a result, a growing number of Gen Z and Millennials see their phone as a constant source of stress, and the majority find it stressful at least sometimes.

Taken digital detox this year by generations



Frequency of checking phone by generations



In Ofcom’s most recent study on adults’ media use and attitudes², they found that above all else there is a generational divide in terms of the importance people place in phones. Over three-quarters of 16-24 year olds said their phone is the device they would miss the most if taken away, while two-thirds of those aged 75+ would most miss their TV – even though 81% of them have a mobile phone.

Most of the time spent on new technologies like smartphones and tablets are used to access traditional media content – watching videos and listening to music. So, there is an open question about whether using the term “addicted” is more indicative of a moral panic that historically accompanies the emergence of new media forms (e.g., literary novels, penny arcades, jazz music).

However, there is some evidence to suggest that media-multitasking impacts how we filter information³, decreases productivity and can make it more difficult to perform tasks that require sustained concentration, such as completing a test⁴. Smartphones have made media-multitasking possible in a way that TV didn’t, and that is thought to be the fundamental shift in how we consume media. Due to a combination of people’s personal experiences, reporting in the media and a growing cultural awareness, people are beginning to look at devices differently.

Smartphone stress inducement by generations (in millions)



Over 75%

of 16-24 year olds said their phone is the device they would miss the most if taken away

² Google Trends: Digital Detox (Google)

³ Cognitive Control In Media Multitaskers (Ophir, Nass and Wagner)

⁴ Laptop multitasking hinders classroom learning for both users and nearby peers (Sana, Western & Wiseheart)

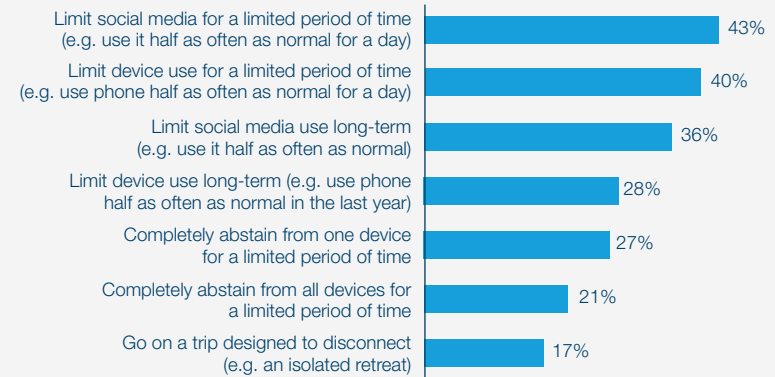
FORMS OF DIGITAL DETOXING

The most common form of digital detoxing is a short-term limit, and social media is the most common thing to detox from. However, half of digital detoxers have limited their use of social media or a device long-term, and 39% have abstained completely from at least one device for a limited period of time. 17% have gone on a trip designed to disconnect.

Of those who have limited their time on a device, 93% did it on their phone, 50% on their PC / tablet, and 30% on TV. And while people are a little less likely (76%) to completely abstain from their phone, the hierarchy remains the same. The phone is what people feel most compelled to avoid.



Type of digital detox



On average, people spent just under a fortnight limiting their device use – regardless of whether it was phone, PC or TV. Abstinence is more difficult to maintain, with people abstaining from their phone for less than a week (while TV remains similar).

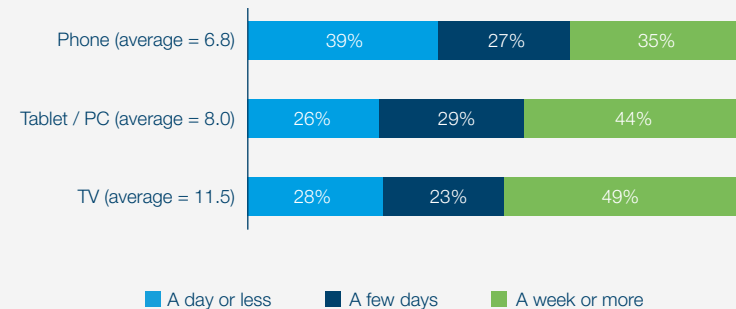
The three most common feelings people had when detoxing were relaxation, clear-headedness and feeling more in control. Post-detox, opinions are split – some people hate that they need the device, but do need them, while others appreciate the devices even more. Most are in the middle.

