Prosumer Report

This Digital Life

Introduction:
Life in the Post-Technology Age

19 countries

7,213 respondents

16% Prosumers **84%** Mainstream
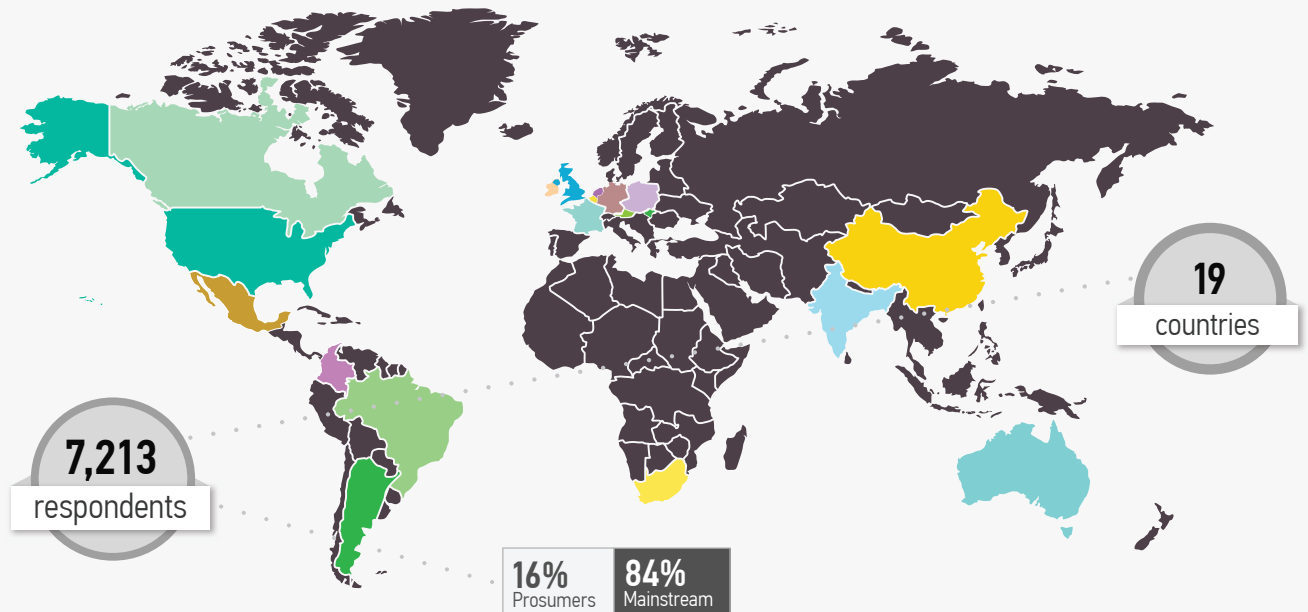
To better understand people's mindsets regarding current technological and social evolutions and revolutions, Euro RSCG Worldwide surveyed 7,213 adults in 19 countries: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, India, Ireland, Mexico, the Netherlands, Poland, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

The respondent base is made up of 84 percent mainstream consumers and 16 percent leading-edge Prosumers; we pay particular attention to the latter group because what they are thinking and doing today is a good indication of what the mainstream will be thinking and doing in the near future.

We welcome you to our kaleidoscopic overview of modern life.

Privacy is obsolete and intimacy is a mirage as the line between public and private becomes increasingly blurred.

The proliferation of digital technology, the faster pace of living, and the radical transformation of social mores have left many of us feeling unbalanced and anxious about what's still to come.

We're seeing a push toward a "hybrid" way of living that combines the best of the old and new—keeping current conveniences while holding fast to those traditions and values that are in danger of disappearing.

In developed markets, people are continuing to push back against hyperconsumption, seeking to accumulate experiences, skills, and beliefs rather than things.

We are entering a new era—an age in which technology has become so thoroughly integrated into our lives that it ceases to offer meaning beyond its utilitarian functions. We continue to embrace our gizmos and gadgets—and grow ever more dependent on them—but our aspirations are focused elsewhere. After decades of dizzying change, we are aching to stand still for a moment, to catch our collective breath and think deeply about this new world in which we live and whether we are headed toward a future we actually wish to inhabit. Many of us hope to identify just the right blend of modernity and tradition, so that we are able to keep moving forward without sacrificing all connection to the past. We want all the fun and ease that digital technology offers, but are also seeking a return to beliefs and behaviors that centered us in simpler times.

We first noted this ambivalence toward the future in our New Consumer study, in which we examined people's reembrace of nature, hands-in-the-dirt home agriculture, and traditional values such as self-reliance, responsibility, and frugality. And we saw it, too, in our 2011 Health and Wellness study, which explored how people are combining modern medicine and the newest technologies with ancient traditions (e.g., acupuncture, meditation) and reemphasizing the power of the mind to heal.

