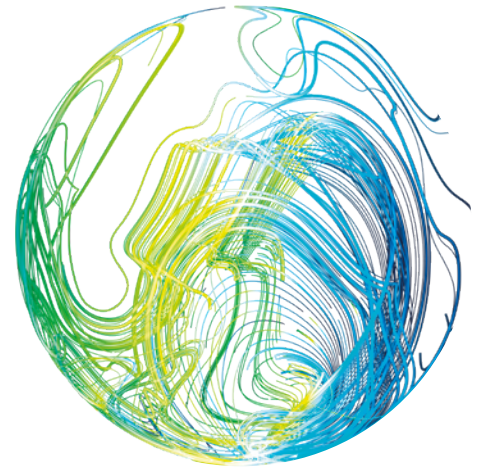


## Smartphones are useful, but they can be distracting



Deloitte Global predicts that 45 percent of global adult smartphone users in 2018 will worry they are using their phones too much for certain activities, and 45 percent of all adult smartphone users will try to limit their phone usage in various ways – from employing high-tech apps that measure or limit usage to sticking their device in a drawer.<sup>48</sup> Further, Deloitte Global predicts this concern will be highest for young people who have smartphones, with nearly two-thirds of 18-24 year olds around the world feeling they are using their devices too much, and with over half trying to control usage. (Throughout the rest of this prediction, all references will be to those who own or have access to smartphones rather than to the total population.)

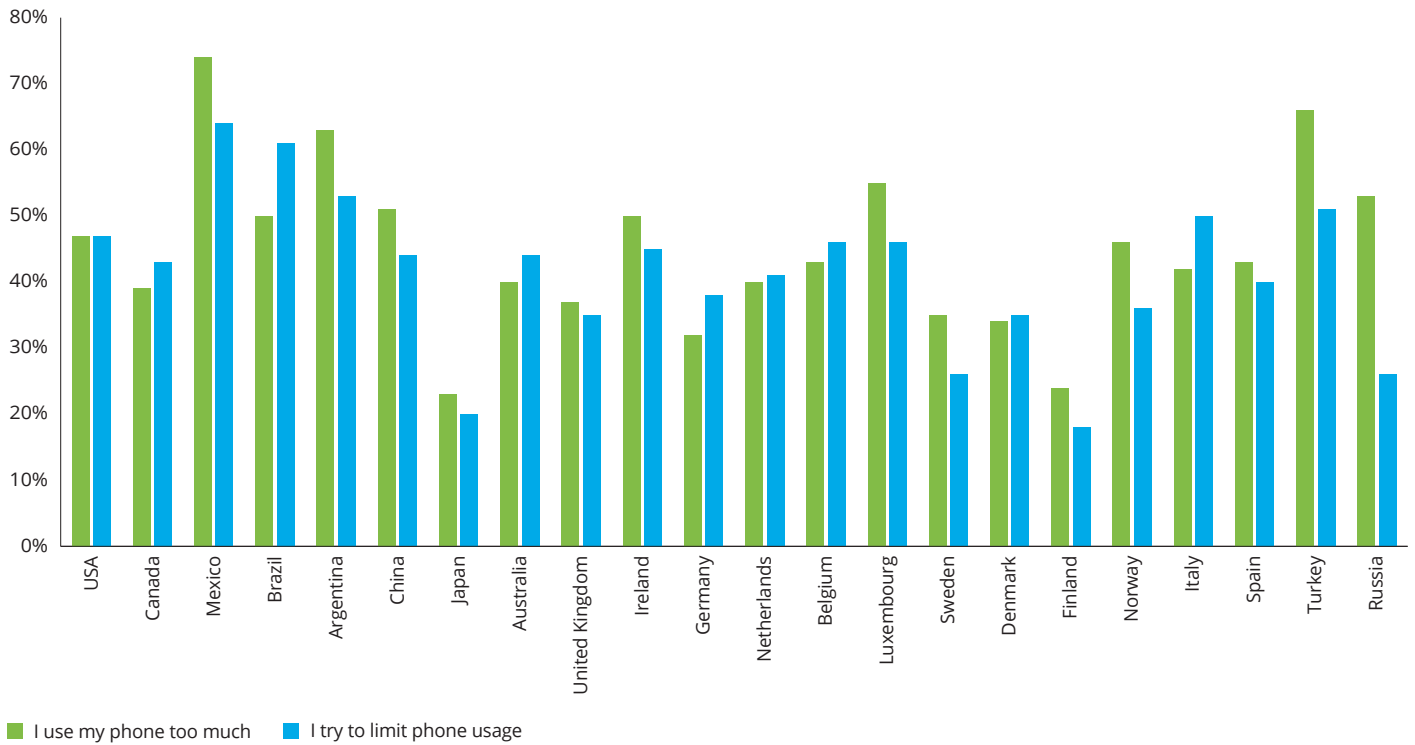
Finally, Deloitte Global predicts that most adults of all ages are actually quite happy with using their phones a lot – even hundreds of times per day. Instead, they are focusing on controlling usage when it is distracting them from activities they would prefer to concentrate on. The dangers of distracted driving are well known. But many will also be concerned in 2018 about distracted sleeping, distracted walking and distracted talking.

