



Forces of Change

Issue 4 • November 2019

DIS/CONSCIOUS CONNECTORS



WELCOME

Welcome to the fourth issue in our series “Imagine: Forces of Change.”

In our last report, “Net Persuasion,” we asked an uncomfortable question: Are people addicted to their apps? And we found that, in a word, yes, they are.

Our extensive research combined behavioral monitoring, self-reported data and a neurological study to determine that the average smartphone user—regardless of age or demographic—spent five hours a day with their apps, checking them an average of 88 times a day. We also found that mobile in-app experiences generated a 2X greater physiological response than linear television experiences.

We partnered with design ethicist Tristan Harris and Dr. Jean Twenge, author of the now-notorious study that linked teen depression to smartphone and social media usage, to bring these findings to life—and sound the alarm about our growing “attention economy.”

The New York Times and Fast Company noted how unusual it was for a media agency like ours to be the ones to put a stake in the ground around ethical marketing. But we are a consumer-first organization, committed to challenging conventions—reaching and engaging people in ways that add value and promote authentic connections. We prize consumer choice, champion data transparency and take our responsibility within this media ecosystem very seriously.

After that study was released, we knew we had to continue to monitor the disturbing trends we saw around app addiction. Would the trends continue, with people increasing their mobile app consumption without limit? Or would the pendulum start to swing the other way? And if so, why?

CONSCIOUS DISCONNECTORS

To answer these questions, we partnered with OMG Research to conduct a 14-month longitudinal study, tracking actual smartphone app usage across more than 2,000 participants (with their permission) through a mobile meter installed on their smartphones. We conducted a quantitative survey in which just under 1,000 respondents, representative of the U.S. population, reported their mobile app usage as well as their motivations in doing so. Lastly, we went to participants' homes, observing their day-to-day mobile behaviors and asking them about those behaviors in order to create a robust ethnography.

In the pages that follow, we'll share the results of what we found. (Spoiler alert: The pendulum has swung!) At a high level, it seems we've reached the tipping point:

- 64% of study participants actually decreased their mobile app usage over the past 14 months, from five hours per day to four hours per day on average.
- Within this group of “Conscious Disconnectors,” we saw two distinct behaviors: “Slow-and-Steady” mobile dieters, who reduced their time with apps steadily throughout the research time frame, and “Intermittent Fasters,” who looked more like yo-yo dieters, increasing usage to a point, then cutting back, but still reducing usage overall.
- When people cut back, they tend to cut back on gaming, mobile browsing and social media—the apps where they spend the most time. Still, the reductions weren't always proportional to each app type.
- They're spending their newfound free time with family, friends, on other hobbies, with other media or sleeping.
- 77% say cutting back their app usage was one of the best decisions they've ever made.

But not everyone cut back. During this same 14-month time period, 36% of people increased their mobile app usage and now clock in at six hours per day—more than one-third of their waking hours.

As marketers, we face a challenge ahead: How do we engage people on screens of Net Attention in a way that's ethical and provides value rather than disrupts experiences or contributes to mobile app addiction? How do we help consumers

take control of their time—and how their time spent with media is monetized? And how do we help set brands up for long-term success with consumers in a dynamic, ever-changing media environment?

These are the questions we will tackle in “Conscious Disconnectors,” with the help of leading voices from across the industry. We hope you enjoy what you read and invite you to challenge conventions with us by sharing your thoughts and feedback with us using #forcesofchange.



Erin Matts
CEO
HEARTS & SCIENCE



POINT OF VIEW

Are we
CONSCIOUSLY
DISCONNECTING?

By Renee Cassard



The arrival of every new form of media, from television to video games, brings with it the notion that it will ruin our society, our relationships or even the gray matter in our brains.

But something different happened when smartphones became ubiquitous in 2007. Warnings about the perils of social media and app addiction, especially among teens, weren't just fearmongering. The negative psychological impact of app addiction

has now been well documented. The relationship between increased mobile and social media usage and unhappiness isn't just correlative, but causal.

Concern about app addiction has crossed over from academia to the dinner table. Four out of five consumers say they're aware of app addiction; 49% say it will become a crisis in the near future, according to a recent study by OMG Research. The majority of people in the

study said app addiction was making in-person communication harder, attention spans shorter and sidewalks and roads more dangerous.

As an executive at a major media agency, I continuously question our role in an "attention economy" and the responsibility we hold as stewards of the relationship between brands and consumers who advertise in these environments.

Thankfully, the industry is also starting to question its role. Apple introduced Screen Time, Android deployed nighttime vision apps and parental controls for devices and apps now abound.

But a new phenomenon has emerged in the fight against app addiction, driven by consumers themselves. New research shows that 64% of Americans reduced the amount of time they spent with apps over the past 14 months, from five hours to four hours per day. Four hours may still seem like a lot of time to spend glued to a screen, but the drop is meaningful—one that took place across genders, age groups and geographies. We call them the "Conscious Disconnectors."

Conscious Disconnectors are cutting back app usage by going on a mobile phone diet, making a conscious effort to check their apps less frequently or turning off push notifications. Only 31% went cold turkey, completely cutting out or deleting apps altogether. In an era where Americans get a bad rap for their lack of moderation, the majority of us are self-regulating.

What's behind the move? The top reason people cited was "wasted time," an ironic answer given how many apps are marketed as helping us save time. While people tend to underestimate the total amount of time they spend with apps, they do accurately assess which apps are getting their attention—social media, gaming and mobile web browsing. And those are the apps they tend to cut back on when they reduce their time spent with mobile devices. But even after the reduction, these apps still dominate how users spend their time.

The Conscious Disconnectors are happier after cutting back, with three-quarters saying it was one of the best decisions they ever made. That's a pretty powerful figure—one of the best decisions they ever made was not using something that didn't even exist 15 years ago. The figure was even higher among Gen Xers and those with children at home. They are spending their newfound free time with family, friends, reading, sleeping or—wait for it—watching TV.

If the trend continues, it will have large implications for marketers and for the digital business models that rely on capturing attention. Less time spent with

mobile devices means fewer chances to reach consumers on these devices, increasing the cost of mobile advertising in the near-term and forcing marketers to rethink where and how they spend advertising dollars in the long-term.

It also means the media industry must rethink ad-based models themselves. We may see increased investment in product placement, branded content and influencer marketing. Recent moves by publishers to adopt micropayment or subscription models may be a harbinger of larger shifts to come.

People understand their time and data are being monetized by media companies but remain wary of advertising. Streaming leaders Spotify, Pandora and Netflix recently found that inserting just one more ad per hour of streaming increased the likelihood that users would opt for ad-free subscriptions—but a greater likelihood that they might abandon the app completely.

In the end, we must move from a model of informed consent to a model of real consumer choice. By letting people choose the model that suits them best in each scenario—micropayments one day, watching a video ad the next—marketers can ensure their message is welcome, adds value and doesn't waste people's time. Otherwise, we run the risk of losing the audiences we've been trying to cultivate.

