

The great digital fatigue: How digital burnout is changing social media use

People are quietly withdrawing from active participation in social media. While they may not be deleting accounts en masse, many are:

- posting less;
- limiting who sees their content;
- deleting stress-inducing apps;
- feeling that maintaining an online presence is work;
- considering leaving because of mental health, polarization, or privacy.

The internet and the connectivity it facilitates have shifted from being focused on interpersonal communication to being sources of news, spaces for political discussions, and sources of algorithmically guided entertainment.

Incogni's researchers surveyed a representative sample of 1,000 adults to investigate people's attitudes surrounding social media and online engagement more broadly, the extent to which they're limiting or eliminating social media usage, their reasons for this, and what they experienced after doing so.

Key insights:

- People are becoming quieter and more guarded online: **55% report posting less now than they did five years ago.**
- **53%** have become **stricter about who can see their posts.**
- **Nearly half (47%) of respondents have deleted a social media or messaging app because of stress or anxiety.** Rates are higher among younger respondents (**61% of Millennials** and **56% of Gen Z respondents**).

- **44% agree political content and polarization make them want to withdraw from social media.**
- **Gen Z and Millennials are more likely to cite mental health as a reason for deleting their accounts**, in contrast with 25% of Gen X respondents and 12% of Baby Boomers.
- **More than half of the respondents state that maintaining an online presence feels like work, rising to 60% among Gen Z.**
- **Disconnecting creates conflicting emotions: peacefulness** is the **most common** response (27%), but more than **one in five** also experience **anxiety**. Relaxation comes third at 21%.

Modern digital burnout



More than half (51%) of participants indicated that maintaining an online presence feels like work. The pressure is strongest among younger users, with 60% of Gen Z agreeing, compared to 38% of Baby Boomers. The latter is still a high number for a generation known to have lower rates of digital participation.

The finding suggests that online participation is increasingly experienced not simply as entertainment or connection, but as another responsibility to manage: from **responding to messages and following conversations to deciding what to post and how it may be received.**

Disconnecting brings both relief and anxiety

The maintenance of an online presence also means staying connected. The survey asked respondents whether not checking their messages provoked any notable emotions. The findings suggest that stepping away from messaging platforms does not produce one clear emotional response.

Peacefulness was the most commonly reported feeling among respondents who had gone an extended period without checking their messages, cited by **27% of survey participants**. **Anxiety followed at 22%**, while 21% reported feeling relaxed.



The tension was particularly visible among Gen Z respondents, who stand out by experiencing negative emotions most frequently:

- 34% experience anxiety when not checking their messages
- 29% experience FOMO.

They are followed by Millennials, although at notably lower rates (26% and 21%), with Gen X and Baby Boomer respondents experiencing both negative and positive emotions less frequently, suggesting that digital communication may play a lesser role in their lives.

The findings suggest that digital communication can be both a source of pressure and something users feel uncomfortable leaving behind.

Political content is pushing users toward the exit

The pressure to remain constantly connected is not the only factor driving digital fatigue. The tone of online spaces also appears to be pushing users away. A demanding aspect of participating in online discourse is having to deal with a heavily polarized environment, often with associated negative emotions on public display.



Incogni researchers found that 44% of respondents want to withdraw from social media due to political content and polarization. 14% indicated that they strongly agree and 30% said they agree.

This suggests that the reasons for withdrawal go beyond the desire to reduce “screen time.” For many users, it’s a response to the conflict, hostility, and emotional intensity they encounter when they log on.

The social internet is becoming less social

The clearest sign of digital withdrawal is actually not mass account deletion, but a decline in active sharing. The survey was used to investigate how people are reacting to the realities of a dynamically evolving digital landscape. Starting with their posting and content-sharing habits.



The major trend identified by Incogni's researchers is a withdrawal from outgoing communication, with 55% of respondents posting less now than they did 5 years ago, while 53% have become more selective about who can see their posts.

Gen Z was the only generation to go against this trend. 16% indicated that they now post more frequently than they did 5 years ago, while 13% reported that they have become less selective about their audience.

Overall, however, the **dominant direction is toward quieter, more controlled participation: fewer posts, smaller audiences, and greater caution over what is shared.**

What would push people to leave social media?

The survey also tried to identify what factors would most likely influence people to quit social media and delete their accounts.



For most respondents, the **most common reason** to leave social media would be a **growing threat to their privacy or security**. More than half (51%) said excessive risk in this area could lead them to delete their accounts.

Harassment, bullying, or hate speech was the **second**-most commonly selected trigger.

Around a third of respondents could see themselves quitting if:

- they found themselves wasting too much time on or excessively using social media;
- they experienced mental health issues;
- conflicts with their loved ones arose over their social media use.

Notably, 16% claimed that nothing could make them delete their social media accounts.

Mental health was particularly important among younger respondents, being cited by 44% of Gen Z and 42% of Millennial respondents, compared with 25% of Gen X and 12% of Baby Boomer respondents.

Conclusion

The findings of this study can be seen to trace a progression of people's attitudes towards, and relationships with, online participation, especially on social media. Not quite coming full circle, but certainly doing an about-face: online engagement apparently used to feel like connection to users and was presumably fun for many people.

Now, the majority of users indicate that maintaining an online presence feels like work, nearly half report having deleted social media apps because of the stress and anxiety they caused, and the most common emotional response to avoiding social media and similar apps is a sense of peace.

From algorithms that demand both attention (from users) and subservience (from creators) to a rising tide of AI slop that's already displaced all too much legitimate content, it's little wonder that people are limiting what they share while generally withdrawing from online life. The more pertinent question becomes what can be done to reverse course.

Methodology

The survey was conducted between the 1st and 9th of June, 2026, with the participation of 1,000 respondents. It was conducted via **Cint** and captured a representative sample of Americans (by age and geographic distribution).

Public data can be accessed [here](#).

Use of visuals

Notwithstanding the terms of the CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 licenses of the visuals above, Incogni grants news organizations and other media entities permission to use the specified asset(s) in their news coverage or commentary, including on pages that display advertising.

The visuals can be downloaded or embedded using the menu at the top right of each visual. Embedded visuals preserve their interactivity.

Is this article helpful?

[Yes](#)

[No](#)

About The Author



Incogni research

Company

[Pricing](#)
[About us](#)
[Privacy policy](#)
[Cookie policy](#)
[Terms of service](#)
[Affiliate program](#)

Opt out guides

[Whitepages.com Opt-Out](#)
[Corelogic Opt-Out](#)
[TruthFinder Opt-Out](#)
[Checkpeople Opt-Out](#)
[True People Search Opt-Out](#)
[Fast People Search Removal](#)
[Radaris Opt-Out](#)

Useful links

[Data brokers covered](#)
[How To Remove Personal Information From The Internet](#)
[Data Broker Opt-Out Guides](#)
[Data Broker Removal Services](#)
[Incogni Review](#)

Follow us



Digital Footprint
Checker
Help

© 2026, Copyright Incogni. All Rights Reserved. Incogni Inc., 25910 Acero, Suite 240, Mission Viejo, CA 92691,
entity No 5186159