As can be seen in Figure 6, although concern about smartphone use and attempts to limit it both average about 40 percent globally for smartphone owners, there is significant variation by country. Fewer than one in five Japanese smartphone owners surveyed thought they used their smartphone excessively,<sup>49</sup> while nearly three in four Mexicans with smartphones were concerned and nearly two-thirds were actively trying to limit usage. In most countries, the percentages of those worried about overuse and of those trying to cut back were very similar.

There are few obvious regional trends. In the Nordic countries, for example, the proportion of Finns worried about phone usage was about half that of Norwegians.<sup>50</sup> One pattern that did apply was that English-speaking countries were roughly in line with one another for both metrics. Deloitte Global expects that the percentages in 2018 will be slightly higher than in 2017, but by no more than one or two percentage points.

48. Deloitte's Global Mobile Consumer Survey, 2017 edition. Respondents are all aged 18-75, except for the following countries (Argentina, 18-55; Brazil, 18-55; China, 18-50; Mexico, 18-50; Netherlands, 18-70; Russia, 18-59; Turkey, 18-50).
49. It is worth noting that Japan is a little unusual in smartphone/feature phone mix. Most developed world countries in our 2017 GMCS study have penetration rates of 85 to 90 percent for smartphones and only 10 to 15 percent for feature phones, but Japan has only penetration of 60 percent for smartphones and 31 percent for feature phones. This may account for why Japanese perceptions of smartphone overuse are lower than they are elsewhere.
50. Regional differences may have something to do with which brand of phone people have. Just as there was a big difference between Finland and Norway in terms of worrying about phone usage, so it is with phone brands; the mix between major operating systems is different in the two countries.
51. It was only 2.8 percent of children and young adults in a 2013 study of mobile phones. Adolescent mobile phone addiction: A cause for concern? Dr. Mark D. Griffiths, International Gaming Research Unit, Nottingham Trent University, as accessed on 3 November 2017: [http://www.academia.edu/3372702/Griffiths\\_M.D.\\_2013\\_-\\_Adolescent\\_mobile\\_phone\\_addiction\\_A\\_cause\\_for\\_concern\\_Education\\_and\\_Health\\_31\\_76-78](http://www.academia.edu/3372702/Griffiths_M.D._2013_-_Adolescent_mobile_phone_addiction_A_cause_for_concern_Education_and_Health_31_76-78).
52. DSM-IV Substance Dependence Criteria, Danya, as accessed on 3 November 2017: [https://www.danya.com/dlc/bup/pdf/Dependence\\_DSM.PDF](https://www.danya.com/dlc/bup/pdf/Dependence_DSM.PDF).
53. Is smartphone addiction real? We ask the experts, Digital Trends, 1 November 2015: <https://www.digitaltrends.com/mobile/is-smartphone-addiction-real/>.

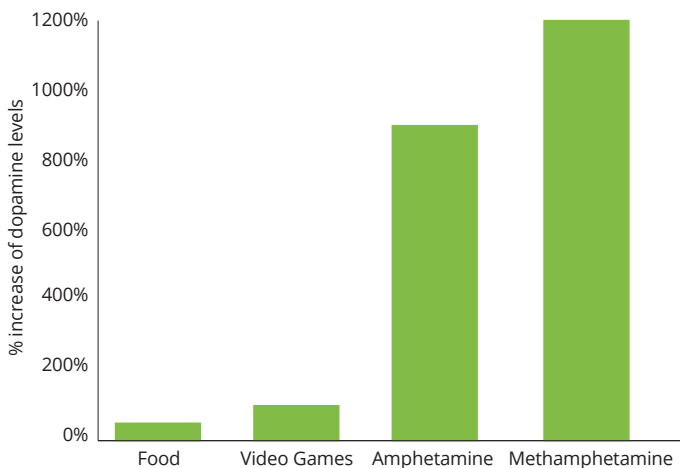
**Figure 6. Concern about phone use and attempts to limit use; adults with smartphones in 2017**



