THE : FUTURE : LABORATORY

Communities

The Tech-Resisters

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Cover image: Unplugged, UK

Key Takeaways



Unplugged, UK

Survival Strategies

Consumers are actively resisting technology through disconnection strategies such as app-blockers and analogue alternatives, driven by concerns over autonomy, mental health, privacy and cognitive function.



B416, New Zealand

Generational Nuance

Younger consumers are motivated by cognitive preservation and missing out on real-world experiences, while older resisters are conscious of wasting time and setting an example for their children.



Light Phone, US

The Value Gap

Echoing insights from our The Value Vanguard community, the resisters are seeking out digital brands and products that respect boundaries, protect privacy and support intentional use.

Introduction

Meet the citizens armed with knowledge of addictive design and extraction mechanics who are rejecting algorithms, embracing analogue alternatives and treating friction as protection

Lead analysts

Alice Crossley, *deputy foresight editor*
Ella Murray, *junior creative visualiser*
Fiona Harkin, *director of foresight*

Why? Consciously or not, consumers have begun to slowly resist the same technologies they spent the past few decades welcoming with open arms. From screen time-blockers and deactivating social media accounts to using Anthropic over OpenAI or boycotting certain apps, the tide is turning.

While it was previously accepted that consumers want the fastest, most frictionless technology wherever and whenever they can get it, our research suggests this is no longer the case.

Our Communities reports identify and interview the early adopters who signal where the rest of society may later follow. This Communities report introduces the people who have tipped from thinking critically about the role of technology in their lives to actively taking steps to change it.

Their behaviours are not technophobic, but reflective of a growing cohort of informed sceptics who understand exactly how technology works and resist it precisely because of that knowledge.

They are motivated by a crisis of autonomy – feeling their time, attention, thoughts and even identity are no longer their own, bringing the tension between human and machine to life – as explored in The Future Laboratory's The Synthocene Era macrotrend.

These consumers are not resisting the future, but attempting to preserve a version of life, culture, humanity and autonomy that they sense is endangered.

How? Supported by a proprietary Future:Poll survey of more than 3,000 adults, this Communities report delves into the lives of five consumers living in the UK, Australia and the US. These Tech-Resisters are united by a mission to build elaborate personal defence systems that allow them to exist within the digital world on their own terms.

Alongside these consumer snapshots and proprietary quantitative research, more than 35 consumers across the globe responded to The Future Laboratory's call to share their stories of tech resistance. Their thoughts and behaviours helped shape the wider context of this report.



Brick, US

Future:Poll™

Before delving into the lived experiences of Tech-Resisters, we commissioned an original **Future:Poll** survey of 3,042 adults in the UK, the US and Australia to find out more about the general public's current attitudes to technology.

35%

want to cut their screen time

↑ 52% among students

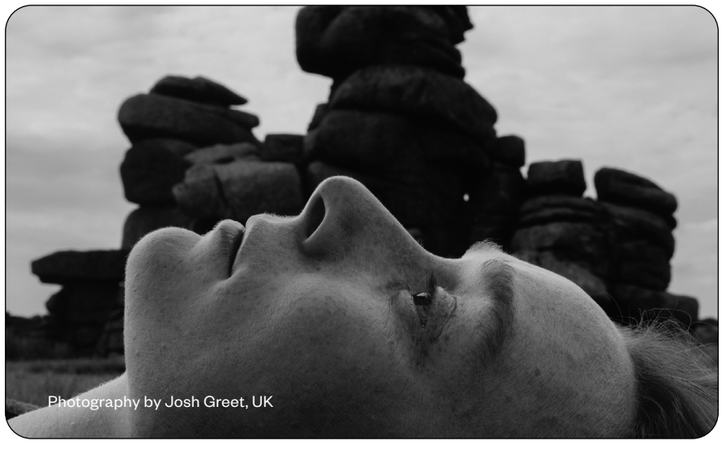
37%

avoid social media to limit screen time

↑ 41% in Australia

36% are *cutting back* on tech to protect their mental health

with 33% saying it feels addictive



Photography by Josh Greet, UK



Samsú, Ireland

57%

are seeking slower, more analogue ways of living

60%

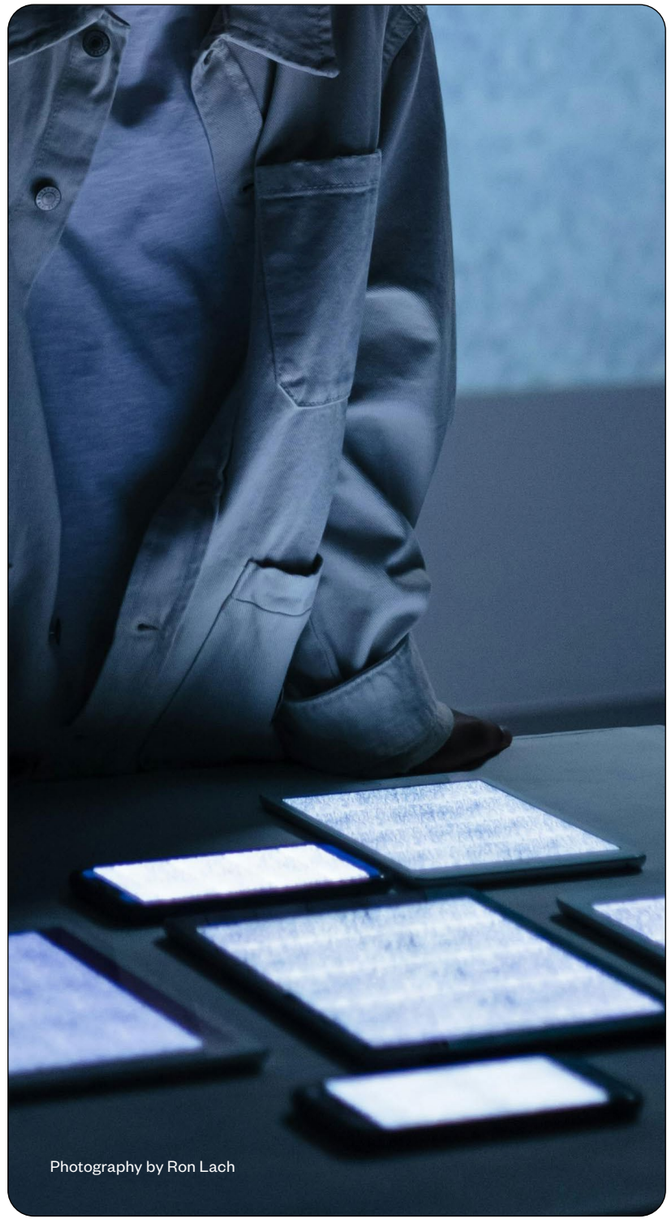
choose not to use dating apps – the most rejected technology

Future:Poll™

46%

use AI every week

25% have never used it at all


Photography by Ron Lach

74%

support tougher regulation of AI and social media

↑ **80% in the UK**

82%

are concerned about data tracking

↑ **87% among over-55s**

76%

feel scared by AI's capabilities

↑ **84% among Boomers aged 65+**

Parents are *twice as likely* to schedule tech-free spaces (28%)

↓ **14% among non-parents**

Then **vs** *Now*

In 2024, The Future Laboratory interviewed 2,000 adults about AI across the UK and the US. Two years on, how have things changed?