In terms of the ideal digital detox experience, many people like the idea of a dedicated meditative spa or just somewhere out in the countryside, but many people think of it more in terms of integrating into their daily lives.

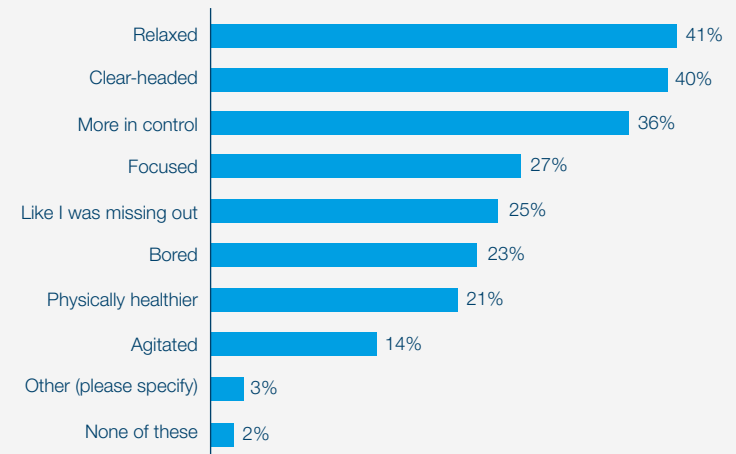
“ I think a getaway break in nature in an environment like a tropical island or like one of those igloo huts in the forest or in Scandinavia, it would just mean that you could reconnect with nature properly.

A spa - this is where I did my detox. I found it easier as I spent the time being pampered, focusing on my wellbeing and eating tasty food. Did not feel that I was missing out on technology as it wasn't needed.

Length of abstinence



Feelings during detox



“ It’s mind over matter. What is so important that people have to have their devices with them and turned on all the time. I am a firm believer that theatres/cinemas and other such entertainment places should be allowed to block any signals so as to ensure complete quiet and concentration on the show/play or whatever. Be a pleasure for the players on stage and for the audience. Nothing is that urgent.

I would make sure there was no internet connection wherever it was, think I would do more workshop ideas to get people interested in something to do other than look at their phones. Start introducing mobile free Mondays, or no Facebook Thursday, just to help break the habit.

I think that retreats are a good idea but to appeal to a wider audience and bring digital detox to the fore businesses can offer incentives to customers to not engage with their devices when they are out/on holiday e.g. restaurants giving discount % for putting (their) device into (a) basket.

Just keep yourself busy with other things. Even if it’s household chores or going out.

I think I’d have cameras in the home showing what people do of a day. If parents in particular see their children fighting you for attention, as I noticed, then that’s one group that would use there devices less.



RAISED CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE EFFECTS OF **TECH ADDICTION**

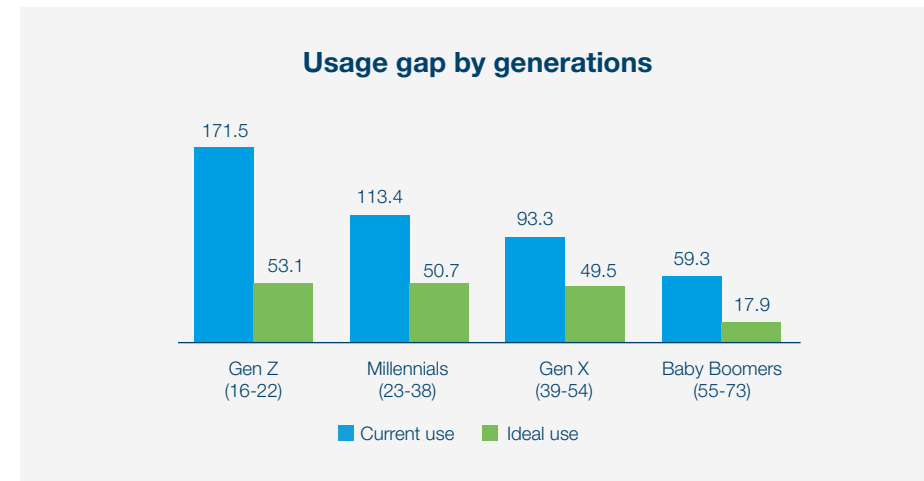
Every generation spends more time on their phone, social media and PC than they think they should. Gen Z, Millennials and Gen X all think you should look at them about 50 times per day across all three combined, while Baby Boomers think you should do so less than 20 times a day.

