



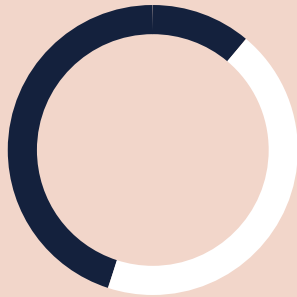
A common search for digital wellbeing

While OTT platforms continue to multiply and the consumption of online video smashes all the records, a certain resistance to being constantly connected is starting to crop up.

Internet users are increasingly prioritizing active use of their devices and optimizing their screen time. Faced with this collective awareness, major players in the digital marketplace are adopting a more transparent attitude toward consumers and some are betting on models that highlight the quality of the time spent on their devices.

Have we reached a plateau in our use of the internet, social media and smart devices? A [study by the Pew Research Center](#) suggests so. Its report shows that, while the use of digital technology has seen rapid and steady growth in the United States, the percentage of Americans who use these technologies has remained fairly stable during the last two years. Surely this saturation can be explained in part by the fact that the adoption rate has almost reached its potential in several regions of the world. However, it also raises questions regarding how we use our devices.





In recent years, “screen fatigue” has emerged in media discourse. Are we too connected?

Can the time we spend using our devices and devote to social media have an impact on our relationships, our everyday behaviour and, in the long term, on our mental health? In the past few years, members of the scientific community have taken a stand on the issue. Of note are reports by the Radiological Society of North America and the Royal Society for Public Health together with the Young Health Movement. Nonetheless, what is new is an awareness in the general population and **a desire to consume less or—at very least—smarter.**

According to a survey undertaken by GlobalWebIndex (GWI), more than one third of consumers in the United States and the United Kingdom believe that the use of mobile phones undermines their health and wellbeing. Moreover, users under the age of 35 are more concerned by this reality: within this demographic, the proportion jumps to 57%.

Contrary to what we may think, the level of concern is not related to the number of hours spent using a device. When very active users are compared with moderate users, the findings remain the same. According to GWI’s Erik Winther Paisley, the survey shows that the concern is elsewhere.





“What it does tell us is how people use their phones could be more important than how much they use them.”

— Erik Winther Paisley, insights content manager
at GlobalWebIndex, 2018



In parallel with this trend, the ‘digital detox’ concept is emerging. Another GWI study reveals that during the last year, one in five people went through a digital detox, which comes down to disconnecting completely from the online world over a specific period of time. In other words, they have eliminated the use of all internet-connected devices. That being said, 70% of respondents admitted trying to reduce their consumption in some way, without necessarily resorting to such drastic measures.



According to a recent survey
by the Consumer Technology
Association (CTA)

86% of Canadian consumers
own a smartphone.

In the United States, an analysis carried
out this year by Deloitte shows that

85% of Americans
own or have access
to a smartphone

When it comes to the wider consumption habits related to screen-based technologies, another study by GlobalWebIndex, We Are Social, Hootsuite shows that these same consumers spend an average of 5.5 hours per day on the internet, whether on a mobile phone, a computer, or a tablet.

	4	29	
	5 hours	30 minutes	0 s
	6	31	1

They spend a further 3.15 hours per day watching television and 1.4 hour per day on social media platforms.

	2	8	
	3 hours	9 minutes	0 s
	4	10	1

	0	23	
	1 hour	24 minutes	0 s
	2	25	1





Media consumption: a narrowing generational gap?

Another finding worth noting is the **influence that young children have on adult consumption patterns**: according to a [Solutions Research Group](#) study, watching long-form video on mobile devices is increasingly popular with Canadians, but the trend is significantly greater among parents with children under the age of 12. In fact, 50% of respondents from households with children said that they had watched videos of more than 10 minutes in duration on a mobile device in the last month. For households without young children, the proportion was 29%.

This intergenerational mirror effect can also be seen in [Deloitte's Digital media trends](#) survey of the US population. The survey shows the emergence of Gen Xers (aged 35–51) as early adopters of new technology in general and consumption of content on mobile devices in particular. This demographic mimics behaviour observed among members of Generation Z (aged 14–20) and Millennials (aged 21–34).

Hyperconnectivity among teenagers

Meanwhile, among 13–17-year-olds, the total minutes spent online continue to increase. According to a [Pew Research Center](#) survey, a phenomenon known as hyperconnectivity is emerging, as nearly

95%

of teenagers own a smartphone or have access to one. Their mobile connections lead to online activity that is even more pervasive.

45%

of teenagers surveyed say that they are online almost constantly.

The same study reveals that about

52%

of American adolescents say they have taken steps to reduce the amount of time they spend on their phones.