2024 2026

01 — Usage

2024

69%

of consumers foresee AI assisting in daily life

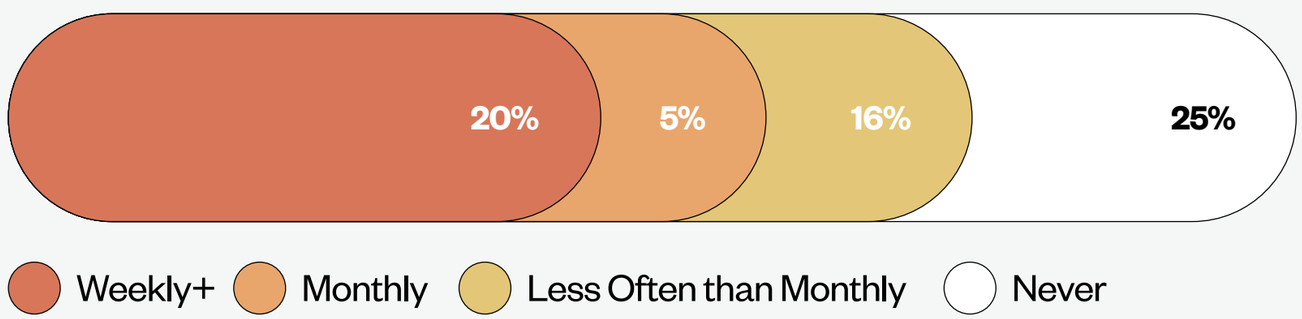
2026

16%

use AI daily —
but a quarter have never used it at all

2026

Breakdown of frequency of AI usage

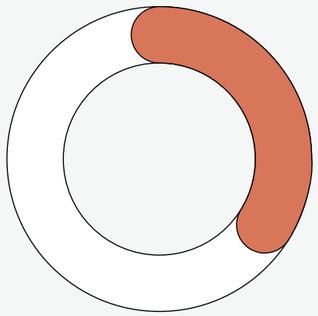


02 — Resistance

2024

31%

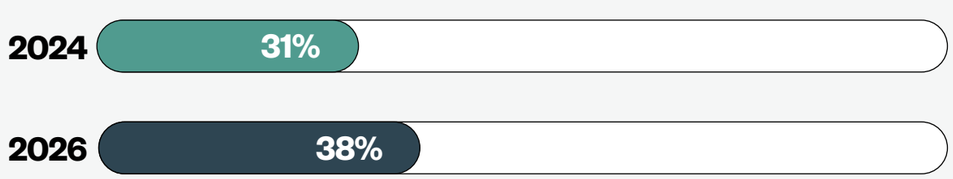
of respondents
remain resistant to AI



2026

38%

deliberately choose not to use ChatGPT

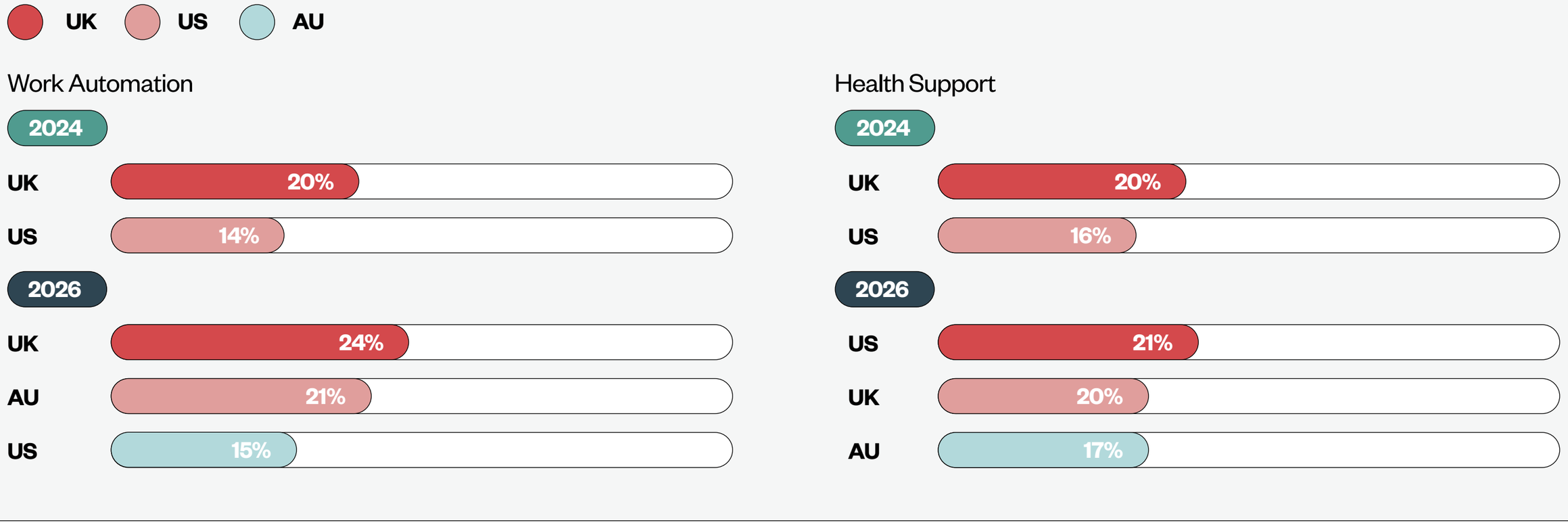


Then **vs** *Now*

03 — Use Cases by Region

Work & Health – Regional Split

Comparing openness to AI across the UK, US and Australia



Key Behaviours

Workplace contradiction

The Tech-Resisters maintain a love-hate relationship with technology, accepting it as a necessary professional tool but also a personal threat. The more sophisticated the user – or the more closely they work with technology in a professional capacity – the more suspicious they become.

Parenthood as a catalyst

For many, parenthood is the tipping point for re-assessing tech habits. Despite years of tolerating technology's intrusion into their own lives, the resisters draw hard boundaries when it comes to their kids, often as a catalyst for self-reflection.

Agency and autonomy

Resistance is not a rejection of tools but a reclamation of agency. These consumers want greater control over how, when and why they engage with digital products and services.

Cognitive function

Beyond time, they feel their capacity to focus is being permanently altered by technology, and believe that outsourcing thinking and creativity to generative AI will have permanently adverse effects on the brain.

Analogue revival

Resisters are returning to analogue technologies such as record players, film cameras and paper journals that offer respite from the frictionless consumption of digital environments.

Resistance as protest

Resistance is political. From boycotting tech giants for their involvement in geopolitics to an aversion to American technologies and the creeping feeling of living in a surveillance state, resisting becomes a personal protest against technocracy.

Informed sceptics

The most sophisticated resisters don't consider technology to be inherently bad, but recognise it is designed to extract value and consequently adopt protective behaviours such as tracking permissions, limiting data-sharing and using privacy tools to resist this.

Generational nuance

While younger respondents fear their brain functions are being altered and cognitive function depleted, older resisters are more concerned about technologies' ability to drain finite time.

Mental wellbeing

Resisters describe technology as a mood-destabiliser, anxiety-inducer and rage-baiter. Reducing exposure becomes a proactive strategy for survival in the modern world.

Time guardians

Tech-Resisters fiercely protect their finite hours, acutely aware of how easily time can disappear into doomscrolls and infinite feeds; logging out of the digital world unlocks presence in the physical world.



Bang & Olufsen, Denmark

The Sovereignty-Seeker



Photography by Josh Greet, UK

CONSUMER SNAPSHOT



Name
Felipe Bravo

Age
33

Nationality
Colombian

Location
Berlin, Germany

Occupation
Architecture and design

RELATIONSHIP TO TECHNOLOGY

→ Felipe describes his relationship with technology as ‘pretty healthy’ as a result of the controls and restrictions he has put in place around it

→ His heavy use of technology at work motivates him to ‘build barriers’ to technology in his personal life and have hobbies that do not require a screen

‘I think I’ve worked pretty hard to establish a healthy relationship with technology’



Photography by Ekaterina Bolovtsova

RESISTANCE

TURNING POINT

- Felipe's tech resistance began 5–6 years ago when he decided to stop using Instagram because it felt meaningless
- His first concrete action following this realisation was to establish digital compartmentalisation by creating a separate ghost email for online subscriptions
- His relocation from the US to sustainability-conscious Berlin provided cultural reinforcement, accelerating his evolving values around intentional technology use

ANTI-AMERICAN AI

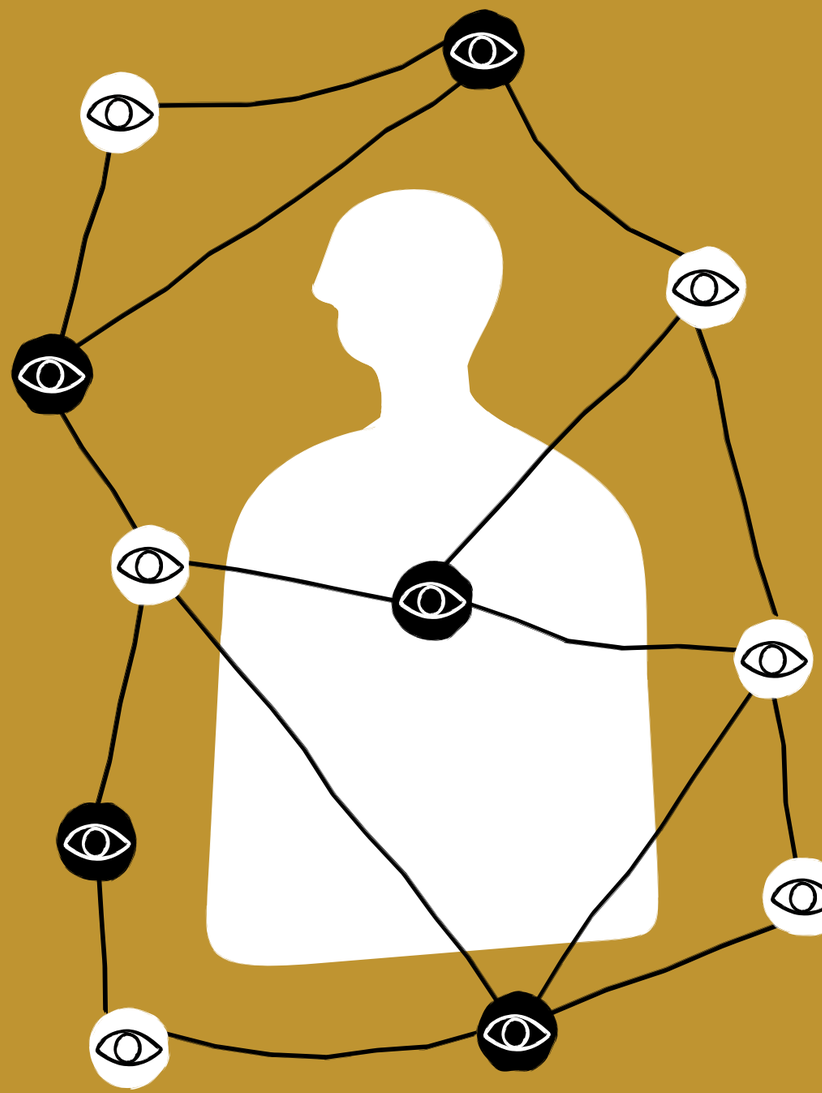
→ Felipe uses AI at work for research and to help with his CV and portfolio