Weighted base: All adult smartphone owners Argentina (1,811), Australia (1,762), Belgium (1,593), Brazil (1,743), Canada (1,589), China (1,778), Denmark (860), Finland (857), Germany (1,708), Ireland (933), Italy (1,782), Japan (1,194), Luxembourg (913), Mexico (1,789), Netherlands (1,796), Norway (925), Russia (1,976), Spain (1,832), Sweden (1,792), Turkey (927), UK (3393), USA (1,634)  
 Source: Global edition, Deloitte's Global Mobile Consumer Survey, May-June 2017

Although the term is used frequently in the media, the number of people who are truly “addicted” to their phones is probably very low, less than 3 percent<sup>51</sup> Addiction and dependence are defined medical terms,<sup>52</sup> and very few adults suffer from genuine addiction to their smartphone.<sup>53</sup> Recent articles have called tablets, phones and gaming consoles “digital heroin” because they all raise dopamine levels,<sup>54</sup> but while it may be true, this happens on a completely different scale for electronic devices and food compared with addictive drugs,<sup>55</sup> as Figure 7 shows.

**Figure 7. Relative increases in dopamine: food, video games and drugs**



Source: Smartphones aren't addictive – but their increasing usage points to bigger problems, Medium, 21 April 2017

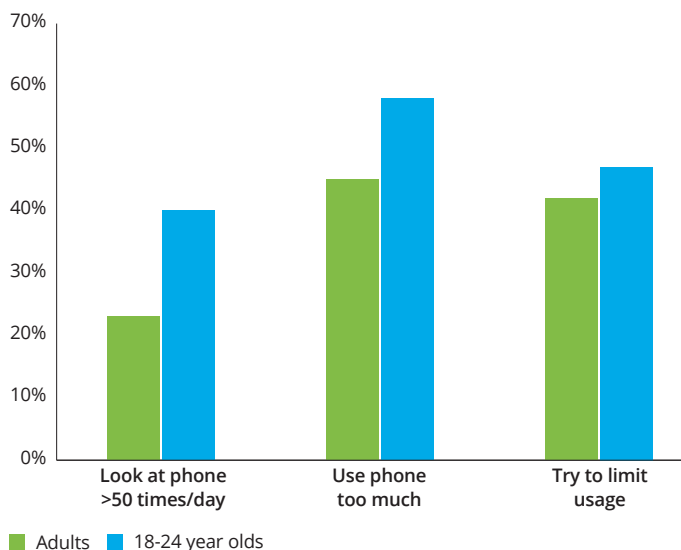
- 54. It's “digital heroin”: How screens turn kids into psychotic junkies, NY Post, 27 August 2016: <http://nypost.com/2016/08/27/its-digital-heroin-how-screens-turn-kids-into-psychotic-junkies/>.
- 55. Smartphones aren't addictive – but their increasing usage points to bigger problems, Medium, 21 April 2017: <https://medium.com/@jhreha/smartphones-arent-addictive-but-their-increasing-usage-points-to-bigger-problems-2507991d3f04>; Video games aren't addictive, New York Times, 1 April 2017: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/01/opinion/sunday/video-games-arent-addictive.html>.
- 56. It is worth noting that distracted driving is actually illegal in many countries. Therefore, the self-reported numbers of how often people admit to using their phones while driving are almost certainly minimal; the actual numbers are most likely higher.
- 57. Apps to fight distracted driving, DMV.org, as accessed on 3 November 2017: <https://www.dmv.org/distracted-driving-apps.php>.

Just as we need to be careful in describing phones as addictive, we also need to be cautious in saying they are being used “too much.”

Smartphones in 2018 are the Swiss army knife of devices, replacing tens of devices of a decade ago. They now act as wristwatches, radios, TVs, computers, cameras, video recorders, maps, newspapers, gaming devices, magazines and much more. Placed in that context, glancing at a phone 50 or more times per day is not, in and of itself, a sign of excessive use; rather, it shows what an exceedingly useful device the smartphone is. Categorizing these activities as useful or not useful is difficult; any instance of checking the time, taking a picture, and engaging with social media or email could be either useful or not useful.