However, despite the consensus about ideal usage, Gen Z use their devices much more often – about 172 times a day, compared to 113 for millennials and 93 for Gen X. So, while Gen X and Millennials use tech twice as often as they think they should, Gen Z do it 3 times as much! Or, put another way, half of Gen Z use their devices 100+ times more often than they think they should.



The majority of every generation has thought “the amount of time I’m spending looking at screens can’t be healthy”

The majority of every generation has thought “the amount of time I’m spending looking at screens can’t be healthy”. On top of that, more than half of Gen Z and Millennials have thought “How have I wasted so much time on social media today?”, while almost half of Baby Boomers have thought “Why do people expect me to reply all the time?”. And while only a minority of all generations have thought “I wish someone would just take this phone away from me sometimes”, that increases significantly as you go down the generations.

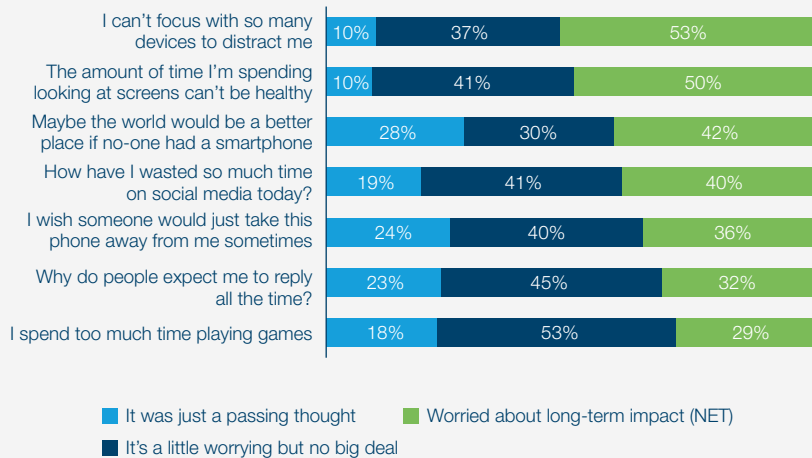


It's tempting to think these are just passing thoughts, but more than three-quarters of people who said each of these things at least thought "it's a little worrying but no big deal". And more than half of those people that think that amount of screen time is unhealthy, genuinely worry about the long-term effects.

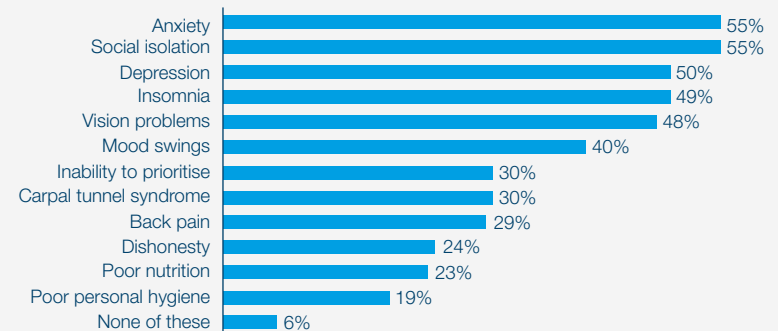
While technology addiction is not a clinical diagnosis, there is a widespread belief that there are potentially very serious effects to the over-use of technology, and these effects are growing over time. Roughly half of them said they believed technology addiction can contribute to anxiety, social

People said they believed technology addiction can contribute to anxiety, social isolation, depression, insomnia and vision problems.