→ But he uses Mistral's Le Chat instead of ChatGPT, preferring European over American tech

→ 'I like data privacy and think it is safer to use an app like that in the EU because of regulation, than something from the US,' he says



Brick, US



82%

of consumers express concern about apps or platforms tracking their personal data

Source: **Future:Poll™**

PRIVACY & SECURITY

→ Felipe uses NordVPN on all devices to delete digital footprint and remove unwanted subscriptions

→ He has Bluetooth turned off on all devices and Siri deactivated

→ He has a protective wallet, phone and passport cases to prevent SIM cards and cards being read

→ His home contains no smart devices

→ He uses network scanner and monitoring tool Fing to monitor devices connected to his wifi network and remove previously connected devices

FOCUS & PRODUCTIVITY

→ Felipe uses Brick – a physical device that blocks app access – to maintain focus during the working day

IDENTITY & ANONYMITY

→ Felipe has a blank Instagram account with tagging turned off

→ He uses an initial instead of his name on WhatsApp (no name or photo)

→ He uses Device1 on all devices so personal information isn't saved when paired with unknown devices

→ He uses a secondary email for newsletters and sign-ups

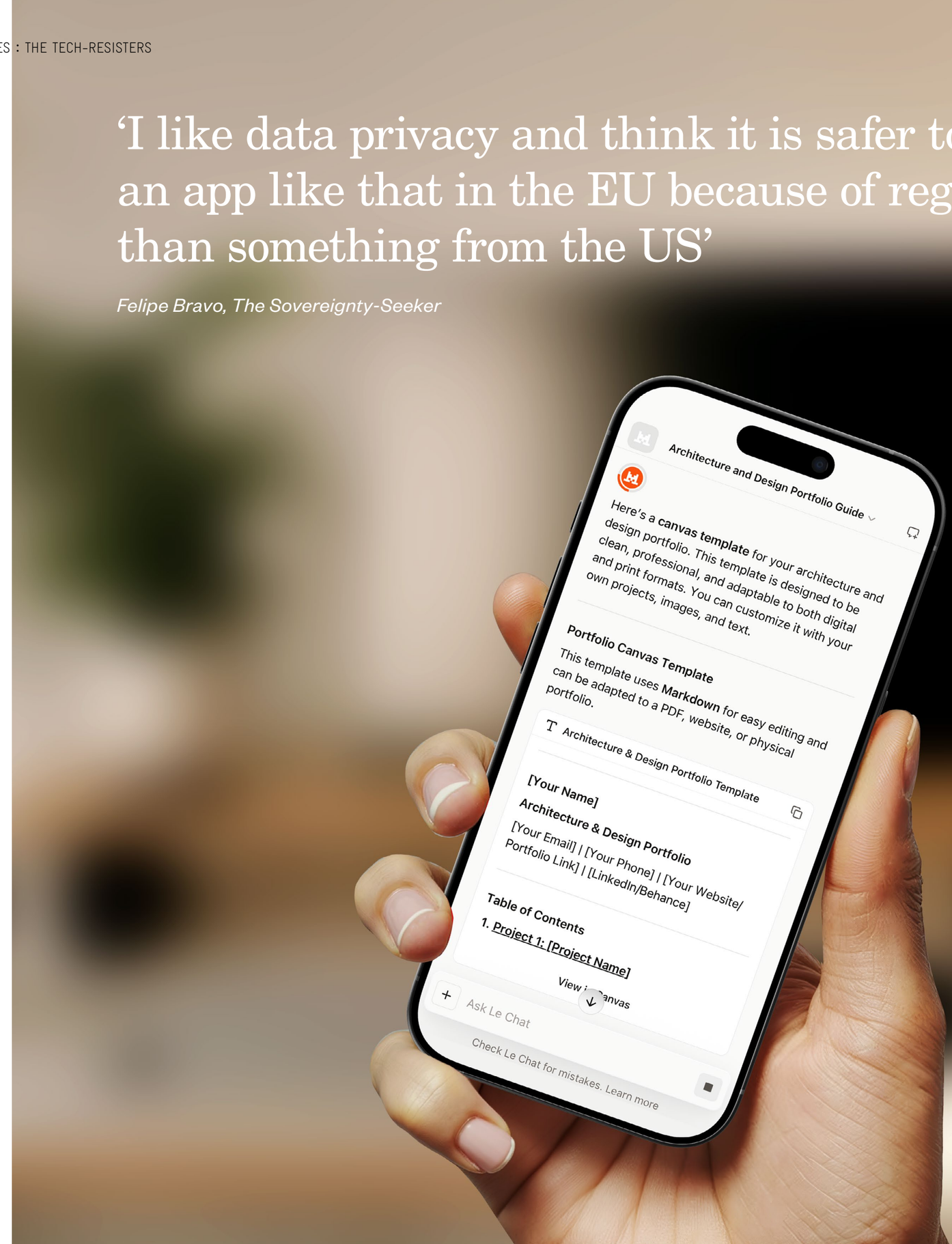
→ He immediately distrusts apps or websites that require personal information to access content

DIGITAL DETOXING

→ Felipe and his friends host B2B (back-to-basics) days when they take walks, play board games and do crafts, with no technology involved

'I like data privacy and think it is safer to use an app like that in the EU because of regulation, than something from the US'

Felipe Bravo, The Sovereignty-Seeker



Felipe uses the European alternative to Chat GPT, Le Chat, for research and to help with his CV and portfolio, France

MOTIVATIONS & BENEFITS

MENTAL HEALTH

→ Felipe's tech resistance is motivated by wanting to build barriers for his mental health, so that he's not always on a screen

SUSTAINABILITY

→ His resistance is also motivated by the environmental impact of the technology industry

PRIVACY & SECURITY

→ He is concerned about identity theft and is privacy-conscious

TIME

→ He feels he has earned time back by resisting technology, which he uses on his hobbies

FREEDOM

→ He feels a sense of freedom from feelings of guilt around wasting time on screens



Image courtesy of Felipe Bravo, Germany



Photography by Maks Gelatin

DRAWBACKS & FUTURE INTENTIONS

→ Felipe generally feels good about his current relationship with technology and the positive changes he has experienced from limiting technology

→ But the one drawback he has experienced is difficulty in maintaining friendships without passive updates from social media

'I think my friendships across the globe have changed, and not for the better'



Phone-free Fun

Unplugged is a digital detox escape in the UK's countryside helping over 10,000 people take intentional time offline, UK

The Digital Native Defector



Unplugged, Spain

CONSUMER SNAPSHOT



Name
Caitlin Macintyre

Age
26

Nationality
Scottish

Location
Scotland

Occupation
Digital marketing

RELATIONSHIP TO TECHNOLOGY

→ Caitlin describes her current relationship with technology as complex and contradictory: ‘I have a love-hate relationship with technology. I rely on it for my job, but I am making more of a conscious effort to know what I’m interested in outside of technology’

→ Despite her resistance, Caitlin considers herself the most online of her artist friends

‘I don’t really have rules. I rely on my own discipline and knowing when to kind of shut off and when not to’



Image courtesy of Caitlin Macintyre, UK

RESISTANCE

TURNING POINT

→ Caitlin's resistance to technology is inspired by her dad (56) who taught her more about using Signal (an open-source, non-profit messaging app)

→ In 2025, she read a book which asked her to list five hobbies that don't involve technology and she found she couldn't get past three, causing her to re-evaluate her reliance on technology

→ A workplace data breach reinforced her commitment to change after finding out an ex-colleague accessed her Google Drive after she left the job

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'It just made me a bit more paranoid about what I'm keeping online'

PERSONAL DEVICE MANAGEMENT

→ Caitlin uses Signal (influenced by her 56-year-old father)