In 2017, people with smartphones estimated they looked at their phone an average of 50 times per day, according to our Deloitte Global study. As can be seen in Figure 8, about 25 percent of adults worldwide estimated this number at 50 or more times per day, with 40 percent of 18-24 year olds saying they used their devices that often. Meanwhile, 45 percent of adults and 58 percent of 18-24 year olds said they thought they were using their phones too much, and out of those, 42 percent of adults and 47 percent of 18-24 year olds were actively trying to limit their usage. An additional 10 percent of adults and 20 percent of 18-24 year olds were thinking about trying to control their usage but were not yet doing so. Deloitte Global predicts that all these percentages will be slightly higher in 2018.

**Figure 8. Phone use and possible over-use in 2017, by age**



Weighted base: All adult smartphone owners (34,588), 18-24 (5,351)

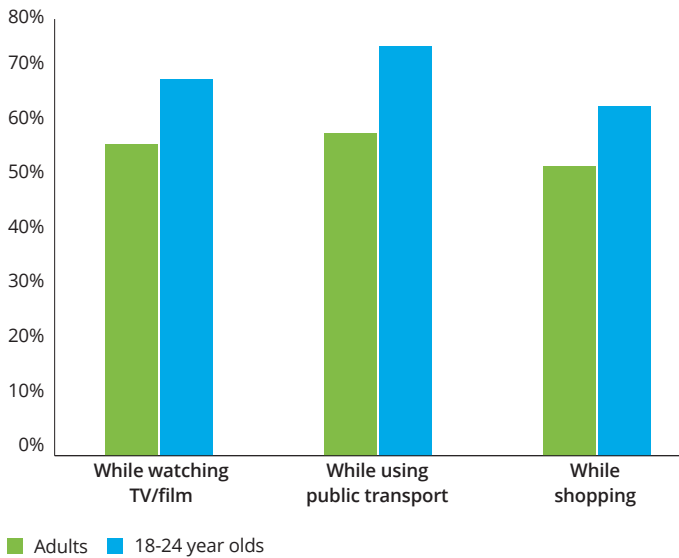
Source: Global edition, Deloitte's Global Mobile Consumer Survey, May-June 2017

There are some large differences in usage and perception of overuse, not just by age but also by gender. Based on data from 2017, 49 percent of adult women with smartphones think they use their phones too much, while only 41 percent of men think the same. We expect that gender gap to persist in 2018.

Not all usage is equal. Checking one's phone while watching TV or a film, commuting on public transit, or out shopping is probably not harmful or negative in any way, and it seems likely that when people talk about cutting back on phone usage, they are not talking about these instances. Figure 9 shows Deloitte Global data for adults (18-75 years old) and for 18-24 year olds on phone use for activities when the phone is not distracting users from something they think they should be doing instead.

58. Death by narcissism: The rise of selfie fatalities, *The Irish Times*, 16 June 2017: <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/health-family/death-by-narcissism-the-rise-of-selfie-fatalities-1.3121386>.
59. Have smartphones destroyed a generation? *The Atlantic*, September 2017: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/09/has-the-smartphone-destroyed-a-generation/534198/>.
60. The Author of “The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy” Perfectly Captured the “Rules” About How We React to Technology, *Business Insider*, 25 May 2014: <http://www.businessinsider.com/douglas-adams-on-technology-2014-5>.
61. Children of the ‘80s never fear: video games did not ruin your life, *Smithsonian*, 25 May 2017: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/children-80s-never-fear-video-games-did-not-ruin-your-life-180963452/>.
62. No harm in horror: when Congress investigated whether comic books were poisoning young minds, *New York Daily News*, 14 August 2017: <http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/federal-inquiry-comic-books-ruining-kids-article-1.816665>.
63. Rock and roll is banned in Santa Cruz, California, *History*, 3 June 1956: <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/rock-and-roll-is-banned-in-santa-cruz-california>.
64. Don’t touch that dial, *Slate*, 15 February 2010: [http://www.slate.com/articles/health\\_and\\_science/science/2010/02/dont\\_touch\\_that\\_dial.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/science/2010/02/dont_touch_that_dial.html).