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Conscious Disconnectors are cutting back app usage by going on a mobile phone diet, making a conscious effort to check their apps less frequently or turning off push notifications.

By Pamela Marsh, Ph.D.



Pamela Marsh, Ph.D.
Managing Director,
Primary Research
OMNICOM MEDIA GROUP

BEHIND THE NUMBERS

“Conscious Disconnectors” builds on the findings of two of our previous studies, “The Unreachables” (2017) and “Net Persuasion” (2018). While both studies found significant levels of consumption of video and content on mobile devices, it was our “Net Persuasion” study that prompted this deeper study into app addiction. In our “Net Persuasion” research, 1,000 people told us they were addicted to their mobile apps and sacrificed other activities due to the time they were spending with apps. Behavioral data from those same survey respondents showed us that they weren’t telling stories; data about their mobile phone usage was collected for three months and showed that, regardless of age, people interacted with their mobile phones 88 times per day, amounting to five hours of usage across all types of apps. Wow.

These results, along with the past decade’s media attention on the effects of mobile phone addiction, served as an alarm. We were determined to figure out how this apparent social epidemic affects consumers’ lives, attitudinally and behaviorally, and to establish what a marketer’s role could—or should—be in this space.

We used a multi-methodological approach to understand whether people felt the need to cut back on their app-addictive behaviors and if so, how they went about doing it. Did they cut back consciously or non-consciously? Is there a tipping point that prompts disconnecting? Importantly, we asked about what influences people to decrease their mobile app usage (e.g., self-imposed, influenced by social pressures, privacy concerns, mental and/or physical concerns) and asked, who is responsible for app addiction (e.g., publishers, device developers, brands, government or themselves)?

We collected 14 months (April 2018–May 2019) of mobile app usage data from ~2,400 U.S. respondents ages 13+. Over the course of the year, our behavioral data showed us that two-thirds (64%) of all people decreased their average daily usage from five hours to four hours, and one-third (36%) of people increased from four hours to six hours. And when nearly 1,000 of these same people were surveyed in April 2019, they told us that app addiction is real, and they perceive it as a current and future crisis. Interestingly, while two-thirds of people admit to their own app addiction, they often

don’t realize the full extent of it. “Our survey data showed us that people estimate their daily usage to be just shy of 3.5 hours, but our behavioral data showed us that they are on their mobile apps about five hours each day. That’s a lot of time in the day—and a substantial gap between perception and behavior!

Consequently, it made perfect sense that respondents’ number one reason for cutting back was tied nearly exclusively to their feelings of being strapped for time—not about concerns regarding their mental or physical health (despite the media headlines), or about avoiding content or ads, or even about feeling social pressure. While people can rationalize why they spend so much time using their apps, eventually their rationalizations run thin. Having time—or not—in one’s day to spend time with family and friends, to focus on work, to enjoy hobbies or just to get enough sleep is not something that can be rationalized with mobile apps. Interestingly, people accept responsibility for their heavy usage and realize it is solely up to them to make any changes, successfully or not. (One caveat to this is parents, whose concerns about their children’s screen time runs

deep because they are sensitive to any potential negative effects on their children’s physical and mental well-being.)

So, people’s motivation for cutting back was clear, but was there a wake-up call or specific pattern for when and how they did it? Not really. Behavioral data showed us that people cut back very consistently throughout the week, though people reported that they cut back more during the weekends. People also cut back more in the evenings, though they thought they cut back most during the day. Regardless, most people told us that they just check their apps less frequently, which tended to work, but there were many people who needed to go the extra mile and delete the apps from their phones: out of sight, out of mind (or use). But whether they self-regulated their urge to check apps or deleted the apps altogether, nearly all (77%) people told us it was one of the best decisions they have made, and half (56%) plan to continue. They see disconnecting as a path to gaining back lost time for the things that truly do enhance their lives.

“We used a multi-methodological approach to understand whether people felt the need to cut back on their app-addictive behaviors and if so, how they went about doing it. Did they cut back consciously or non-consciously?”

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Forces of Change

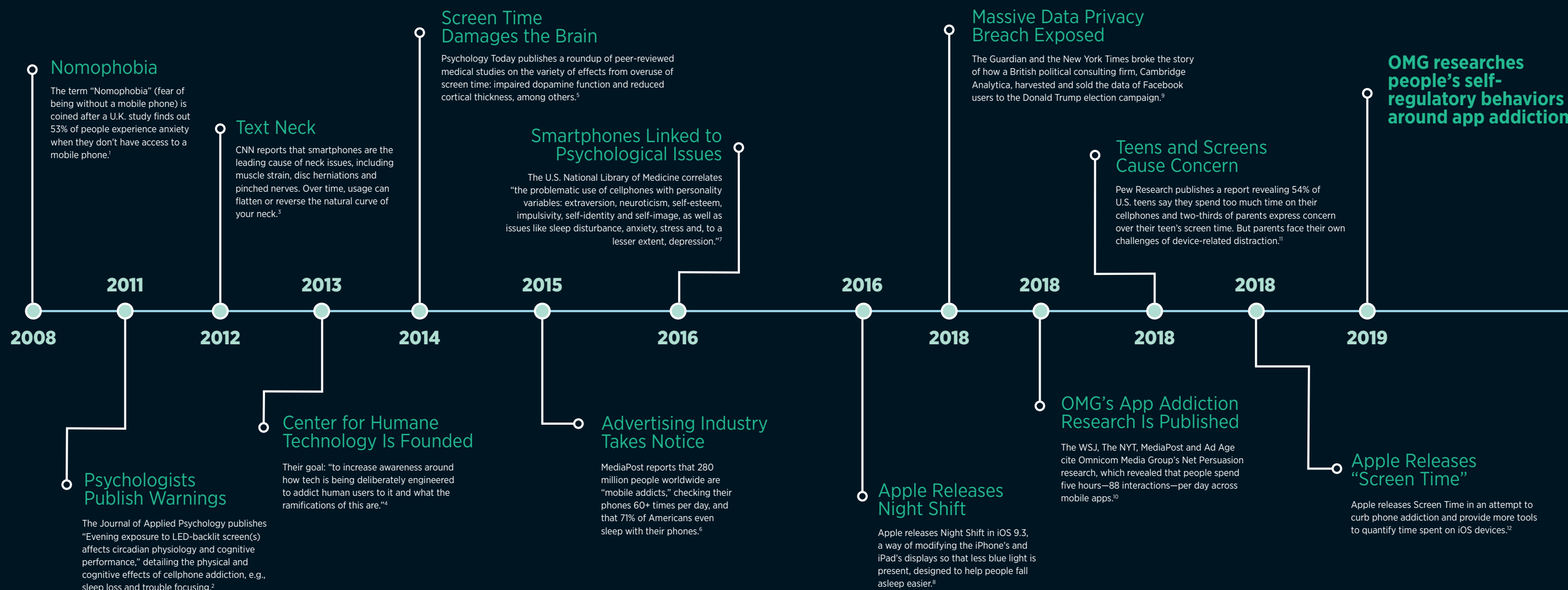
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DIS/CONSCIOUS CONNECTORS

Over the decades, people raised red flags about the “boob tube” and other technologies—but mobile devices have documented physical and psychological detrimental effects.