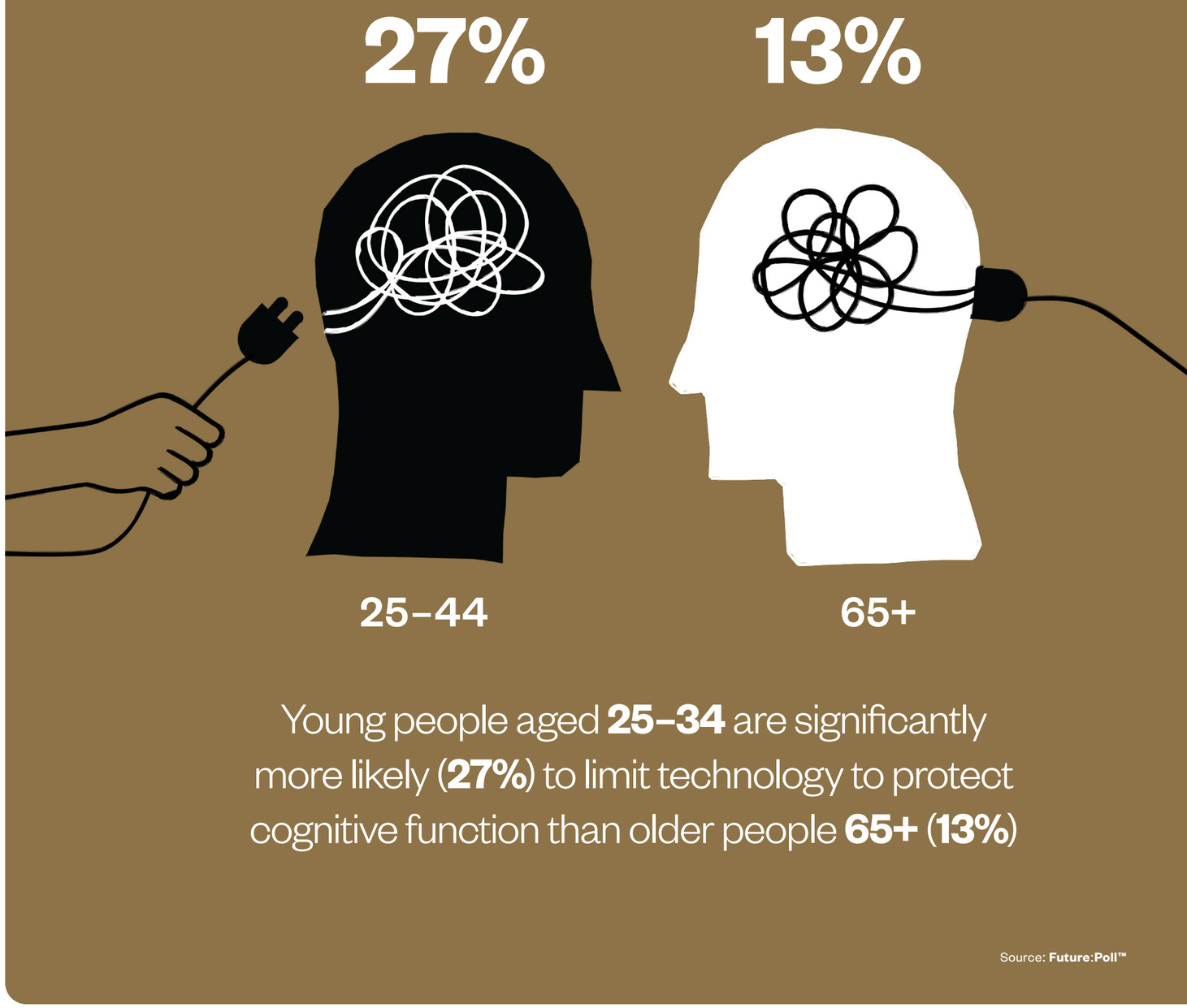
→ She leaves her phone at home when possible and stores it in her bag (rather than pocket) to reduce unintentional pick-ups

→ She stopped using Spotify but uses YouTube, Bandcamp or buys CDs

'Spotify makes you lazy'



Image courtesy of Caitlin Macintyre, UK



Young people aged **25–34** are significantly more likely (**27%**) to limit technology to protect cognitive function than older people **65+** (**13%**)

Source: **Future:Poll™**

POLITICS & EDUCATION

→ Caitlin boycotts companies such as Google, Apple, Netflix and Spotify due to their support of Israel's war on Palestine

→ She previously used AI but now tries not to after researching how AI companies use data

→ She investigates companies' morals and who they are owned by before buying from them

ANALOGUE REVIVAL

→ Caitlin has an old hi-fi machine and CD player

→ She keeps a pen and paper journal instead of using Google Docs

→ It is important to her to pursue hobbies that don't rely on technology (swimming, clay modelling, painting)

→ She seeks out organic inspiration in galleries, libraries and in the general public, rather than always going to Pinterest

→ She uses film and digital cameras

MOTIVATIONS & BENEFITS

PRODUCT QUALITY

→ Having noticed the enshittification of digital products and services, Caitlin seeks out older technologies that she perceives to be better quality

SELF-AWARENESS

→ She has found a better understanding of herself, her interests and 'what's important in life' through moderating her use of technology

GENERATIONAL RECKONING

→ Caitlin feels envious of people who didn't grow up online

'I envy the lives of people that didn't grow up online, how they've formed their personality and see the world through actually living in it'

Caitlin Macintyre, The Digital Native Defector

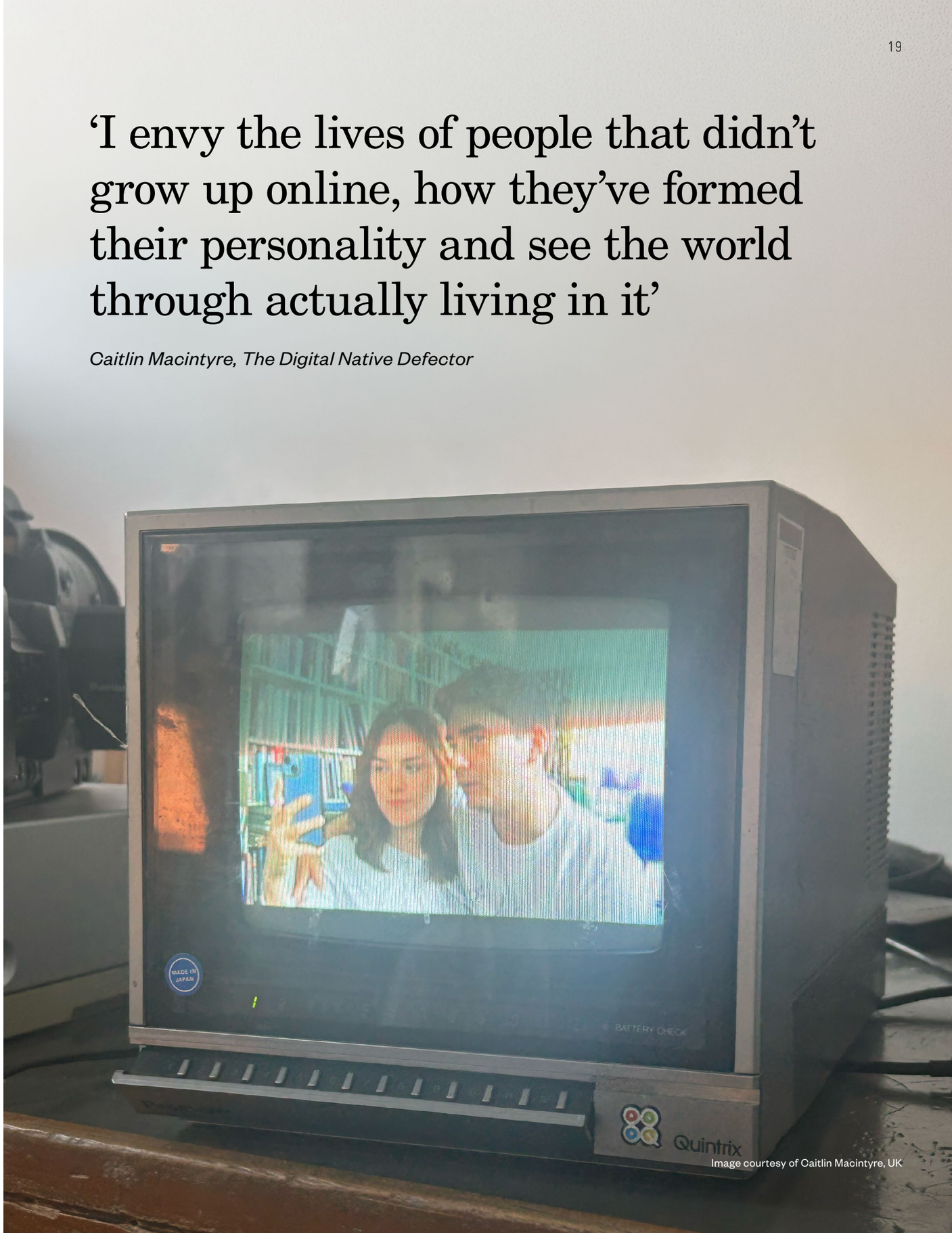


Image courtesy of Caitlin Macintyre, UK



Image courtesy of Caitlin Macintyre, UK

DRAWBACKS

→ Caitlin would like to delete social media, but doesn't feel that she can due to the nature of her job

FUTURE INTENTIONS

→ 'I would love to log off Instagram for ever, I think, if I didn't have to do it for work,' she says

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'I think back to being a teenager in 2019 and I was looking at what my friends were doing or even the cool people that you'd see in the city centre. So, it's just trying to go back to those original sources of inspiration rather than just being on the internet all the time'



Peace of Mind

The Offline Club is a global community on a mission to change the way we interact with technology and each other

The Concerned Parent



Photography by Vitaly Gariev

CONSUMER SNAPSHOT



Name
Duncan Cornish

Age
31

Nationality
British

Location
London, England

Occupation
Financial education charity worker

RELATIONSHIP TO TECHNOLOGY

→ Duncan feels he is ‘surviving, rather than thriving’ in his use of technology

→ He is torn between needing technology for work and wanting to build a life without it. Despite years of effort, he hasn’t ‘constructed a life where I’m at ease with technology’