**Figure 9. Phone use that is not distracting: percentage of smartphone owners in 2017 who almost always/very often/sometimes use their phone during different activities**



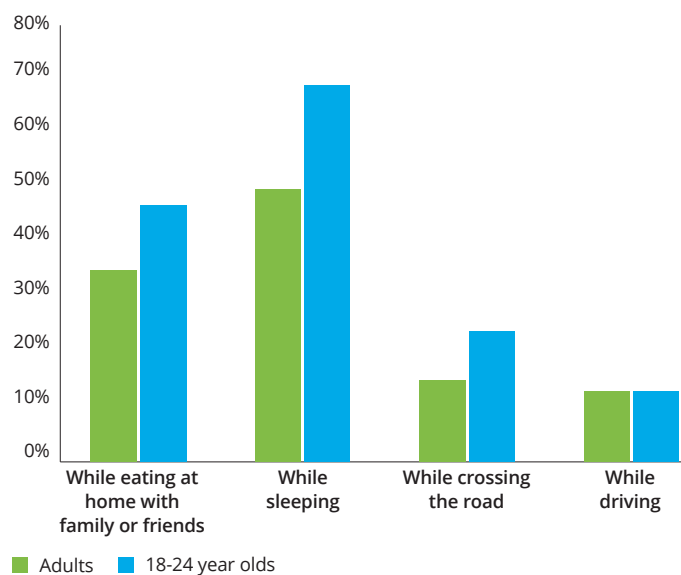
Weighted base: All adult smartphone owners (34,588), 18-24 (5,351)  
Source: Global edition, Deloitte's Global Mobile Consumer Survey, May-June 2017

But other smartphone behaviors are distracting users, harming their relationships with others, and even potentially endangering their health or that of other people's. See Figure 10 for the Deloitte Global data on these activities in 2017.<sup>56</sup> Once again, there are likely to be differences between age groups, with younger smartphone owners more likely to be using their phones when perhaps they should not. But other demographic splits emerge as well. Men with smartphones were more likely to engage sometimes in distracted driving, with a figure of 15 percent for men, compared with 11 percent of women. Nearly 60 percent of women with smartphones interrupt sleep and check their phones at night. And while over 60 percent of people in the UK, Germany, Netherlands, Italy, Canada and Luxembourg never check their phones at night, more than 80 percent of respondents in China and Turkey do.

There are likely to be differences between age groups, with younger smartphone owners more likely to be using their phones when perhaps they should not.

Similarly, there are considerable country-specific variations in smartphone use while driving (or at least in the percentages of people who admit to phone use while driving). In the UK and Argentina, only 6-7 percent of smartphone owners said they regularly used their phone while driving, but in the US, China, Finland and Turkey, the figure was three times higher, at over 20 percent.

**Figure 10. Phone use that is distracting: percentage of smartphone owners who almost always/very often/sometimes use their phone during different activities**



Weighted base: All adult smartphone owners (34,588), 18-24 (5,351)  
Source: Global edition, Deloitte's Global Mobile Consumer Survey, May-June 2017