And **4 in 5 people** have heard about mobile app addiction.

Over the past decade, the effects of mobile phone addiction have risen to the forefront of media attention.



IN 2018, PEOPLE SPENT

5 hours
EVERY DAY ACROSS
ALL MOBILE APPS

VS

1.4 hours
ON LINEAR TV
(FOR GEN X & MILLENNIALS)

2 hours
ON DESKTOP

AND THEY INTERACTED WITH APPS

88 times
PER DAY¹

“

People were spending an average of five hours a day on their mobile devices. Think about what that means: That's a third of our waking hours per day. It's quite shocking when we look across genders, age and demographics to see that people are interacting with this device for that amount of time. Everyone has their screen of “net attention” at all times—it's with us wherever we go. We wake with it, we sleep with it. We thought it was important to continue to track how consumers are interacting with their mobile devices. We were curious if they would continue to capture an increased share of attention, or, if the pendulum would swing back in the other direction.



Renee Cassard
Audience Officer
HEARTS & SCIENCE

Because of the time spent **using apps...**



49%

PEOPLE SPEND
LESS TIME WITH
OTHER FORMS OF
ENTERTAINMENT



41%

PEOPLE DO
LESS PHYSICAL
ACTIVITY



36%

PEOPLE DON'T
GET ENOUGH
SLEEP



35%

PEOPLE NEGLECT
HOUSEHOLD
CHORES



27%

PEOPLE NEGLECT
HOMEWORK OR
WORK



24%

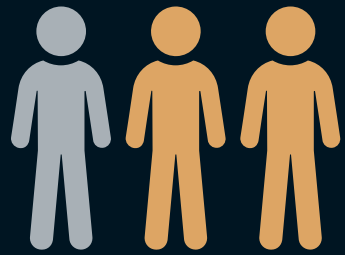
PERSONAL
RELATIONSHIPS
ARE DIFFERENT



23%

PEOPLE SPEND LESS
TIME WITH FRIENDS
AND FAMILY

The majority of people said
this was becoming a problem.



2 out of 3

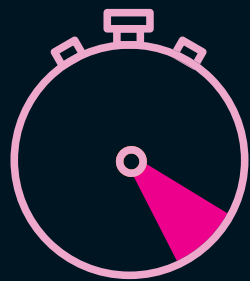
People report being **addicted** to their phone (65%)

Consider the time they spend using apps to be a **problem** (64%)

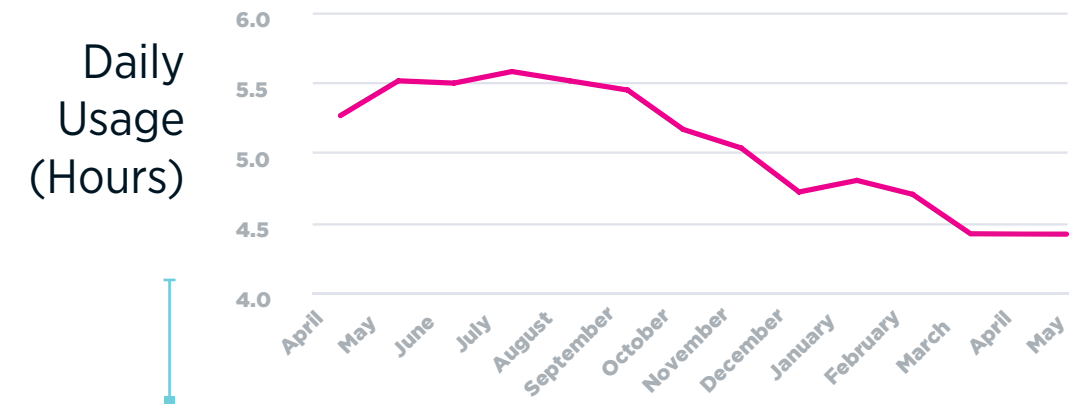
And then something happened this year...

OVER THE COURSE OF A YEAR

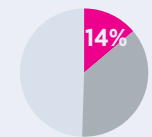
64% of people decreased their app usage:



From **5 hours**
to **4 hours**

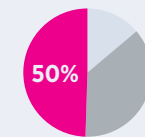


And these Conscious Disconnectors come in two types:
Intermittent Fasters and **Slow and Steady Dieters**.



INTERMITTENT FASTERS

May 2018: **5.2 hours**
August 2018: **4.9 hours**
November 2019: **5.5 hours**
March 2019: **3.8 hours**



SLOW AND STEADY DIETERS

May 2018: **5.6 hours**
December 2018: **4.9 hours**
March 2019: **4.5 hours**



THE BINGERS 36% of people increased their app usage over the same period, from **4 hours to 6 hours**. The vast majority of them (78%) have **never tried to cut back** and are armed with rationalizations like:

59%

Have **control** over their own time

37%

Don't use their phone that much to begin with

33%

To **stay connected** with family and friends

30%

Benefits outweigh the negatives

24%

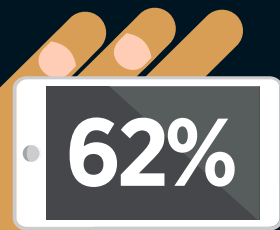
Don't believe this is even a real issue

17%

Need to stay connected **for work**

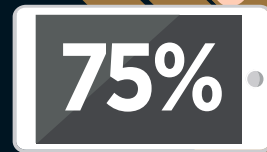
Even so, **45%** of these Bingers say they are **likely to cut back** in the future.

People are **taking ownership** of their mobile app usage...



ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY
for their own heavy app usage

CHOOSE TO CUT BACK
on their own



Me, myself and I

When thinking about who could help them cut back, almost all say “myself” (88%). Only one in three say that people in their life (38%) could help

Put the blame on me

Virtually no one places the blame on social media developers (8%), friends or family (7%) or app developers (7%)

And are **remarkably accurate** about what apps they spend time with:

	Social Media	Texting	Games	Shopping	Video	Audio	Financial	Utility	News	Travel & Transport	Health	Food & Dining	Sports	Career	Dating
ON AVERAGE, PEOPLE ACTUALLY SPEND	52 min	26 min	41 min	9 min	33 min	8 min	3 min	20 min	4 min	12 min	3 min	2 min	2 min	2 min	2 min
WHAT PEOPLE SAY THEY USE HEAVILY	75%	70%	51%	42%	39%	37%	35%	28%	24%	22%	18%	13%	11%	7%	3%

Consumers were accurate in estimating what apps they used heavily, with the exception of Shopping, Financial and News apps

These Conscious Disconnectors decided to go on a “**media diet**” because they were **wasting too much time**.