‘I think that using all of these things [technologies] has made me more stupid, more emotionally dysregulated, more reactive – and less in touch with what I want from life and how to get there, angrier, sadder’

Photography by Kelly Sikkema

RESISTANCE

TURNING POINT

→ Duncan's tech scepticism began at university: 'I realised that any moment I had difficulty or challenge, because obviously the degree was quite hard, I would just open a tab and go to Facebook'

→ Having a child was a line in the sand: 'I can't in good conscience allow my daughter to be one of those iPad kids'

'The moment that triggered me to re-evaluate was feeling like I was addicted as a teenager'

RECLAIMING ANALOGUE

→ Duncan listens to music on vinyl

→ He uses a projector over tv

→ He takes photos using a proper camera

'It's just about putting minor hurdles in'

PERSONAL DEVICE MANAGEMENT

→ Duncan has no Safari on his iPhone to prevent reflex browsing

→ He uses focus app Freedom on his laptop and phone

→ He uses an old iPhone at home with only Spotify, a meditation app and a weather app

→ He leaves phone at home when going into the office

→ He uses open-source time tracker ActivityWatch to count how many tabs he swaps between in a day

→ He exercises without headphones

→ He has no social media (except Reddit occasionally)

→ He uses the browser Brave to reduce online tracking and block third-party ads and cookies

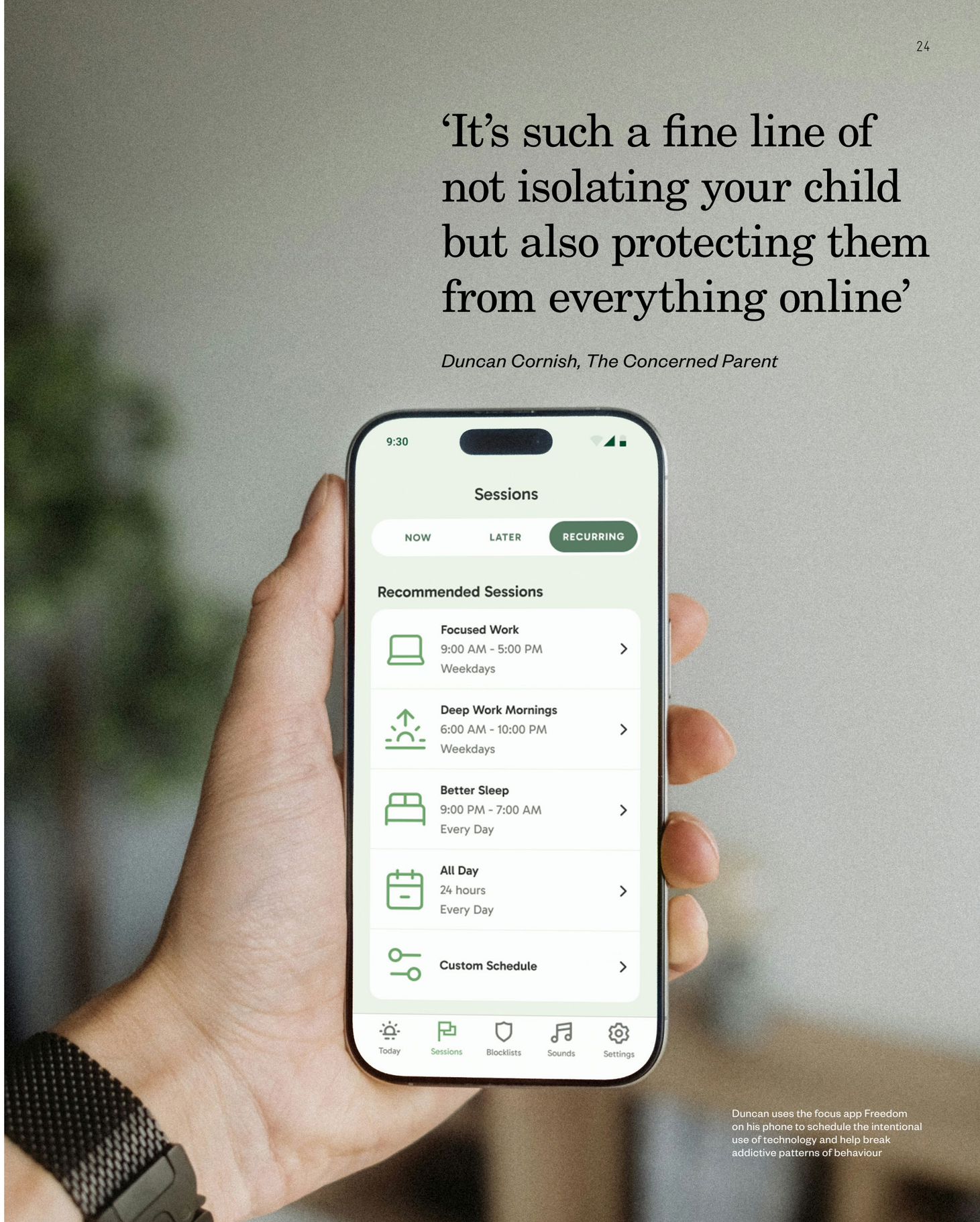
→ He uses a virtual private network (VPN) to further avoid tracking

→ Uses Privacy Badger browser extension to block invisible trackers and spy-advertisers

'I almost feel the same about browsing Wikipedia as going on Instagram, because it's just using information as a soothing tool to quiet your mind'

'It's such a fine line of not isolating your child but also protecting them from everything online'

Duncan Cornish, The Concerned Parent



Duncan uses the focus app Freedom on his phone to schedule the intentional use of technology and help break addictive patterns of behaviour



B416, New Zealand

PARENTING

→ Duncan avoids using his phone in front of children where possible

→ He never uses film, tv, YouTube as a parenting device

→ He doesn't organise playdates for his children with families who parent with screens

→ He has no photos of children on social media, and asks friends and family to respect the same policy

→ He doesn't own an iPad and uses a projector to watch films as a family

→ He refuses ed-tech homework and does his daughter's homework with her with pen and paper

→ He uses a Yoto player instead of a screen-based speaker

→ He spent two months living in an off-grid village in the Costa Rican jungle with his

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'We don't have a screen time policy because we don't have a screen. It's like I don't smoke because I don't buy cigarettes'

PARADOXICAL AI

→ Duncan uses Perplexity or Notebook LM at work to make mundane tasks quicker but tries not to outsource his thinking to it

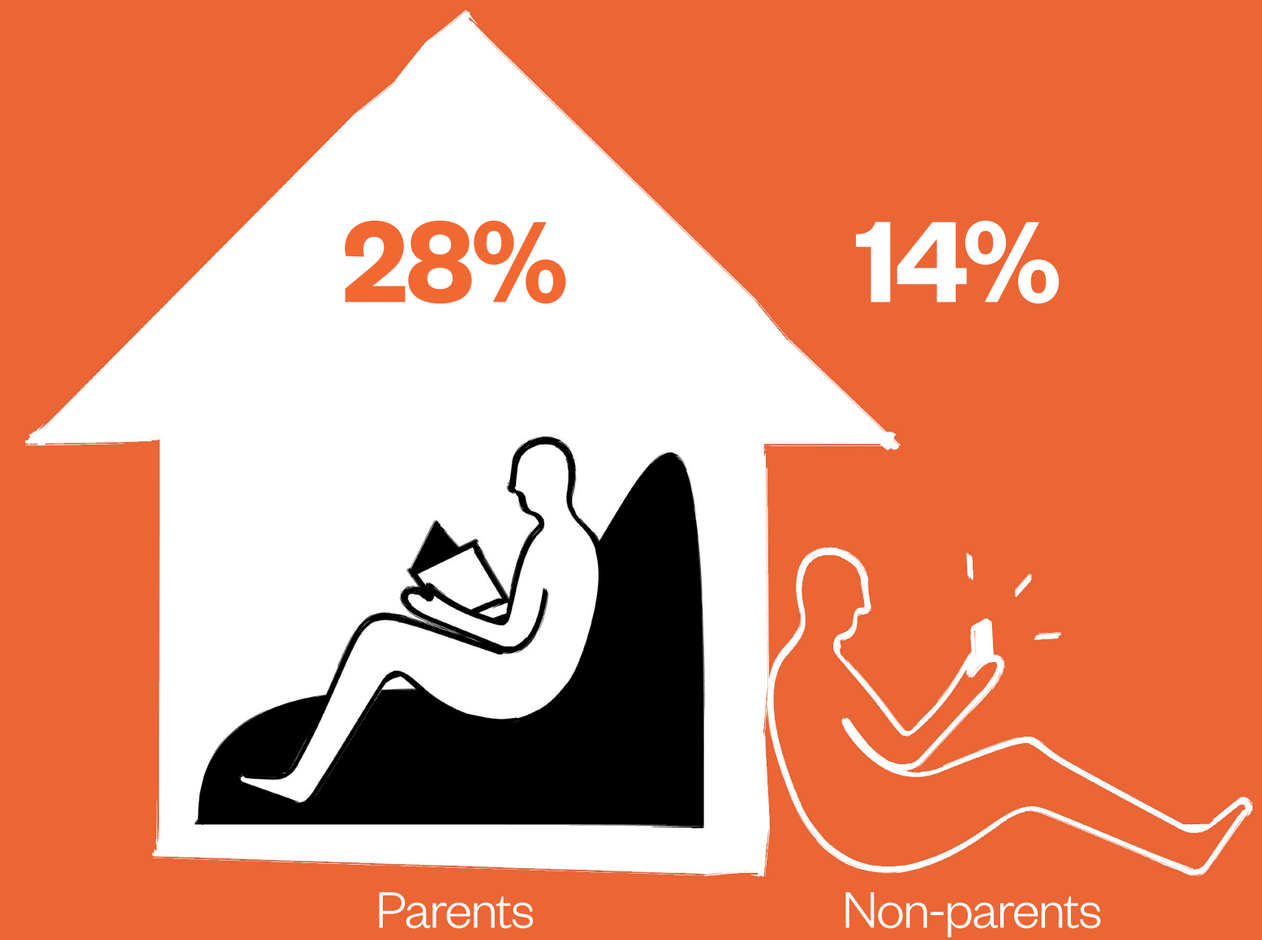
→ He feels that using AI has made him more emotionally dysregulated and less in touch with what he wants