Worries about technology over-use



Symptoms of tech addiction



isolation, depression, insomnia and vision problems. Many described those as being the motivations for the digital detox in the first place, and older generations especially cited growing discussion about this in the news. Women were particularly attuned to the impact of technology addiction on anxiety, which echoes many women's views about over-use of social media because of FOMO (fear of missing out).

In spite of that, there are lots of reasons people are positive about technology. It helps create global movements (e.g. the plastic straw ban from a video of a turtle), it enables learning like never before and it makes the world more connected.

“ Sharing information across the globe to create unified movements such as the plastic straw ban from one highly circulated video of a turtle with a straw up its nose. The ability to spread knowledge and places for discussion.

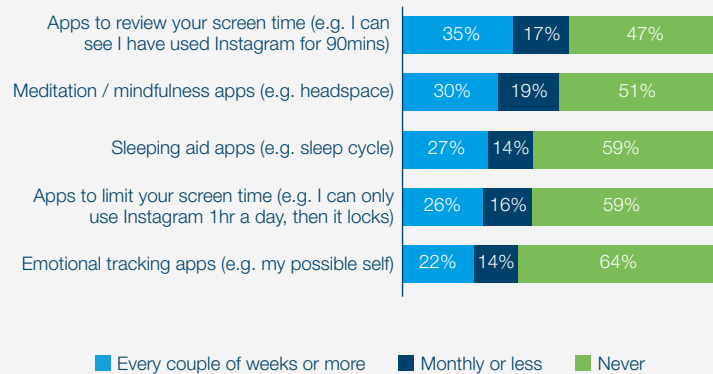
Technology has sped up the development of our minds and allows us to connect with the world, these are things that people use to dream about and now we have it.

The biggest benefit of the technological revolution would be the ability to connect people from all over the world and allow people to form friendships and relationships that would have otherwise not been possible due to geographical hurdles.



ROLE OF TECH COMPANIES

Detox-related apps used

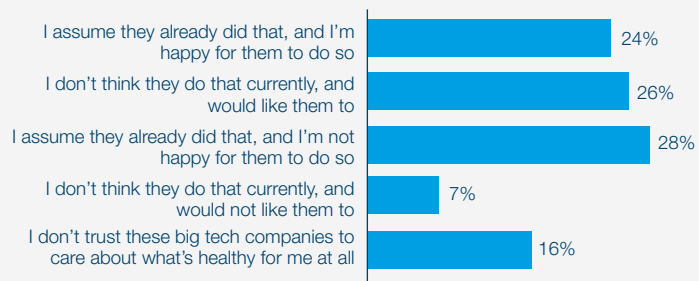


Even among digital detoxers, detox-related apps are still relatively niche. Less than half of them have ever used mindfulness, sleeping aid, screen time limiting or emotional tracking apps. However, among those that have used any of them, most people are quite frequent users – using it every couple of weeks or more often.

The only apps that more than half have used are apps that review your screen time, an indication that users are looking for companies and apps to empower them by informing them, rather than putting restrictions in place.

Most people assume the likes of Facebook, Google, Apple etc. share information amongst themselves about how often people use each of their services, to provide a complete picture on device and internet usage at an individual level. If this was used to help guard against dangerous levels of device usage, almost half would be happy for them to do so.

Attitudes to 3rd party data sharing (total device used)



Almost everyone thinks that big tech companies have some responsibility to prevent people from over-using their devices / platforms

Almost everyone thinks that big tech companies have some responsibility to prevent people from over-using their devices / platforms, and more than one-quarter think they're the ones who created the issue so should be the ones to solve it. If they did something to solve it almost half of digital detoxers would trust them more, while one-third would feel like they're helping tackle problems by buying products / services from companies

Gen Z and Millennials feel big tech companies taking responsibility for people overusing devices would help build trust