This also applies to time spent on social media (57%) and video games (58%).





Major players in the digital space are showing some goodwill in combating the passive use of technology in this era of zombie-feed scrolling.

Given the general awareness of this issue, there is a perception that industry leaders in the digital ecosystem have started to develop something new: environments in which visual technology is less pervasive. Of course, we are referring to the rise of a digital ecosystem populated by **voice-activated assistants, earphones, watches**, and other handheld devices—all with the objective of helping us to reduce eyestrain. In the last few years, we have maximized the demands on our eyes through the introduction of larger screens, increasingly sophisticated cameras as well as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality apps (RA).

Nevertheless, our ability to resist our devices is less and less certain and the major players are taking notice.

“What you get sucked into is not the one thing that caught your attention—your text message or tweet or whatever. Instead, you unlock your phone and instantly, almost unconsciously, descend into the irresistible splendors of the digital world—emerging 30 minutes later, stupefied and dazed. You open this irresistible box, and you can’t fight it”

— Carolina Milanesi, analyst at the technology research firm Creative Strategies, 2018



With ethical considerations emerging and consumers questioning the use of their devices, Apple and Google reacted, although their business models depend on the very overuse at issue. After former Google design ethicist Tristan Harris revealed the strategies used by digital marketing giants to encourage overuse of their products, the discourse has evolved rapidly. We are now seeing a veritable race to develop tools that encourage a healthier use of our devices.

After leaving Google, Harris founded the non-profit organization Time Well Spent, to counteract the power of the attention economy, or the battle being waged by major digital players to monetize our transient attention.

For some years now, parents have been concerned with the media their children consume and the need for safe online environments free of content considered inappropriate. Since the recent appearance and improvement of parental controls on platforms like [YouTube Kids](#) (2015) and [Netflix](#) (2013), parents can rest a little more easily. Nonetheless, applications that track the time adults spend on their devices are emerging (mainly **Moment**, **QualityTime**, and **Checky**), prompting the big players to invest more in the latest versions of their interfaces.



Apple's iOS 12 was the first release to take the leap with the Screen Time utility, which calculates the number of minutes spent on each application and allows users to set time limits and manage distractions caused by notifications. Google is following suit with its Digital Wellbeing dashboard for its latest Android 9.0 Pie update, which was announced just before Apple's release, but rolled out after iOS 12. And that is without mentioning other improvements to existing devices, such as *Do Not Disturb* options, sleep management tools or charts that detail overall digital wellbeing.

“It’s really important for people who use Instagram and Facebook that the time they spend with us is time well spent.”

— Ameet Ranadive, Instagram’s product director of wellbeing, 2018





Following the trend, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube have introduced tools that track the amount of time spent on their platforms. Facebook has launched its *Your Time on Facebook* dashboard and created new positions within the organization whose incumbents are responsible for increasing users' wellbeing.

That being said, the difference between passive and active time spent on online platforms is not yet part of the equation. In other words, while it is possible to set time limits, each one results in a pop-up alert to take a break. Think of YouTube's *Take a Break* notification or Instagram's *You're All Caught Up* message. There is no real restriction on the ability to scroll or to like posts. Consequently, while there is transparency around the amount of time spent online, it is still the user's responsibility to monitor consumption. Although these tools represent a good starting point, they will have to evolve, because otherwise users could just end up ignoring the alerts.





What about low-tech solutions?

In parallel to these initiatives, there is a trend toward low-tech, minimalistic solutions such as the use of small devices allowing users to perform quick online tasks without monopolizing their time or attention.

Such is the case of [Palm](#), an Android device developed by a San Francisco start-up, which works as an add-on to a main telephone line. It does not work on its own or have its own number. The idea is to use it on weekends and evenings or at any other time the user wishes to reduce the digital distractions.

Although this trend is not new—the first promotions for the Light Phone date back to 2015—what we are witnessing is a new approach to these devices: not a replacement for our regular phones, but rather the creation of a new role for them, similar to that of the smart watch.



One way or the other, our collective awareness and the identification of a tipping point regarding the overuse of digital devices are forcing creators and distributors, to remain relevant and ramp up their creativity in the development of content and formats—in a universe where content is more and more diverse and particularly as a result of the presence of major streaming platforms.

“Our eyeballs and the time that we have to consume media of any kind are being challenged.”

— Dan Rayburn, streaming media analyst
with Frost & Sullivan, 2018

New formats involving senses other than vision are gradually emerging and taking their place in the digital landscape while redefining the narrative form. Industry stakeholders and decision makers are finding that collaboration and partnerships are not only beneficial, but also essential to creating strong content and entering a marketplace that has already been commandeered by the giants of Silicon Valley.