'These people have stolen my attention span, so there's no way I'm going to read it [a long work document]. I might as well use Notebook LM to help me find out what's in this document'



Images courtesy of Duncan Cornish, UK

Parents are more likely to schedule tech-free time/rooms (**28%**) than non-parents (**14%**)



Source: **Future:Poll™**

PERSONAL EDUCATION

→ Duncan reads widely around the subject, including from social psychologists Shoshana Zuboff and Jonathan Haidt, computer science professor Cal Newport, Attention Economy author James Williams and media theorist Neil Postman



Smartphone Free Childhood, UK

DRAWBACKS & FUTURE INTENTIONS

→ Duncan misses an earlier, more social version of the internet that was filled with online communities

→ Much of his further resistance relies on finding the time to untangle his life from technologies alongside work and parenting

→ He would like to use the open-source, encrypted messaging service Signal, but it requires adoption by others in his life

→ He would like to move to using a Light Phone and/or end-to-end encrypted email service Proton Mail

→ He would like to have a job that doesn't require him being on a laptop as much, but feels that it is impossible to make good money in London doing less tech-heavy jobs

MOTIVATIONS & BENEFITS

ATTENTION & FOCUS

→ Duncan mourns his focus pre-technology and aspires to get back to his previous level of cognitive function

AGENCY & POWER

→ He resonates deeply with the UK-based grassroots movement to delay children's access to smartphones, Smartphone Free Childhood, and its tagline: 'Don't let your phone steal your power'

PROTECTIVE PARENTING

→ He wants to protect his children and lead them by example. He is proud of his daughter's reading and has challenged his child's school on its ed-tech policies and how it stores the children's data. He has gained purpose in trying to create a life for his family that is less reliant on screens

'I've gained a daughter that likes to read'



Photography by Kate L



Social Media Safeguarding

Resembling cigarette packet warnings, the Mumsnet ad highlights the dangers of social media and urges parents to email their MPs, UK

The Social Justice Warrior



Pull The Plug by PauseAI, UK

CONSUMER SNAPSHOT



Name
Noelle Weaver

Age
55

Nationality
American

Location
New York, US

Occupation
Advertising, trends and creative marketing

RELATIONSHIP TO TECHNOLOGY

→ Noelle's relationship to technology has undergone a fundamental transformation in recent years, from enthusiastic early adopter to guarded sceptic

→ She describes herself as an 'open book' to technology in the past, but has become more protective

'I was on all social media platforms, gave up my data etc. But my open book has gone a little bit closed lately in terms of [tech products and services] don't need to have access to that'



Photography by RDNE

RESISTANCE

TURNING POINT

→ Noelle recently moved from Williamsburg, New York, to a small lakeside community an hour outside of the city, creating physical and psychological distance from her previous digitally immersed lifestyle

→ The catalyst for her resistance to technology was mundane, everyday observations at her local grocery store – watching automation displace workers and encountering other consumers interacting with stock-scanning robots as if they were people

→ These observations, in addition to experience working in AI, led her to 'take a step back from technology… and understand what it is doing to us as humans'

'I've definitely noticed that I now use tech as a way to educate myself and connect further with nature'

PRIVACY & TRACKING

→ Noelle turns off location-tracking on phone apps

→ She proactively revokes location, voice and photo permissions

→ She systematically shuts down app access and AI features on iPhone

→ She reads terms and conditions on new installs and subscriptions to monitor data use

CONTROLLED AI

→ Noelle only uses free versions of ChatGPT or Claude

→ She actively turns off AI tools like Grammarly and Copilot

→ She skips AI summaries and scrolls to known sources instead

→ She subscribes to 'AI poisoning' i.e. saying 'please' and 'thank you' in all prompts to cost tech companies tens of millions of dollars (source: Vice)

→ She is quick to dismiss AI tools if she notices an error

APPSTINANCE

→ Noelle has unfollowed all accounts on Instagram apart from artists

→ She deleted most of the apps from her phone as she didn't use them or because they requested to unnecessarily track her activity and/or location

→ She deleted Twitter/X and TikTok

→ She stopped using Uber Eats and DoorDash

→ She and her partner subscribe to YouTube Premium for access to international tv and music but got rid of Spotify and most major tv channels



Noelle's app usage includes tools that help her connect to nature and the real world, deleting most of the apps that track her location, US



Pull The Plug by PauseAI, UK

SUPPORTING HUMAN WORKERS

→ Noelle opts for staffed checkouts over self-service in supermarkets

→ She hails taxis over Lyft when possible

→ She pays cash instead of card to support small businesses and avoid transaction fees for local merchants

ANALOGUE REVIVAL

→ Noelle uses a record player and collects vinyl

→ She creates hand-written journals for work, daily meditations and drawing/ gardening notes

→ She writes Christmas cards by hand and sent out 103 in 2025



Bang & Olufsen re-imagines its legendary Beogram 4000 turntable, Denmark

MOTIVATIONS & BENEFITS

PRIVACY & SURVEILLANCE

→ Noelle's resistance is amplified by being a US citizen at a time of domestic tension, describing 'the feeling of a surveillance state' and identifying privacy and politics as her key motivations

COMMUNITY PRESERVATION

→ She is a big believer in local community and feels technology is isolating and negatively affects community

'Now I pay attention to what's happening outside my window as opposed to what's happening on my screen'

57%

of consumers are deliberately seeking out slower, more analogue ways of doing things



Source: **Future:Poll™**

POLITICAL AWARENESS & INEQUALITY

→ Noelle perceives the tech industry as a key contributor to inequality: ‘You hear a lot of people talk about the K structure that’s happening in America, which is the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer and the middle class is getting wiped out’

‘I know it’s the current sentiment (especially here in the US), but I find myself actively taking steps against ‘making the rich even richer’



PauseAI community assembly, UK



QuitGPT protest, US

PERSONAL AUTONOMY

→ Noelle wants to reclaim agency over her attention, data and daily choices – choosing human interaction over automated convenience

MENTAL WELLBEING

→ She feels calmer, sleeps better and says friends have noticed this change too: ‘I’m not constantly reacting to the rage bait of everything that’s going on my screen’

DEEPER CONNECTIONS

→ She feels more invested in friends and family, and finds that not having a social media presence has led to having deeper and more exploratory conversations

DRAWBACKS

→ Noelle's only perceived drawback of her resistance to technology is the loss of discovery – while algorithms can create a silo of information, they can also be beneficial for easily surfacing new cultural recommendations and global news

FUTURE INTENTIONS

→ Rather than radical further steps, she describes an increasingly cautious and selective approach and aspires to discover more 'heart-led technologies' that emphasise empathy, creativity and community



Quartz Ring by Modem and Retinaa is a speculative, heart-led technology that makes trust tangible again through the act of physical touch. Photography by Matthew Tammaro, The Netherlands

Across the Imaginative Intelligences sessions, participants described creativity as:

Embodied
Limited
Relational

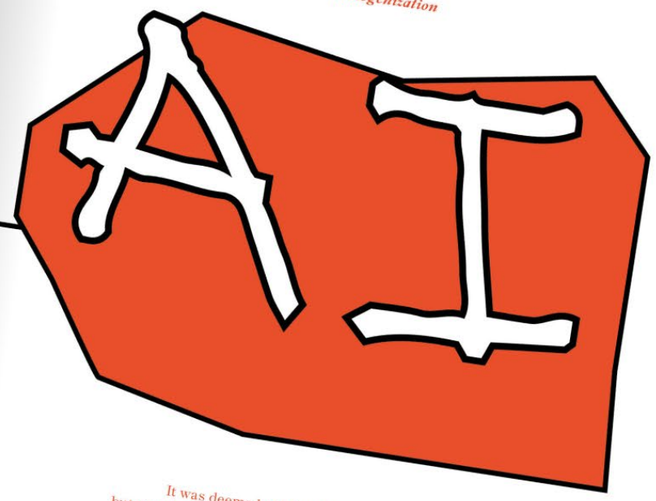
Creativity

and deeply tied to

Purpose
Struggle
Meaning-making

AI, in contrast, was often seen as a force of:

Acceleration
Simulation
Homogenization



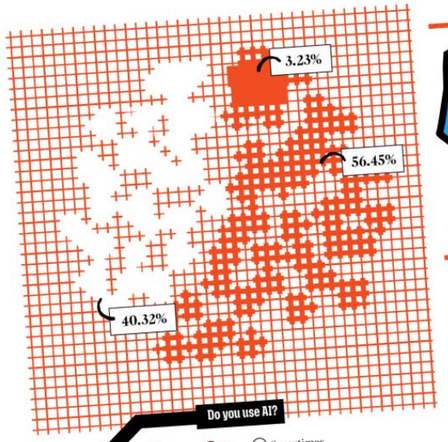
It was deemed capable of producing form, but not sharing the human conditions that give rise to art.