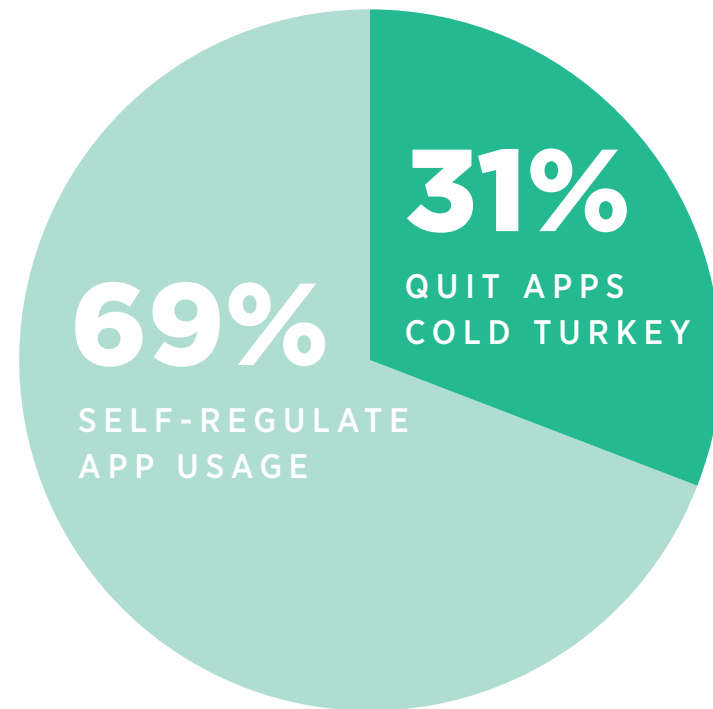
I DECIDED TO CUT BACK BECAUSE...

I was wasting my **time** **54%**

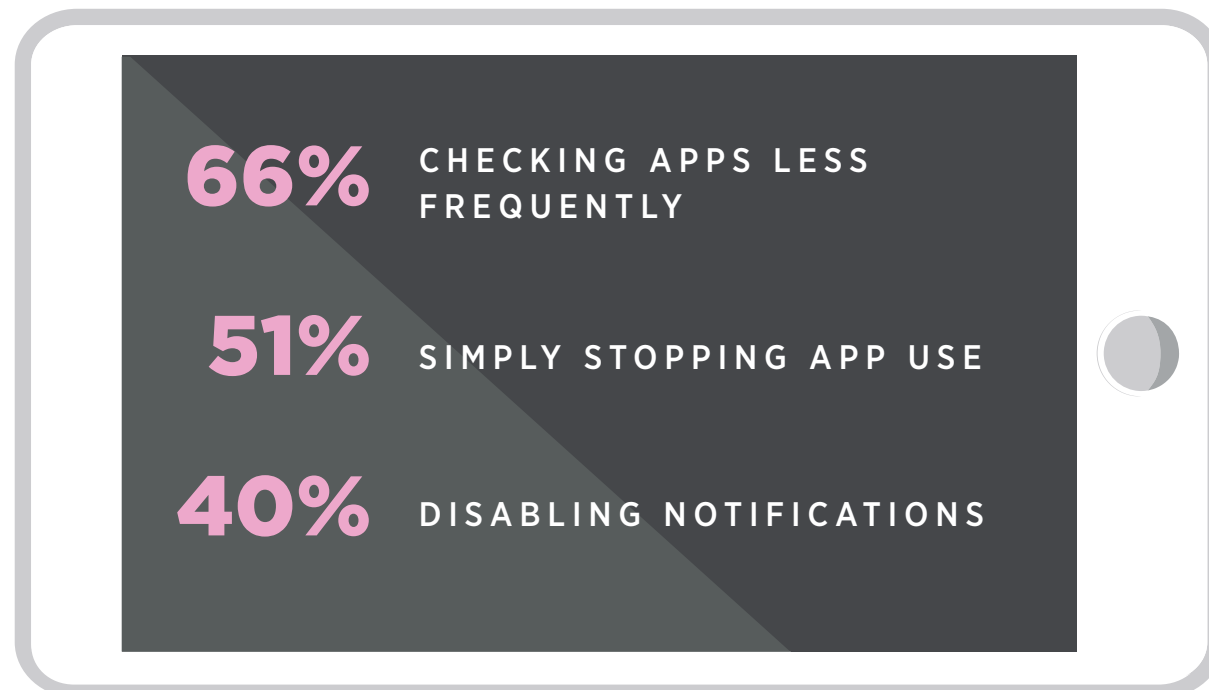
I wanted to spend more **time** with people in my life **32%**

I didn't have enough **time** in my day **31%**

And while **31%** went “**cold turkey**,” the majority (**69%**) **self-regulated**, taking a break from certain apps or cutting back.



HOW DO PEOPLE CUT BACK?

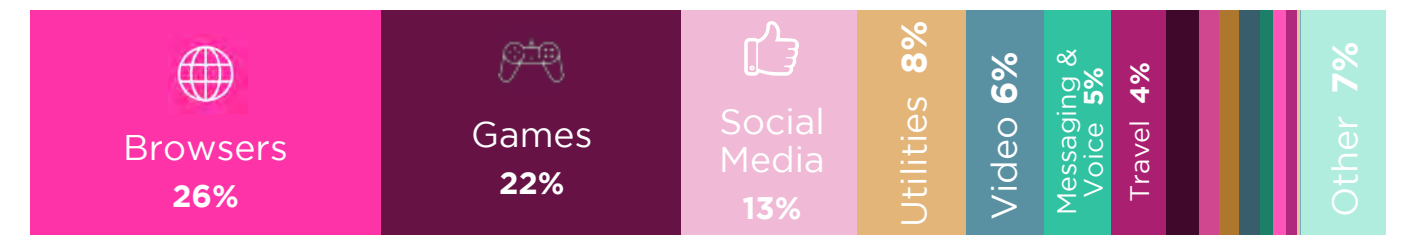


WHAT DO THEY CUT?

When looking at the

1 hour

that people cut most of the time, the cut came from these genres:



10% total:

Shopping - 2%
Food and Dining - 2%
Books - 1%
Dating - 1%
Audio - 1%
Health & Fitness - 1%
Email - 1%
News & Weather - 0.1%
Sports - 0.1%
Career & Education - 0.1%
Finance - 0%

People tend to cut out the apps where they spend the most time—mobile browsers, gaming and social media. But these categories dominate time spent **even after the reduction!**



And they are glad they disconnected:



3 out of 4

told us that cutting back on app usage was one of the **best decisions they have made** (77%)

They're getting **valuable time back**—time they are spending with their family and friends or on wellness.