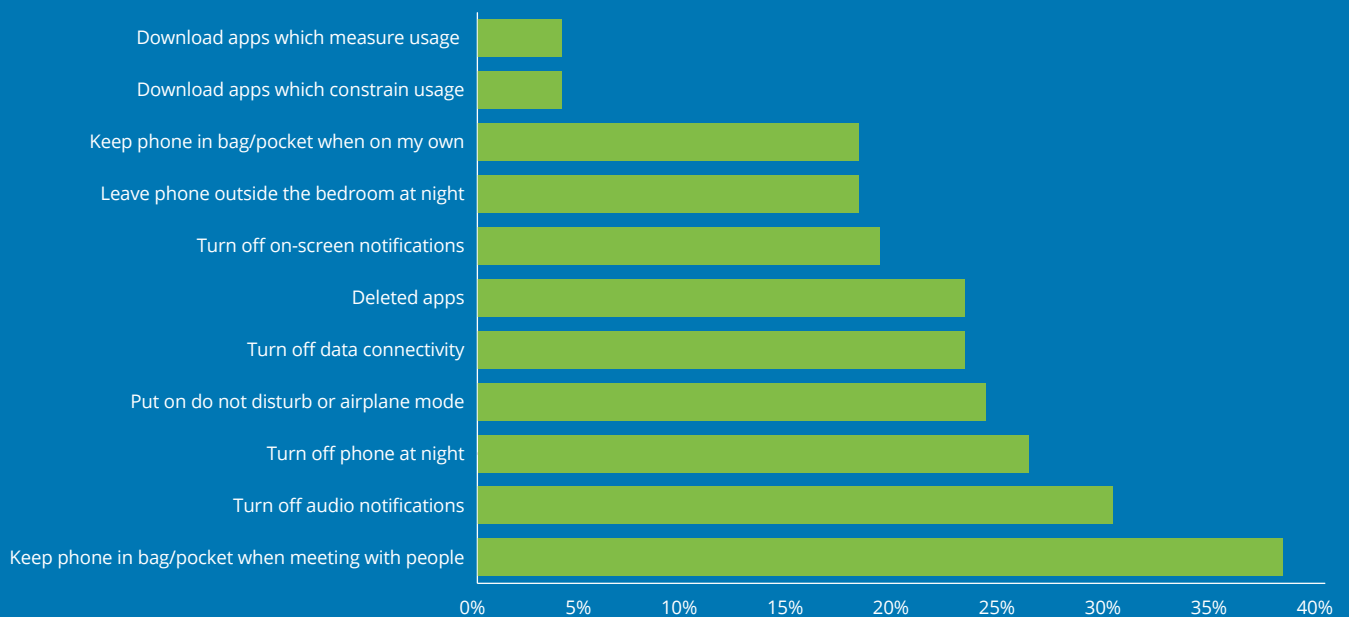
## The bottom line

Both for the telecom industry and for individual users, the goal should not be to strive for some arbitrary number of glances at their phone each day. In fact, as consumers watch ever more video on smartphones instead of TVs, as they perform work tasks on smartphones instead of computers and as e-commerce continues moving to the smartphone, Deloitte Global believes that the number of daily glances will continue to rise and that this may or may not be a bad thing.

Instead, the goal for 2018 should be to help consumers gain control of the specific cases where looking at their phone is something they should do less. Phone manufacturers, software and app developers, and network operators all should work together to assist consumers in enjoying less distracted sleeping, driving, walking, and time with family and friends. Some of these initiatives will improve quality of life; others will save lives. In the US, for example, the Department of Motor Vehicles website provides a list of apps to help prevent distracted driving.<sup>57</sup>

But as Figure 11 shows, those who are trying to limit usage in general (rather than during a specific activity such as driving) tend not to use advanced software technology – or technology of any kind – to limit usage. Only 4 percent of respondents said they were using apps to measure or constrain usage, while the most popular techniques involve turning the phone or notifications off. The single most common technique is putting the phone in a bag or pocket.

**Figure 11. Steps taken by smartphone owners who are trying to limit their usage**



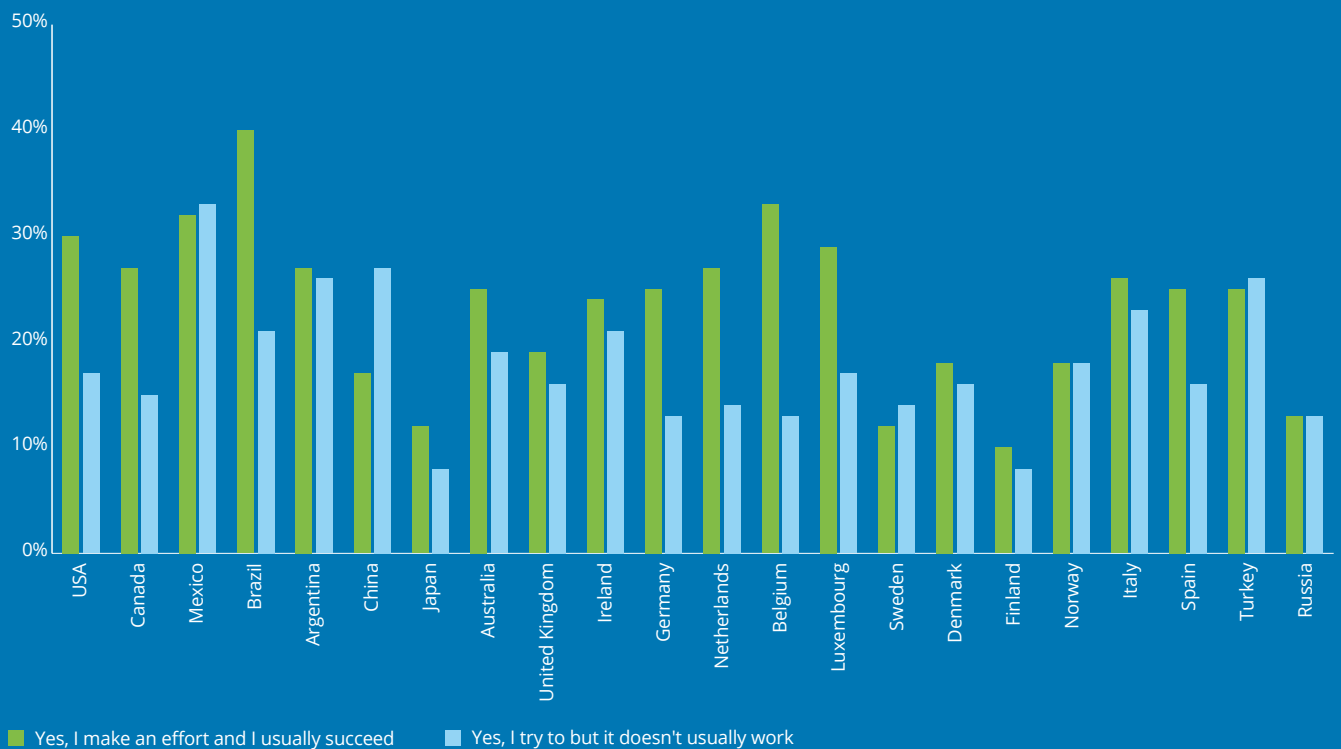
Weighted base: All smartphone owners who try to limit their phone usage (14,410)