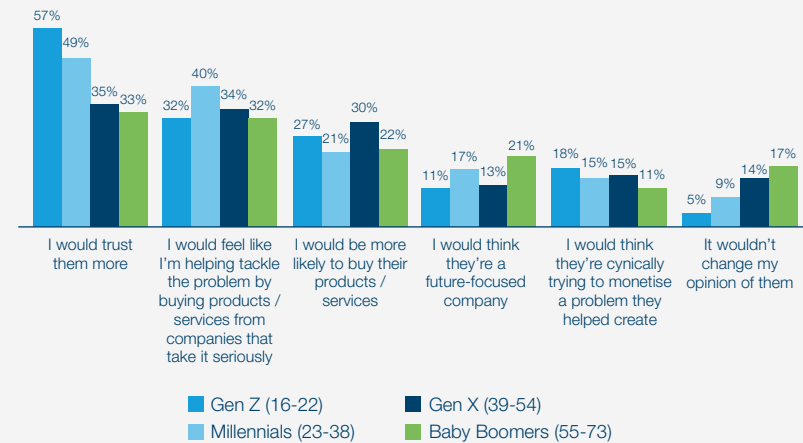
taking it seriously, and one-quarter would be more likely to buy their products / services. Gen Z and Millennials particularly feel that it would build trust.

What are they expected to do? Finance research, publish health warnings within their platforms, provide training to those most at risk, set user restrictions, create trends like FreeFriday, pay for advertisements about the risks.

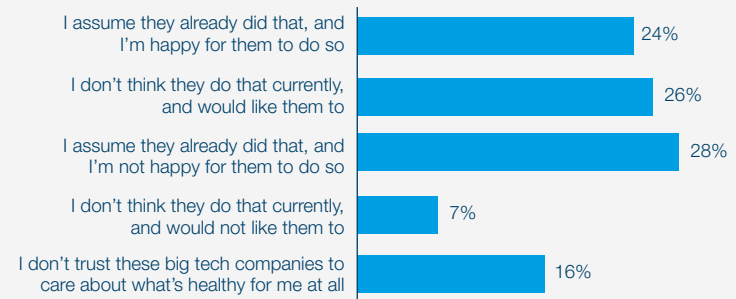
“ Finance research into the issue of addiction to digital services. Publish the outcome and incorporate evidence-based strategies into their service provision. Include evidence-based health warnings on their platforms.

Restrict access, set timers up on the page, reminders of how many minutes you have been using your phone so people can try and cut down. Publicly support or launch text free Tuesday, or FreeFriday...something that is trendy and easy to participate in.

Effect of big tech companies taking steps to solve it by generations



Attitudes to 3rd party data sharing (total device use)



“ Automatic screen time settings (non-optional), monitoring of products and devices - whether they are to be used by children on a frequent basis, relevant training and notices for families and young adults (those most likely to be addicted/compelled to use social media and devices in a non-healthy way).

I think they should show more ads to do with mental health and the effect on people using social media all the time and the reality of it. Not market social media as much.

The opportunity is there for future-focused tech companies to cater to a growing need in the population, to build brand loyalty and bring their users on the journey with them, not just to build better products but to build a healthier world. That goes beyond brand loyalty to build trust, the fuel that connects societies and powers economies. In the same way that sustainable and ethical consumerism has become the fastest growing segment in almost every CPG market, there are early signs that the tech industry will see its own version of the conscious consumer sign in and potentially go viral.



HOW **ACXIOM** CAN HELP

Acxiom solutions can help you better connect with the technology consumer by helping your organisation:

Improve customer experience across all touchpoints

Delivering a five-stage strategic roadmap via our capability readiness assessment to show how data can be applied to improve customer experience.

Deliver personalised, relevant experiences to your customers across all channels

Providing a scalable customer data environment that integrates your omnichannel data sources in a privacy-compliant manner to provide a complete view of your customer.

Model and reach ideal audiences

Analytics services that combine third-party data, multiple audience lists, and your customer data to identify predictor variables of response and develop automated digital look-alike models.

Recognise customers across digital and offline channels

Onboarding offline customer and prospect data for people-based targeting and measurement across digital touchpoints.

ABOUT ACXIOM

Acxiom enables people-based marketing everywhere through a simple, open approach to connecting systems and data to drive better customer experiences for people and greater ROI for business. A leader in identity, customer data management and the ethical use of data for more than 50 years, Acxiom now helps thousands of clients and partners around the globe work together to create millions of better customer experiences, every day.

For more information

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