48% HAVE MORE TIME
IN THE DAY



45% ARE MORE
PRODUCTIVE



34% CAN FOCUS
MORE



28% FEEL LESS
STRESSED

RECLAIMED TIME IS SPENT:



WITH FAMILY & FRIENDS

44%



SLEEPING

31%



HOBBIES

30%



READING

32%



WATCHING TV

28%

Parents, in particular, are keenly aware of the role apps are playing in their lives—and the lives of their children. Their concerns about screen time run deep when it comes to their kids.

Regarding their child's generation and app usage, parents are:

34% EXTREMELY CONCERNED

34% CONCERNED

22% NEITHER CONCERNED NOR UNCONCERNED

10% EXTREMELY UNCONCERNED OR UNCONCERNED

68%



3/5

regulate their child's screen time (60%)

Because they are highly sensitive to any potential negative effects on their child's physical or mental well-being:

REASONS TO REGULATE:

THEIR CHILD'S Physical Health

I want them to be active (80%)
I want them to get a good night's sleep (50%)
I'm worried about their brain development (43%)

THEIR CHILD'S Mental Health

I don't want them to get addicted (61%)
I don't want them seeing inappropriate things (57%)
I want them to focus on schoolwork (48%)
I'm worried about their social skills (39%)

PARENTS REGULATE BY:

66% ALLOWING KIDS TO USE ONLY CERTAIN TYPES OF APPS

52% ALLOWING USAGE ONLY AT CERTAIN TIMES

39% TAKING THEIR PHONE AWAY ALTOGETHER



4 Steps TO SUCCESS

IN THE AGE OF CONSCIOUS DISCONNECTING



Be dynamic.

Consumer behaviors are continually shifting; your media allocation should, too.



Add value.

The #1 reason people stopped using apps was “wasted time.” Help your audience with useful tools, content and information that gets them back to their daily lives.



Rethink your mix.

As people pull back from ad-supported app models, consider branded content, product placement and influencer marketing as alternative ways to reach your audience.



Grant choice.

People understand the content value exchange and that their time and data are being monetized. Put them in control with models that let consumers select their preferred experience, from micropayments to subscription models.

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iMAGINE
Forces of Change

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Q & A



In this dynamic environment of “Conscious Disconnecting,” authenticity and trust have never been more important. We sat down with Alysia Borsa, Chief Marketing and Data Officer of Meredith Corporation, to discuss how she views the publisher’s role in building trust and transparency with consumers and the best ways to incorporate marketing partners authentically into content experiences.

Q: OUR RESEARCH FOUND THAT 64% OF AMERICANS HAVE CUT BACK ON THEIR MOBILE APP USAGE OVER THE PAST YEAR, FROM FIVE HOURS TO FOUR HOURS PER DAY ON AVERAGE. AS ONE OF THE WORLD’S LARGEST PUBLISHERS, DOES THAT SURPRISE YOU?

A: It’s both surprising and not surprising. It’s surprising because, in our industry, we constantly hear that consumers are increasing their digital media consumption. They may be utilizing it in different ways and across different platforms, but, overall, we continue to see increased consumption. On a personal level, though, it doesn’t surprise me. As a working mother, I am constantly trying to find enough time in the day to do everything. I see myself cutting back on digital media consumption and being more conscious of where I’m spending my time and how I’m spending my time.

At Meredith, we focus on women. We reach 90% of all American women every single month across our platforms. For women, we have seen the trend of cutting back mobile usage through our own thought-leadership research we just released with the Harris Poll, through our proprietary data and through feedback from our editors. Women across the country are experiencing a burnout epidemic and are trying to take back control of their lives. One of the ways they are doing that is by cutting back on their digital media consumption, particularly their social media consumption. We’ve seen this trend and are adapting to it as we try to anticipate her needs and give her the content she wants in real time.

Q: WHAT IS THE VALUE EXCHANGE THAT NEEDS TO OCCUR WITH CONSUMERS? HOW DO YOU THINK ABOUT HELPING THEM MAKE THE MOST OF THEIR TIME?

A: To engage and connect with consumers in a meaningful way, we need to provide value to them. That’s the value exchange. We need to help them answer a question, to entertain them, to solve a need. We can only solve those needs and provide value to those consumers if we understand who they truly are and what they want.

We need to understand our consumers from a persistent perspective (e.g., their life stage or interests) as well as from a real-time perspective. For example, I’m a mother who is interested in gardening, but today, I need to figure out what to cook for dinner. Therefore, we need to make sure we understand our consumers in multiple ways to provide them with the right answers and solutions in their moment of need.

Q: HOW CAN MARKETERS BE INCORPORATED INTO THIS VALUE EXCHANGE EFFECTIVELY?

A: I’ll give you a couple of examples of what we’re doing at Meredith to demonstrate how we can provide solutions to consumers and involve marketers in an authentic way. For example, we have a capability where a consumer comes to us to view a recipe. In that recipe, we can show which ingredients are on sale at their local grocery store, and then from there, they can click to add the items to their cart and easily get those ingredients delivered to them at home. That’s an example of a value exchange where we can incorporate marketers in an authentic way while providing value back to the consumer.

Another example involves InStyle. From InStyle magazine, a consumer can scan a QR code to try on makeup that the editor of InStyle has recommended and click to purchase it directly from their phone. Being able to provide simple, easy content-to-commerce experiences is truly valuable to the consumer, valuable to us and valuable to our marketing partners.

Q: MEREDITH HAS BUILT A DEEP TAXONOMY TO UNDERSTAND CONSUMER NEEDS. WHY IS THAT IMPORTANT IN A WORLD WHERE MANY MAY BE GOING ON A “MOBILE MEDIA DIET?”

A: Taxonomy is critical to us and to our industry. “Taxonomy” is just the fancy term for how you classify content and experiences. We have built out a deep, proprietary taxonomy that leverages our editors’ expertise, and then uses machine learning to apply this taxonomy to all of our content. To give you some perspective, standard taxonomies in the industry

are typically six to 800 terms. Our taxonomy is over 10,000 terms. The deeper your taxonomy, the deeper your data and insights and the better able you will be to predict trends and provide more impactful and personalized content and offers to your consumers.

Q: YOU’VE BEEN ON THE IAB’S LEADERSHIP COUNCIL FOR DATA AND A STRONG VOICE SUPPORTING GREATER DATA TRANSPARENCY. HOW SHOULD MARKETERS THINK ABOUT ENGAGING PEOPLE ON MOBILE DEVICES AND ON APPS?

A: Data’s one of the stated core pillars of our entire business and is critical to our industry. It has been, and it will continue to be. That said, in order to drive truly meaningful and long-term engagements with consumers, particularly in mobile, brands and marketers need to ensure that we have established trust and transparency with our consumers. If we haven’t, we won’t be able to continue to use and leverage that data to predict trends, build the right content, personalize experiences and provide more effective offers and advertising. That’s one of the reasons why I take a leadership role in many IAB initiatives, especially around privacy, to make sure the elements of trust and transparency are in place.