Source: Global edition, Deloitte's Global Mobile Consumer Survey, May-June 2017

These lower-tech techniques seem to be working, at least for some. As can be seen in Figure 12, of those who were actively trying to limit usage, most thought they were succeeding. Across all countries, by five percentage points, more people on average thought they were controlling usage successfully: 23 percent compared with 18 percent. In seven countries, the number of those succeeding in cutting back was more than 10 percentage points greater than those failing, with people in Brazil (19 percent) and Turkey (20 percent) enjoying the largest success differential. In some countries, however, users felt they were failing to cut back usage. In China, notably, those who felt they were failing to limit their usage exceeded those succeeding by 10 percentage points.

In recent years, we have seen warnings that social media was ruining kids, and 10 years before that it was search engines that were to blame.

Figure 12. Limiting mobile usage: success versus failure for smartphone owners



Weighted base: All adult smartphone owners Argentina (1,811), Australia (1,762), Belgium (1,593), Brazil (1,743), Canada (1,589), China (1,778), Denmark (860), Finland (857), Germany (1,708), Ireland (933), Italy (1,782), Japan (1,194), Luxembourg (913), Mexico (1,789), Netherlands (1,796), Norway (925), Russia (1,976), Spain (1,832), Sweden (1,792), Turkey (927), UK (3393), USA (1,634)

Source: Global edition, Deloitte's Global Mobile Consumer Survey, May-June 2017

Although many people worry that smartphones are being used too much, the loudest voice in the debate in recent years has been the one saying that young people use phones too much – and with dramatically negative consequences, ranging from social isolation to depression and even death (a small number of people die taking selfies every year, for example).<sup>58</sup> In September 2017, *The Atlantic* magazine published a lengthy article that summarized the zeitgeist on this issue: “Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?”<sup>59</sup>

However, the warnings may be exaggerated. The author, Douglas Adams, wrote this description of how people of various ages react to new technologies.

01. Anything that is in the world when you're born is normal and ordinary and is just a natural part of the way the world works.
02. Anything that's invented between when you're fifteen and thirty-five is new and exciting and revolutionary and you can probably get a career in it.
03. Anything invented after you're thirty-five is against the natural order of things.<sup>60</sup>

In recent years, we have seen warnings that social media was ruining kids, and 10 years before that it was search engines that were to blame. Prior to that, the internet, video games/computer games<sup>61</sup> and computers themselves were all labeled as harmful. The US Senate Judiciary Committee investigated the effects of comic books on young people<sup>62</sup> in 1954 and of rock-and-roll music in 1956.<sup>63</sup> Before that, there were alarms sounded over (in reverse chronological order) TV, radio, gramophones, schools, novels and printed books in general (in the 1500s). Even Socrates in ancient Greece is said to have warned that children should not rely on writing things down, since it would harm their ability to memorize.<sup>64</sup>

As we say in another prediction, it may be that the kids are alright.



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