With each step we take toward an artificial, high-tech, digitally centered future, we reach back and pull closer objects and customs that offer comfort and help to recenter us—things that we deem more authentic, more natural, more "real" than those digital substitutes that have been created to replace them. In this way, we seek to live a **hybrid existence** that keeps us comfortably tethered to a world we're not quite sure we're ready to leave behind.

When the Idea of Progress Doesn't Make Us Dream Anymore

Modernity has long been synonymous with progress. A country or community was modern if it continuously moved forward. The question is: **What does modernity stand for in a world in which the idea of progress doesn't make us dream anymore?** Sixty percent of our global sample believe society is moving in the wrong direction. A majority believe people have grown intellectually and physically lazy. Fifty-two percent worry that globalization is homogenizing the world, wiping it clean of its unique cultures. Sixty-nine percent worry we have grown too disconnected from the natural world. And around two-thirds of global respondents worry about the modern world's loss of authenticity and the rise of artificiality. This all reveals a deep dissatisfaction with some of the fundamental characteristics of modern life, with a world that is changing at a faster rate than many of us find comfortable or desirable.

% Prosumers   **% Mainstream**

Dissatisfied with Modern Life
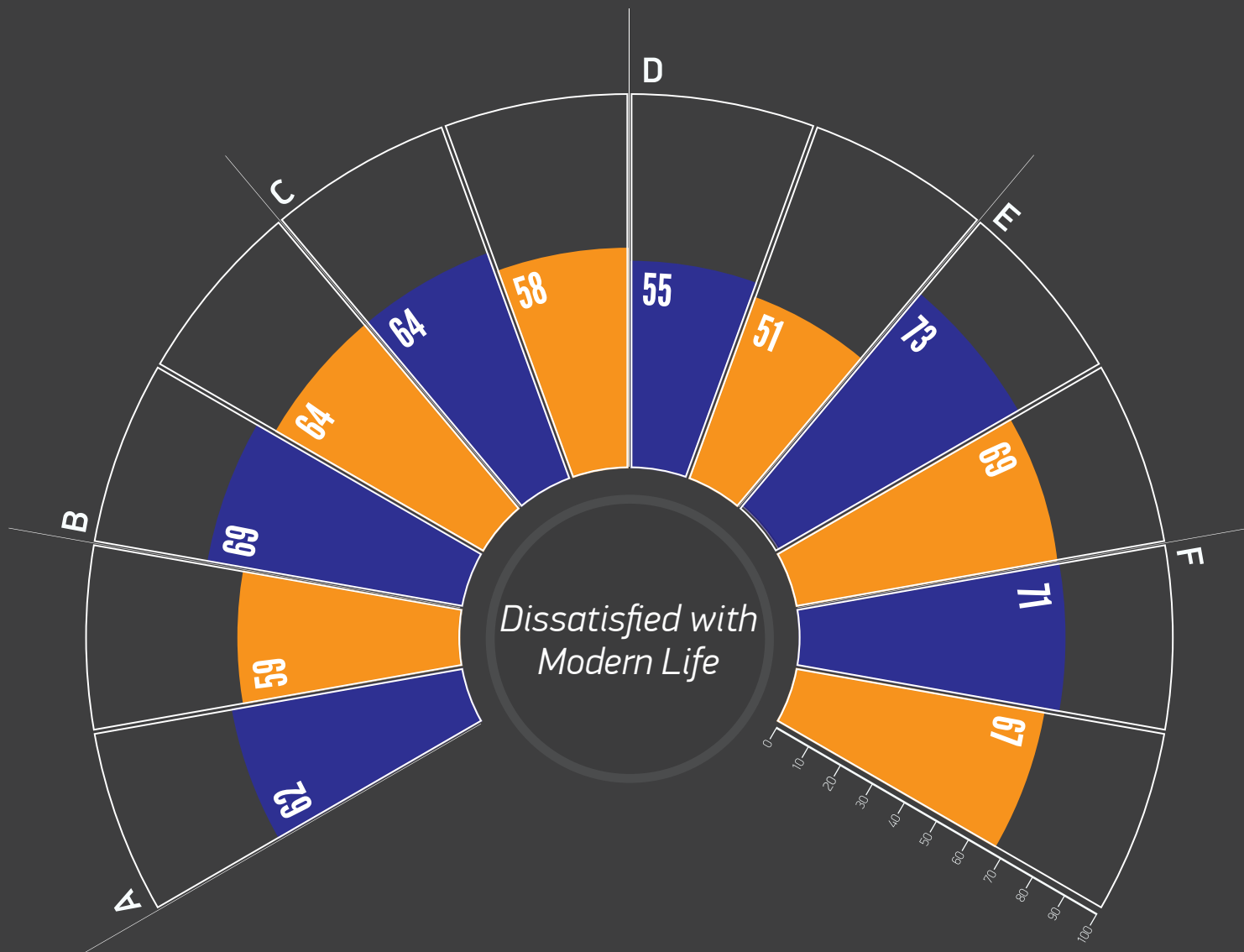
A	In many ways, I think society is moving in the wrong direction
B	As a society, we have gotten physically lazy
C	As a society, we have gotten intellectually lazy
D	I worry that globalization is homogenizing the world, wiping it clean of its unique cultures
E	I worry about society's loss of connection to the natural world
F	I worry about society's loss of authenticity (everything is artificial)

