

SHOULD BRANDS EMBRACE THE DIGITAL DETOX TREND?

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The 'digital detox' trend is thriving. Almost a third of young people have undergone a digital detox, and more than half have purposely deactivated their social media accounts. Is it time for brands to embrace offline and connect with young people in real life?



3 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW

1. Young people are tired of the anxiety and addiction of social media - they're more aware than ever of its effect on their wellbeing
2. There's an information overload - and it's coming from branded messaging
3. Detoxes are only temporary - brands shouldn't worry - young people will be back!

Young people across Britain are threatening to #DeleteFacebook. The social network is under fire after the recent data scandal, and it's pushing young people to log off. But taking a break from social media is nothing new. It's part of a bigger trend: the **digital detox**, where young people deactivate their social networks and reduce their technology usage.

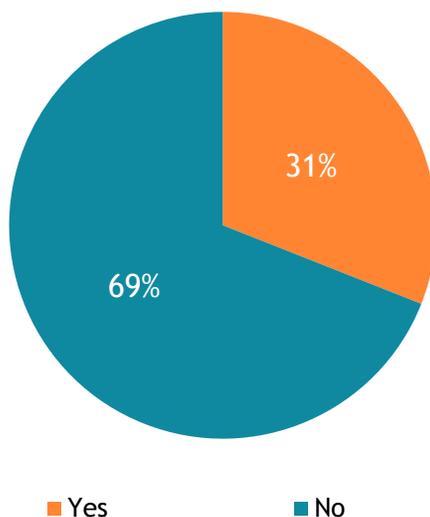
The benefits of logging off are **well-documented**: better sleep, better posture, less anxiety, and more enjoyment in real-life social situations. But is digital detoxing a threat to brands that rely on digital and social media branding? We asked young people aged 16-24 directly to find out more.

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE TIRED OF THE ANXIETY AND ADDICTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

51% of young people said they have permanently or temporarily deactivated or deleted a social media account when we asked them in 2015. Surprisingly, the youngest generation, who have grown up with social media and technology, are the most likely to give up their social media accounts - the trend is strongest among Gen Z (53%) (SYN, W25.4, Dec 2015).

But recently we've seen the rise of a specific 'digital detox' - a trend in which almost a third of young people that we asked have purposely given up social media for a set period of time. Again, the trend is stronger among Gen Z and young women (SYN, SM3, Oct 2017).

Have you ever purposely decided to give up social media? (e.g. a month's digital detox)



(Graph data: SYN, SM3, Oct 2017)

So what is driving young people to log-off? Rupen G Kalsi, a Millennial writing in the Guardian, says it's the **anxiety and addiction of social media**. *"I didn't want to feel the constant weight of comparison on my shoulders, or feel compelled to check how many friends had watched what I did... So it was goodbye, Snapchat and Instagram."*

Young people are savvier than ever before about their mental and emotional health, and **they know that social media can make them unhappy** - whether it's pressure to look a certain way, or get a certain number of likes, maintaining social media profiles can be hard work.

But there's another big reason for turning to a digital detox...

INFORMATION OVERLOAD – THE RISE OF BRANDED MESSAGING

Part of the driving force behind the digital detox trend is fatigue of branded content. Asked why she deactivated her social media account, one young Millennial woman **said** *"Targeted advertising [on social media] is really starting to alienate our generation."*

Young people are particularly intolerant of digital advertising, and they are quick to deactivate their accounts when brands get too pushy. For example, one study revealed that a **third of people have deleted email accounts due to excessive brand messaging**.

It's a wake up call for brands: bombarding young people with digital ads may be pushing them towards switch off altogether, suggesting that brands should potentially avoid excessive blanket campaigns across social media and digital platforms.

Indeed, brands are increasingly acknowledging the digital detox trend and its benefits, as Dolmio showed with their ad campaign in 2017. Fed up with "technology hijacking family dinnertime," Dolmio launched the 'Pepper Hacker,' a device that disables wifi in the surrounding area. When placed on the dinner table, families are forced to put their phones down and talk. Dolmio created a humorous video advert, a website, and a real-life product to promote the campaign.

Persil also tapped into the movement with its long-running 'dirt is good' campaign. It encourages kids to put down their tablets and smartphones, and get outside. Persil balanced the online and offline world by launching a 'Wild Explorers' app to help parents get their children playing outside. The app was downloaded 125,000 times in its first three months, proving that brands can still use technology and encourage digital downtime.

Case Study: The KFC Phone Stack

The company: KFC

The story: KFC noticed that young customers would arrive at its restaurants in groups, but sit around the table on their phones in silence. So KFC launched the 'Phone Stack.' The campaign encourages diners to place their phones in a stack in the middle of the table and enjoy a real conversation. KFC customers can 'link' the stacked phones using an app, and a timer records how long they stay offline. The longer they stay offline, the more KFC rewards they build up.

The results: The Phone Stack spread outside KFC restaurants and groups of friends began stacking their phones in all sorts of social situations.

DON'T WORRY, THE DIGITAL DETOX IS USUALLY TEMPORARY

While the digital detox trend is growing, it's unlikely to have any long-term effect on social media use. Despite the panic around the #DeleteFacebook campaign, Facebook says it hasn't yet seen a significant loss of users.

Our own data confirms that young people will struggle to log-off for good. 69% say that social media is an "essential part of my life" (SYN, W23.1, Oct 2017), and 52% feel "vulnerable" without their mobile phone (SYN, W38.2, April 2016).

Digital detoxes are more commonly a short-term breather, before the FOMO kicks in and young people reactivate those deleted accounts. Like any detox or diet, it isn't long before old habits creep back in.

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR BRANDS TO CONNECT WITH YOUNG AUDIENCES IRL

Digital detoxes reduce anxiety, increase happiness and give people a new perspective. It's important for brands to catch people when they're logged off as well - try reconnecting with young people in the real world with experiential marketing and real-life social events, and they'll associate those feel-good moments with your brand.

Some brands are already capitalising on the trend - brewery company Meantime launched a pop-up bar in London launched in 2017 with a **strict no-phones policy**. Customers were forced to hand in their phones at the door, a tactic which resonated with customers who enjoyed the digital down-time and garnered articles in the press.

Innocent Smoothies went a step further and launched the “**Unplugged Festival**” in 2016. It advertised a “Weekend off the grid to escape [people’s] busy, stressful city lives where they are constantly overloaded with information”. It attracted 2,000 people and is set to return in 2018.

ACTIONS FOR YOU

1. **Acknowledge the effects of social media** - Show you support young people and want to help combat the negative side of social media. Put positive messages out there and young people will associate those positive feelings with you
2. **Be cautious about the volume of targeted ads** - there may be potential to recalibrate your frequency of ads on social media. Information overload is not just irritating young people, it may drive them to seek other platforms entirely.
3. **Go offline** - Digital detoxes are only temporary, but they’re a good reminder to catch your audience in real life too. Develop experiential marketing and real-life events to bring people together and create a social experience around your brand offline.

*This Spotlight is part of YouthSight’s **State of the Youth Nation** (SYN) membership product. State of the Youth Nation is the essential youth marketing companion when it comes to understanding Gen Z and Millennials.*

*If you’d like more information about young people’s trends, **get in touch** with our team of researchers who will be able to signpost you to more insights and relevant data from State of the Youth Nation.*