Q: MEREDITH HAS DIVERSIFIED AWAY FROM JUST ADVERTISING INCLUDING LICENSING, SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES, NEWSLETTERS, REAL LIFE EXPERIENCES AND VIDEO ON DEMAND. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE CONSUMER CHOICE IN THESE EXPERIENCES? DO THEY DRIVE BETTER OUTCOMES FOR MARKETERS?

A: We are very focused on diversification. From a business perspective, our revenues are roughly split 50/50 between advertising revenue and consumer revenues, which include over 42 million print and digital subscriptions. We reach 150 million digital consumers each month, and we send 6 billion emails per year. We’re the second-largest licensor after Disney and have driven over 1 billion dollars in retail sales from our content-to-commerce experiences. We are very focused on diversifying our business but also on diversifying our experiences for consumers.

We give consumers choice with where, how and on what platform to engage with our brands. This consumer choice allows us to partner with marketers in a way that is much more impactful and diverse. A great example of this is PEOPLE and how it handles red carpet events. We work with marketers leading up to the event through our over-the-top (OTT) PEOPLE TV experiences. We then integrate the OTT with digital executions. On the day of the event, we have livestreaming and social executions and then, afterward, we summarize the event’s highlights through our magazines. Through various platforms and experiences, in an authentic way, we reinforce the value that we bring to our consumers and allow marketers to be integrated into that experience as well.

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Q & A

SUPERCONNECTED & UNPREPARED

Dr. Jean Twenge is the groundbreaking author of the book, “iGen: Why today’s Super-Connected Teens are Growing up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy – and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood – and What That Means for the Rest of Us.” Dr. Twenge initially sounded the alarm regarding the increased use of smartphones and the rise in depression and general discontent among adolescents in her September 2017 article in The Atlantic, “Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?”

Her research on the use of apps and smartphone technology provides the undeniable conclusion that increased use of smartphones in adolescents results in less social interaction, increased rates of depression and a higher likelihood of being unhappy. But is this enough to cause people to adapt more moderate behavior and decrease their use of apps? We spoke with Dr. Twenge to get her views. Below are edited excerpts from our conversation.

Every new medium brings with it calls of concern that it will be destructive to our relationships or our physical and mental well-being. What are your thoughts about the introduction of smartphones versus, for example, the introduction of television?

Many people say to me, ‘People said that TV was going to ruin society and that kids were spending too much time watching TV and it was going to have negative effects.’ Well, guess what? They were right. I think that something to keep in mind is that just because someone has made an argument before about technology, it doesn’t mean that it’s wrong.

TV isn’t great, either, but it’s very similar to digital media in that it’s very useful in limited doses. We don’t need to give up our phones; we don’t need to even give up all social media or all digital media. We just need to limit how much we use it. We need to limit the use of smartphones enough such that it doesn’t interfere with our doing other things, like seeing people in person without having that phone in front of us.

App addiction has been documented as a real condition with social consequences. What behavior have you seen in your research around the effects of app addiction?

“iGen” is defined as the generation born in 1995 or later. This is the first generation to spend its entire adolescence with smartphones. Around 2011 or 2012, I started to notice unusual trends in yearly national surveys of teens with sudden spikes in loneliness and symptoms of depression. The suicide rate among teens suddenly shot upward, and measures of anxiety have suddenly increased. There are all these troubling trends for teen mental health that began in 2011 or 2012, which is the year that the number of Americans owning a smartphone surpassed 50%. That was the year where smartphones went from something a minority of people had to something the majority of people had. The big picture is that the more time teens spend on digital media, the less time they spend with their friends, face-to-face, and the less time they spend sleeping. This is not a formula for good mental health and happiness.

Do you think there is potential for people to recognize the negative impact on increased smartphone use and change their behavior?

I actually am pretty optimistic that we can see change around smartphone use. If both teens and adults think about how they are using their time and decide to try to use their time in more productive and fulfilling ways, then they could decide to use that phone for what it’s good for. It can help you find your way around, it can look up a little information and it’s useful for sending a text to a friend about when it would be best to get together. Otherwise, put that phone down and go and live your life.

64% of Americans are now spending an hour less per day on apps than they were a year ago. The majority are “dieting,” or self-regulating, which means they are making a conscious effort to check apps less frequently, to turn off push notifications or to simply stop app use. About one-third are going “cold turkey” by deleting certain apps from their phones. What is your view on how much smartphone use we need to cut?



Dr. Jean Twenge
Author and Professor, San Diego State University

Food and digital media have some similarities. You could argue that we need a little technology and a little digital media and that a little bit might be good for us. The same is true of food. We need food to survive, but we need a limited amount. We shouldn’t be overeating, just like we shouldn’t be over-consuming digital media.

As a parent, what advice would you give other parents about limiting their children’s time on smartphones?

I have three kids myself, and I have learned over the years one of your biggest roles as a parent is to set limits. You tell your kids when to go to bed and you make them healthy meals and say that they have to eat dinner before they get dessert, and that, no, they can have two cookies, but they can’t have three cookies and they definitely can’t have six cookies!

It’s the same thing with screens. Parents have a responsibility to make sure that their kids are using devices in a responsible way. For a high school student, they might have their own smartphone, but you can put an app on it to make sure that they are not on it eight hours a day. You can limit their use to about two hours a day or less, which is what the research suggests is a healthy limit. The same thing would apply if you have a child who really wants to play video games. Sure, you can play, but not so much that it’s interfering with other things in your life.

How do you think advertising will change if people continue to cut down on the time they spend on apps?

Ads have migrated online because that’s where people are. If we do have a movement toward people not spending as much time on their phones, then ads might migrate back to wherever people are. I don’t think the platform necessarily has to matter that much. It’s more that you go where the eyeballs are, and currently the eyeballs are on online.

Q & A

ADVERTISING IN A CHANGING DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

An interview with Andrew Hotz

We sat down with Andrew Hotz, EVP of digital marketing and chief data strategist at Warner Bros., to get his thoughts on the most effective methods of advertising in this changing digital environment. Below are edited excerpts from our conversation.

Does it surprise you that the majority of Americans have cut back on their mobile app usage over the past year, from five hours to four hours on average?

There has been so much movement away from fixed screens to mobile screens that I'm surprised consumption is decreasing. That said, I'm not surprised that people are becoming more mindful of how they're engaging with media. Personally, I am more mindful of my app usage around my two kids, as they comment on my phone usage, which makes me feel horrible. Yet, even when I try to cut back, I feel that unconscious tug that draws me to my mobile screen.

Streaming is one of the major ways consumers spend time on mobile devices. When they "cut back" app usage, they tend to cut back on social media first, followed by reducing time spent with content sites, gaming and streaming. Does that concern you as a content publisher and marketer?

It doesn't concern me as much as it would if it were on other platforms. To sell movies, the most important thing is to have a consumer sample our video content. Social is an incredibly personal and powerful experience for users, but it's not a great platform to engage with video content.