Digital Invasion

A primary accelerant behind these high levels of unhappiness is what might be termed the recent "digital invasion." Few people would argue against the notion that technology has been both boon and bane to modern society. It has brought with it levels of convenience and access (to information, to people, to broadcast channels) that would have been unimaginable even half a century ago. And only 1 in 10 respondents is convinced that the overall effect of digital technology will be bad, while 48 percent believe it will make life better. It's telling, however, that 42 percent say it's too soon to tell whether technology will make life on planet Earth better or worse. This suggests a relatively strong level of distrust and unease about what may be yet to come. The unknown is even scarier when it barrels toward you at hyperspeed.

All in all, will digital technology make life on planet Earth better or worse?

■ % Prosumers   ■ % Mainstream

58
It will make life better
47
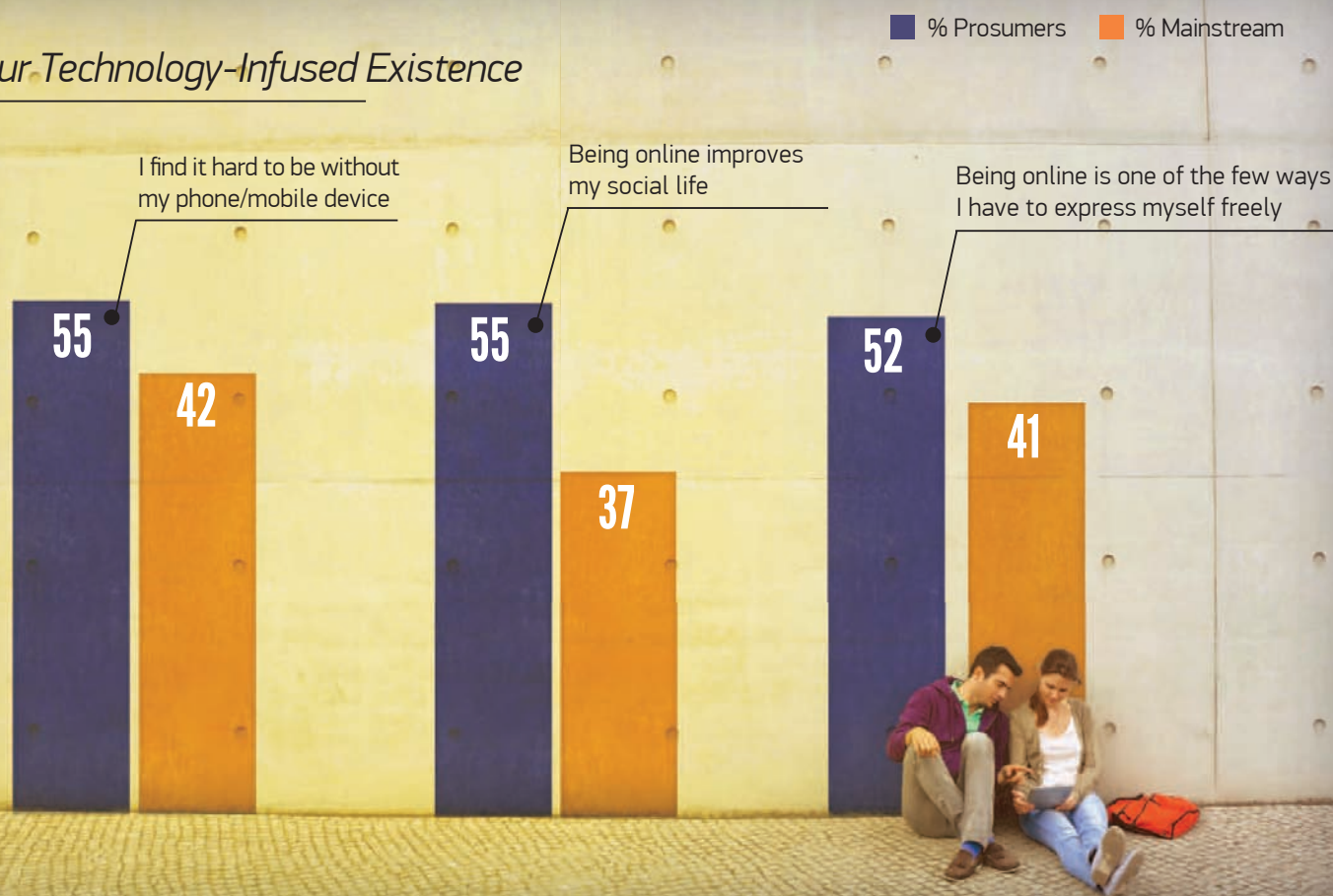
It's too soon to tell
44
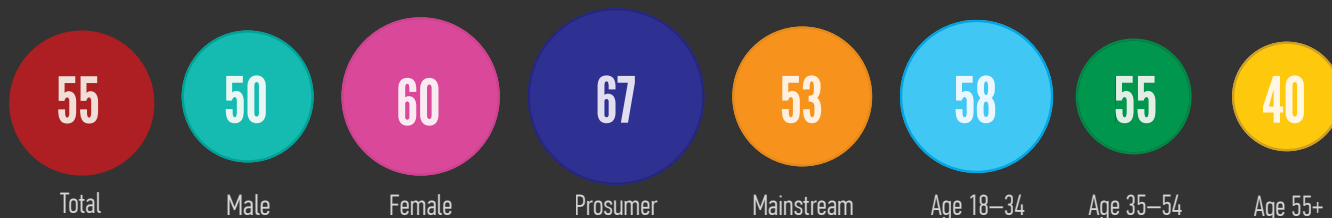34