Imaginative Intelligence
Creative Purpose at the Dawn of AI by Mozilla Foundation captures the hopes, anxieties and demands of creatives working at a key moment for creativity and technology, US

ImagineIntel

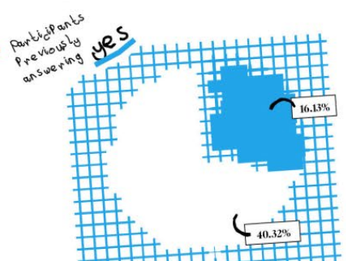
Process vs scale

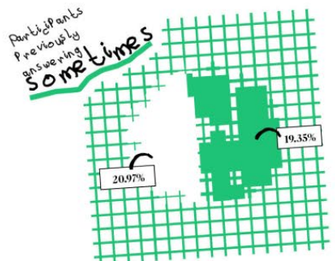
Out of all Imaginative Intelligences Assemblies participants - composed of filmmakers, creative technologists and creators - almost 97% use AI tools. For two thirds it has helped them scale their creative output; from streamlining processes, creating presentations, cleaning up scripts and initial research to being a thought and writing partner.



Has AI helped you scale your creative output?

More specifically, more than half of the creatives that only use AI sometimes say that it doesn't help them scale their output. Yet more than two thirds of those that use it regularly indicate that it helps them scale their creative output; which suggests that those that use AI tools more often do so because they've found it useful to assist with certain parts of their creative process.





Has AI helped you scale your creative output?

Yes

When I use it, it does change the way I create.
I become more of a producer (chooser) rather than the creator.

Radically. My work now moves at the speed of my ideas.

Honestly, it has made it more fun. I love being able to bounce ideas off the AI like I do with my other writer colleagues.

It has LESS directly influenced the QUALITY of my creativity
-rather- it has MORE directly influenced the QUANTITY of my creativity
or the EFFICIENCY of my creativity.

Made me better! I use it for roadblocks. It's such a blessing for folks that don't have access to huge studios and resources.

AI has enabled me to become a tech builder. I had already dreamed of building
anything I wanted but was too afraid to jump in and make stuff. AI has enabled me
do this and ultimately change my life by creating my first million dollar business.

How has it changed your creative process?

Added new ways to think differently to problem solve.
Ways to experiment with ideas and conjure up new approaches.
Removal of many frictions to ideation and output.

Has AI helped you scale your creative output?

N

Not at all.

Mainly as a research partner, I'm developing a few AI-first creative proje
that are more agentic in nature.

Slowed it down. Learning how to use it has become more important
than creating.

Very little. I use it to help in editing writing.

Added pressure for speed. Hopefully in time, story consultants will be a
to use the AI for speed as story managers rather than be made obsolete

I'm using it to spark new musical ideas. But mostly for my scriptwriting

It is helpful for getting feedback with non-creative writing
but I don't use it in creative processes.

The Mindful Commuter



Photography by Dilara Irem

CONSUMER SNAPSHOT



Name
Will Yearsley

Age
44

Nationality
British

Location
Greater London, UK

Occupation
TV producer

RELATIONSHIP TO TECHNOLOGY

→ Will describes his relationship with technology as ‘love-hate’

→ While he is positive about other technologies and lives in a tech-filled home, he believes smartphones have a hugely negative impact on his (and others’) lives: ‘I’m not going to get rid of my phone, but at the same time, I think the phone is the greatest source of unhappiness in the world’

‘Phones are a path out of the present. Your ability to stay in any given room is shattered’



Photography by Hello I Am Tugce

RESISTANCE

TURNING POINT

→ Will's journey towards tech resistance was motivated by his experiences as a parent. First, he was referred to as 'phone dad' by his son's football coach and then later made his daughter cry by being on his phone during her ballet recital

→ He began recognising the subconscious nature of his phone behaviours and conducting personal research into neuroscience – specifically automaticity (performing tasks, behaviours or cognitive processes without conscious thought): 'I'm standing in my kitchen and I'm holding my phone. Wait a minute, I didn't even intend to pick the damn thing up'

→ He engages extensively with philosophy and literature to understand these behaviours

→ His re-evaluation of his smartphone usage was accelerated by the unexpected death of an industry peer, which reminded him of his own mortality: 'I don't know how long I have left, but I don't want my phone to be there'

'I'm fairly confident I've read every single book about phone use that was ever written, but also, a lot of neuroscience, philosophy, all that sort of stuff'

MEDITATION & MINDFULNESS

→ Will has established a daily meditation routine to help him take back control of his cognition and reduce the role of automaticity in his phone use

PHONE-FREE COMMUTE

→ Will has committed to commuting to the office multiple times a week without checking his phone. To reinforce this behaviour and create social accountability, he wears a high-visibility jacket stating his mission

→ He does not read or listen to anything but tries to be present for the entire journey, sometimes striking up conversations with others to share the benefits the experience has provided him

→ Will writes a Substack sharing his experience of a phone-free commute and his observations of how other commuters use technology on their journeys

USAGE AWARENESS

→ Will uses an app to track his phone pick-ups and shares the data with his friends on a WhatsApp group for accountability

'The phone is like a great big plughole that you fall into and you can put little blocks along the way, but sooner or later you're going to overcome them. I believe the best thing to do is to respond with better control over one's mind and intentionality'



'I'm watching people use their phones more closely than they're watching themselves. Most people are just opening and closing apps'

Will Yearsley, The Mindful Commuter

Image courtesy of Will Yearsley, UK

INTENTIONAL AI

→ While he has no strong views on general AI use, Will writes for pleasure and will not use AI for writing as he believes ‘once you get AI to do something for you, you’ll lose that ability’

WELLBEING BENEFITS

→ After four weeks of phone-free commuting he began feeling ‘better, optimistic, lighter, happier’

‘If you’ve had a tough day and then you commute home without using your phone, your mind breathes and you process all your worries. And then by the time you get home, you tend to feel okay’

35%

of consumers want to decrease their screen time, rising to **38%** in the UK and **46%** among **18–24-year-olds**



Source: **Future:Poll™**



Healf and Unplugged, UK

MOTIVATIONS & BENEFITS

MENTAL HEALTH & MOOD

→ Will recognises that phone use contributes to unhappiness and anxiety

AUTONOMY & SELF-CONTROL

→ Will wants to fight the automatic, compulsive behaviours he did not consciously choose

PRESENCE & MINDFULNESS

→ He desires to be more present with family and in daily life

PRODUCTIVITY AT WORK

→ He feels his phone-free commute has made him more present and effective at both work and home, and allows him to draw stronger boundaries around bringing work stress home

DRAWBACKS

→ Will plans to continue his phone-free commute for life

FUTURE INTENTIONS

→ While he has made it his life's mission to gain control over his smartphone he is not interested in getting a dumbphone as he would rather change his behaviour than the technology



Photography by Bertellifotografi



Digital Dopamine
B416 is a campaign by parents, public health and technology experts and community leaders working together to raise the age of social media to 16, New Zealand

Analysis



Samsú, Ireland

ANALOGUE IS THE NEW LUXURY

Analogue is becoming a luxury – not because it's expensive, but because it requires intention and represents scarcity in an economy of infinite digital abundance. Record players, magazines, paper journals and film cameras are all experiencing a resurgence, especially among young consumers seeking to disconnect.

Even in the automotive industry, manufacturers such as auto brand Ferrari are re-introducing buttons, dials and toggles to appeal to consumer demand for tactile and tangible technologies.

Within this resistance, however, is a layer of privilege. For many consumers, digital engagement is not optional, but economically necessary – investing in tools to monitor, block or track digital habits or switching to analogue technologies is an expensive lifestyle change, in the same way that it is a privilege to choose friction or inefficiency. As previously analysed in our Gen Z Parents communities report, screen time is becoming a new marker of privilege; those with the means to protect their cognitive function and finite time are logging off, while others are stuck in a cycle of tech dependency.

THE GENERATION GAP

Gen X and Boomers often frame their resistance around time scarcity. Every hour lost to scrolling is an hour subtracted from finite reserves. Resistance strategies emphasise scheduling, boundaries, deliberate analogue reclamation. Their anxiety is not solely about what technology does to their brains, but also what it steals from their remaining years.