As consumers spend less time on their devices, marketers will be challenged to find ways to deliver more targeted, more relevant, less "ad-like" advertising to people. If a decrease in mobile impressions puts the pressure back on marketers to sharpen our targeting skills and our creative skills to make sure we're giving the right content, I think that's actually a better route to go in the long run, both for marketers and consumers.

You came from Google to Warner Bros. How has your view of the consumer changed now that you are running a global media brand? Any lessons you've learned?

At Google, everything is built around the user experience, and I gained an understanding of how consumers are engaging with content on various digital

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As consumers spend less time on their devices, marketers will be challenged to find ways to deliver more targeted, more relevant, less "ad-like" advertising to people.



platforms. Traditionally, on the marketing side, we decide what we want audiences to do and then expect them to do it. Today, it is imperative to create content that is congruous with the consumer experience and to provide the consumers with what they want, even if it is not necessarily what we want as marketers.

For example, to address the myriad platforms, we have reformatted our creative. Our traditional trailer is a 2:30 creative that we put into movie theaters before other films. We also put it on YouTube, where people are going, to afford us longer viewing time. On other platforms, our trailer may be 30 seconds, or 10 seconds, or perhaps simply a still graphic that says the trailer is out now.

What do advertisers need to keep in mind when marketing to consumers on mobile web and in mobile apps? Any best practices of tactics that work—or don't?

Marketers are realizing that mobile is crucial, but they haven't examined their entire process to ensure it's focused on the mobile consumer. Are they approving content on mobile devices? Are they effectively planning to make sure a certain media allocation goes toward mobile devices? Do they understand how users engage with content across different platforms on mobile devices?

About 70% of movie tickets in the U.S. are sold within three hours of the showtime. This presents an opportunity on a mobile device to reach that consumer and influence them to pick our movie. To take advantage of that opportunity, we shifted to dynamic, real-time ad spending. If we know where you are based on your mobile device, we can personalize the advertising and tell you the name of the closest theater and the showtimes.

Our next evolution will be to target by consumer mindset. Consumer mindset is where mobile becomes a key player, as it will enable us to know where a consumer is in their purchase process. If they are standing outside a theater and searching for movies to see, we can take that signal and send them a targeted message.

Another implication of the research is that giving consumers a choice for how their time is valued and monetized is going to be more important than ever. As a global brand leader, how do you think about consumer choice?

Consumer choice dictates everything and should be at the core of everything that you're doing. As creative marketers, our job is to design content in a way such that consumers will want to engage. Now that the consumer can control how they uniquely engage with media, they are in the driver's seat.





FINDING LOST TIME

Tiffany Shlain is both a filmmaker and an internet pioneer. She founded the Webby Awards and recently authored the book “24/6: The Power of Unplugging One Day a Week.” We sat down with Tiffany to discuss smartphone addiction, the role of marketers in this ecosystem and how a weekly “Technology Shabbat” helps her “find time” she had lost.

Q You’ve been doing a “Tech Shabbat” with your family for a decade now. What does that mean, and has it gotten harder or easier over time?

A Ten years ago my family decided to “unplug” one day a week. Now we look forward to it every week. My husband and I have a 16-year-old and a 10-year-old and we view it as our one day of rest which, in our modern day, means no screens. Afterward, I feel much more productive, more creative and more connected to myself, my family, to nature and to the world.

We found that 64% of Americans have cut back on their mobile app usage over the past 14 months. Does this surprise you?

It doesn’t surprise me because the pendulum had swung so far one way. The invention of the iPhone in 2007 was a distinguishing moment and then everyone got addicted. Now research has started to come out, which confirms what we instinctively knew, which says it’s not good to be constantly staring at these screens. There was a period of realization and recognition, and now people want to do something about it and they’re starting to change their habits. It’s comparable to any addiction—first you acknowledge that there is a problem, then you have to want to do something about it and then you actually do something about it.

Across the board, we found that “stop wasting time” was the top reason people cited for decreasing their usage. Tell us about people’s perception of “time.” What does it really mean when people say they cut back “because of time?” Are we living in a society that feels “time poor?”

Technology speeds up our perception of time. We all know that feeling when we intend to “check one thing” and then suddenly we’re sucked into the feed and have wasted a lot of time. When you turn off the device, you get your time back. The most valuable thing in our 24/7 time-starved society is being present, and by turning off our devices, we are then able to be present in the moment.

How do you think people’s value of time will change over the next 10 years?

Every ancient wisdom practice from every religion and culture values time for reflection and time to be present. Technology has blurred the boundaries between work and leisure. We have created a society where there’s no room for reflection or solitary contemplation. We need to go back to living a good life of meaning and purpose and create time for reflection.

A full 34% of people increased their app usage over the past 14 months, with no signs of slowing down. These audiences also tend to use language of an addict (e.g., “I don’t have a problem”) “Others use

it more than I do”). Have you seen that behavior in your own life? What do you make of the denial?

A smartphone is an alluring device. Thousands of engineers and behavioral scientists spend every day working on keeping our eyes glued on the screen. Everyone is at a different stage of addiction. There are some people who believe the pendulum has swung too far and want to do something about it. They might decide to turn off notifications on their phone or practice a Tech Shabbat like my family does. Then there are other people who have not yet reached their breaking point.

You’ve been pretty critical of tech folks who created the “attention economy” and now claim to have the way to fix it. What do you think is behind that?

It’s going to take everyone to try to solve this. It is imperative that we have a diversity of perspectives to help to find the solution. Currently, a monochromatic group influences the direction of our communication technology and we need to invite many more voices—including women and people of color—to help find a solution. There are a lot of ways technology improves our lives, but the question of our time is, “When is it better to turn it off?”

What are some examples of marketing tactics that are feeding the problem of lack of time?

Examples of marketing techniques that contribute to the problem of “lack of time” include notifications, which



Tiffany Shlain
Filmmaker, Author, and
Founder, The Webby Awards

we are constantly bombarded with; the way Facebook times the news on your newsfeed—how it drips out the likes to keep you coming back or the news in general, which plays on our fears. The more stressful the news is, the more you want to click on it.

What advice would you give to marketers trying to reach consumers on mobile devices?

Marketers have an ethical responsibility to have a serious conversation within the industry on what they’re doing to people. They need to ask themselves, “When does screen time make life better and when does it make life worse?” Ultimately, everybody wants their brand to be associated with something that makes people feel better. Marketers should consider other strategies that could achieve the same goals without resulting in people’s eyes glued to the screen.

Q & A

THE FUTURE of Choice & Consent

An Interview with Benjamin Barokas

As the Founder and CEO of Sourcepoint Technologies, Benjamin Barokas is driving the next phase of the internet by providing technology and services that enable the world's largest media companies to foster a transparent value exchange with consumers. We sat down with Benjamin to get his unique perspective on the future of choice and consent for consumers.

Q We found that 64% of Americans have cut back on their mobile app usage over the past 14 months, from five hours to four hours on average. Does this surprise you?