In contrast, younger consumers are concerned by cognitive function, noticing the damaging effects technology appears to have on their focus, motivation and emotional stability. For many Gen Z consumers, their resistance is also motivated by anemoia – a feeling of nostalgia for a time they never experienced. Like Caitlin, they long to experience life before smartphones and social media, romanticising this as a simpler, happier time.



QuitGPT, US



B416, New Zealand

RESISTANCE AS CIVIC BEHAVIOUR

Resistance to technology is both individual and civic for many consumers. Boycotts, researching corporate ownership structures, and ethical positioning and diligently reading terms and conditions are becoming forms of micro-activism that generate larger movements.

QuitGPT – which urges consumers to stop using ChatGPT after its parent company OpenAI allowed the US Pentagon to use its AI systems for 'any lawful purpose' – claims to have reached more than 4m supporters (source: The New York Times).

Meanwhile, as of March 2026, British newspaper The Guardian has published podcast episodes investigating the toxic content teenagers see on social media, how technology is fuelling a literary crisis and whether consumers should 'break up with American tech', demonstrating a shift into mainstream culture. The newspaper also reported on 'a notable undercurrent of anti-tech resistance' at the 2026 Oscars (source: The Guardian).

Strategic Opportunities

CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR



This Isn't Working, The Netherlands

The Time Economy

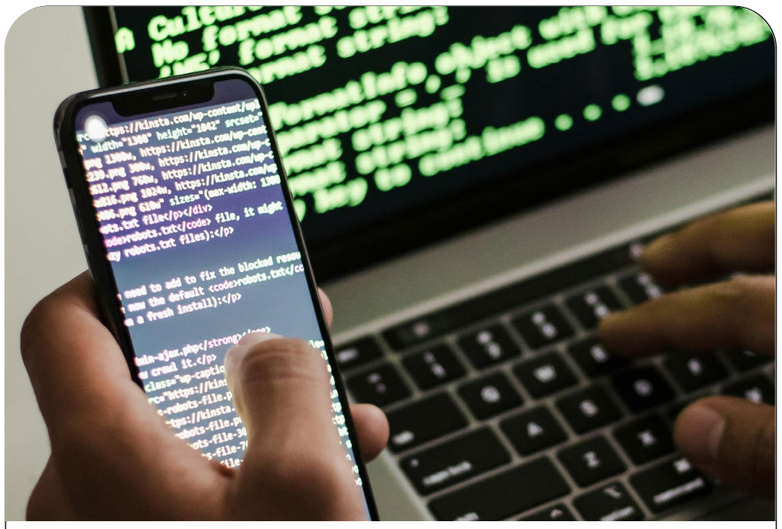
Gen X and Boomer consumers respond less to 'protect your brain' messaging and more to 'spend your limited time wisely'. Position products and services as tools for reclaiming time, reducing distractions and creating quality memories with friends and family.



Samsú, Ireland

Give Permission for Consumers to Log Off

Reframe physical experiences as opportunities for disconnection. From cinema screenings and phone-free gym classes to screenless cultural events, brands can position organically offline moments as restorative spaces to protect attention and social connection.



Photography by Sora Shimazaki

Conscious Data Exchange

Acknowledge consumers' digital footprints as extensions of themselves, treating personal data as a valued asset, offering transparency, choice and reciprocity in return for attention, engagement or participation.

Strategic Opportunities

PRODUCT & LIFESTYLE



Elrow Industries, US

Design for Digital Wellbeing

How can your business build digital wellbeing into your products and services? Consider integrating ‘sunset modes’ that gracefully degrade functionality after healthy usage thresholds or collaborate with tools such as ActivityWatch to create dashboards that monitor and advise consumers on how to safely use technology.



Light Phone, US

The Challenger Brand Playbook

Open-source app-blockers such as Foqos and Broke or BackThen (private family photo-sharing) are finding success by removing features to add value. Identify what your category adds that consumers secretly resent. Sell friction as premium – consumers will pay for products that respect their boundaries.



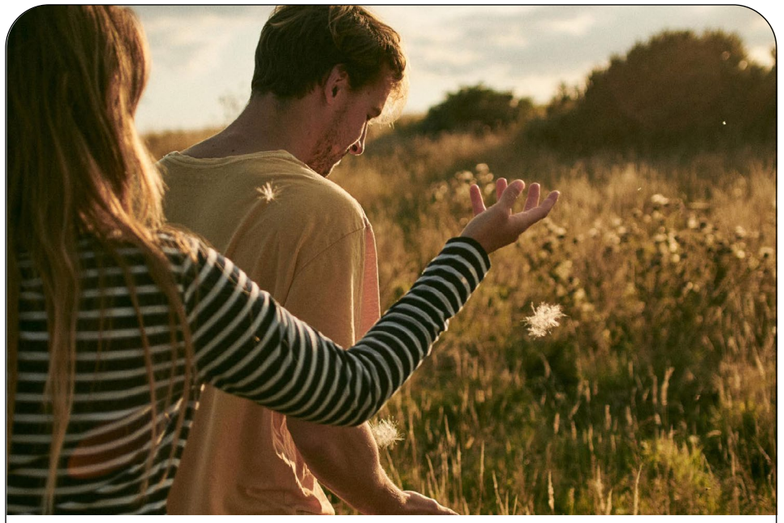
Polaroid Flip

Human-First Tech

Design products and services that enrich attention, creativity and connectivity, re-imagining interactions with technology as a value exchange that prioritises wellbeing over efficiency.

Strategic Opportunities

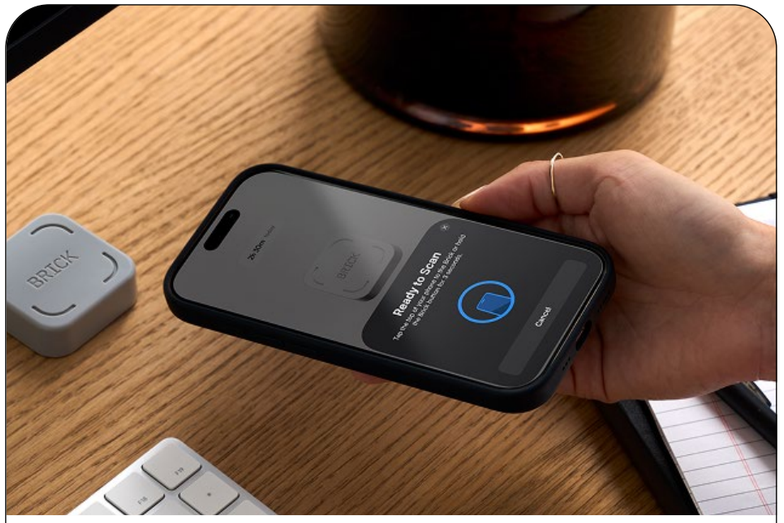
ENGAGEMENT



Unplugged, UK

From Addiction to Autonomy

Position your brand as returning something – time, focus, presence – using language that promotes autonomy such as ‘reclaim’ and ‘give back’, while acknowledging the value exchange by treating digital footprints as personal assets.



Brick, US

Learn the Language of Resistance

From ‘bricking’ (using a brick device) to ‘appstinence’ (removing access to social media apps), a new language is developing around technology resistance, driven by Gen Z. By learning this language you can authentically align your brand with the movement, not just the market.



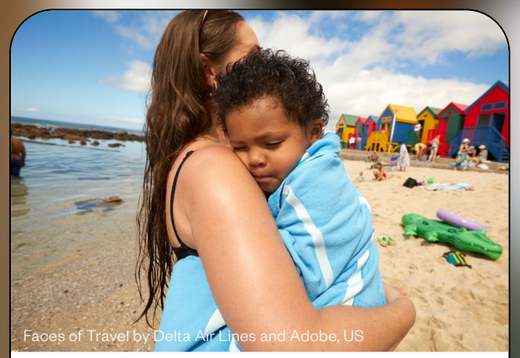
Dazed Club member Aarony Bailey’s Culture Workshop at Twilight Contemporary, UK

Own the Offline

Move away from Substack strategies to analogue activations. Launch print products, go big on out-of-home activations (OOO) and collaborate with local community hubs to create phone-free, immersive brand touchpoints that align your business with the real, not digital, world.

Access our full research library and our unique **Future:Poll™** quantitative research by partnering with The Future Laboratory.

Read our latest Communities reports



Faces of Travel by Delta Air Lines and Adobe, US

Gen Z Parents

Exploring how Gen Z parents are raising the next generations, Gen Alpha and Gen Beta, while redefining modern family life, values and consumption.



The Value Vanguard by The Future Laboratory, UK

The Value Vanguard

Examining the consumers redefining value through imperfect sustainability, emotional spending and radical pragmatism, offering brands a glimpse into the future of meaningful connection and commerce.



AI imagery by The Future Laboratory, UK

Women Who Play

Profiling the female gamers demanding greater visibility, representation and influence as gaming continues to evolve into a powerful platform for consumer engagement.

Combine your access with direct input from our future experts, bringing our intelligence into your business through a range of formats — from on-demand presentations to strategic workshops and bespoke reports.

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