A It does not surprise me. There's a point where we reach peak phone usage. How much time do you want to spend looking at your little screen? People are becoming increasingly aware of connecting with the digital world versus being in real life—and are choosing to spend more time being present in the moment.

What are consumer attitudes about privacy and how their data is used? Have you seen attitudes shift in recent months?

I believe very strongly that data rights are human rights. People are anxious about data privacy and are cognizant that they don't know how their data has been harvested and utilized in the past. The online advertising ecosystem is beginning to pivot toward transparency so that users can understand the value exchange that's occurring when they consume content. As publishers and digital utilities provide users with transparency and enable them to make the choice of paying with their data, with their attention or with a micropayment or macropayment, there will be a clear value transaction taking place that will improve the common good.

Why is consumer choice so important in today's attention-driven environment and what are the best practices for offering consumers a choice for how their time and attention for data is monetized?

Customization and personalization are the gold standard that all digital utilities and content creators aspire to. The starting point of successful customization and personalization is communicating directly with the consumer. Companies that have clear communication with the user perform better over time. The return on advertising spend is significantly higher when the user raises her hand and says, "I want to pay with my data." There is much less advertising blindness when there's an understanding of the transparent value exchange that occurs. Providing the consumer with a choice will become the standard worldwide for respecting data privacy while collecting appropriate remuneration for content.

How is Sourcepoint helping publishers make choice a reality for consumers?

Sourcepoint offers a product called AltPay that allows publishers the ability to provide the consumer with the choice of making a micropayment in exchange for content. We also have a product called AltAd, which allows users to see a different kind of advertising experience than they would get normally in exchange for content. Finally, we have a product that focuses on compliance. This is a consent management platform that publishers can use to obtain consent from their user and then communicate that consent downstream. This will ensure that consumer data was collected in a compliant manner.

What are your initial findings with AltAd and AltPay? What are people choosing?

We're seeing a lot of interesting results. People are more likely to participate in AltPay, AltAd and the consent management platform in places that have longer form video content. In places where the content is written and not necessarily ultra-premium, people tend to provide their data in exchange for the content. There are some ultra-premium platforms where the goal is subscription revenue, but it is very difficult to convince someone to pull out their credit card and actually pay money in exchange for those content experiences.

Micropayments have been talked about for years but haven't had much traction. Why do you think that's the case?

Consumers tend to utilize micropayments when the friction to pay is very low, for example when there is a wallet involved. There will be a day when wallets are created and everyone has one, but that day is not here yet. Blockchain technology isn't yet deployed at scale, so there is currently no mechanism for publishers

and digital content creators to generate significant amounts of revenue in an alternative way.

Do you see a difference between a consent economy and a choice economy? And if so, what's that difference?

Consent is on the continuum to choice. Previously, many users had no understanding of how the publisher or the digital utility creator was compensated. Now, through legislation, we're moving toward consent, where users are starting to understand how data and attention are utilized to compensate the publisher. The next stage will be choice, where the consumer has the opportunity to either pay with data and attention or pay through a different means.



Benjamin Barokas
Founder & CEO
Sourcepoint

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IN CLOSING

THE WAY FORWARD

Concerns about app addiction are real—and mainstream. While technology players launch parental controls and screen-time monitors, people are taking matters into their own hands, with the majority of people cutting back on the time they spend each day with apps. To reach these consumers effectively, marketers and publishers must add value to the mobile experience, be transparent about the value exchange taking place and offer consumers a choice for how to engage.

We may have hit peak app usage. 64% of people cut back on the amount of time they spent with apps over the past 14 months, from 5 hours to 4 hours per day. And this change is likely here to stay.



Renee Cassard
Chief Audience Officer
HEARTS & SCIENCE

“The single most important reason why people are doing this, why they are cutting back on their screen time, is they’re losing time to do the things that matter most to them. They are conscious of wasting their time, or in essence, living life in a way they find less meaningful. The shift is internally motivated, not externally motivated. This isn’t somebody telling you that you should cut back. This isn’t a result of the social media platforms manipulating you or too much fake news. This is truly something that is felt internally, or what psychologists call an internal locus. This is what leads to long lasting changes in behavior, and why we feel marketers need to pay attention.”

“But whether they self-regulated their urge to check apps or deleted the apps altogether, nearly all (77%) people told us it was one of the best decisions they have made, and half (56%) plan to continue. They see disconnecting as a path to gaining back lost time for the things that truly do enhance their lives.”



Pamela Marsh, Ph.D.
Managing Director, Primary Research
OMNICOM MEDIA GROUP

But it’s going to take effort across the industry and society at large to solve the problem of app addiction in the long term. 36% of people increased their usage over the research time period.



Tiffany Shlain
Filmmaker, Author,
Webby Awards Founder

“It’s going to take everyone to try to solve this. It is imperative that we have a diversity of perspectives to help to find the solution. Currently, a monochromatic group influences the direction of our communication technology and we need to invite many more voices—including women and people of color—to help find a solution. There are a lot of ways technology improves our lives, but the question of our time is, “When is it better to turn it off?”

“I actually am pretty optimistic that we can see change around smart phone use. We don’t need to give up our phones; we don’t need to even give up all social media or all digital media. We just need to limit how much we use it. We need to limit the use of smartphones enough such that it doesn’t interfere with our doing other things, like seeing people in person without having that phone in front of us.”



Dr. Jean Twenge
Author and Professor
SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY

Publishers are already starting to adapt to this changing consumer behavior, ensuring they add value to every digital experience. They’re also making the value exchange with consumers more transparent and offering greater choice to people for how to engage.

“To engage and connect with consumers in a meaningful way, we need to provide value to them. We need to help them answer a question, to entertain them, to solve a need. We can only solve those needs and provide value to those consumers if we understand who they truly are. Particularly in mobile, brands and marketers need to ensure that we have established trust and transparency with our consumers. If we haven’t, we won’t be able to continue to use and leverage that data, which enables us to reach and engage our consumers in meaningful ways.”



Alysia Borsa
Chief Marketing and Data Officer
MEREDITH CORPORATION



Benjamin Barokas
Founder and CEO
SOURCEPOINT TECHNOLOGIES

“Consent is on the continuum to choice. Previously, many users had no understanding of how the publisher or the digital utility creator was compensated. Now, through legislation, we’re moving toward consent, where users are starting to understand how data and attention are utilized to compensate the publisher. The next stage will be choice, where the consumer has the opportunity to either pay with data and attention or pay through a different means.”

We hope you have enjoyed this discussion of App Addiction and Conscious Disconnecting. Share your feedback or join the conversation with [#forcesofchange](#) or learn more at hearts-science.com/forcesofchange.

LEARN MORE

To learn more about this and other Forces of Change shaping our industry, visit www.hearts-science.com/forcesofchange and share your thoughts and feedback with [#forcesofchange](https://twitter.com/forcesofchange).