It will make life worse
10
7

What we do know at this point is that people—Prosumers especially—have integrated new technologies into their lives to such an extent that they would have great difficulty reverting to an analog lifestyle. Fifty-five percent of Prosumers and 42 percent of the mainstream say they would find it hard to be without a mobile phone or other device. More than half of Prosumers say being online improves their social lives and is one of the few ways they have to express themselves freely. Two-thirds of Prosumers and a majority of the mainstream have come to rely on the opinions of their fellow social networkers to help them make decisions when shopping.

Our Technology-Infused Existence

■ % Prosumers   ■ % Mainstream

I find it hard to be without my phone/mobile device
- 55
- 42

Being online improves my social life
- 55
- 37

Being online is one of the few ways I have to express myself freely
- 52
- 41

I trust Internet users' opinions/depend on social networking to help me with my shopping

Total	Male	Female	Prosumer	Mainstream	Age 18–34	Age 35–54	Age 55+
55	50	60	67	53	58	55	40

% agreeing strongly/somewhat

Addicted to Our Digital Tools

The flipside is that people oftentimes feel *too connected* and *too reliant* on products and services that didn't even exist a few years ago. Around 6 in 10 express concern over their addiction to or overreliance on technology. Half the sample worry that digital technology and multitasking are impairing humans' ability to think deeply and focus on one task at a time. And 46 percent admit that being online distracts them too often. A third say being online interferes with their family life. It's little wonder, then, that a majority enjoy deliberately taking breaks from their phones or other mobile devices.

A
59 / 62

B
51 / 49

C
48 / 46

D
32 / 35

E
56 / 51
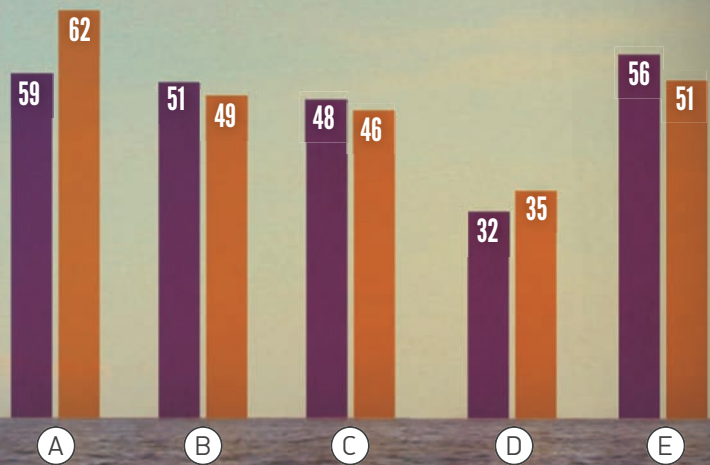
A
I am concerned about society's addiction to/overreliance on technology

B
I worry that digital technology/multitasking is impairing our ability to think deeply and focus on one task at a time

C
Being online distracts me too often

D
Being online interferes with my family life

E
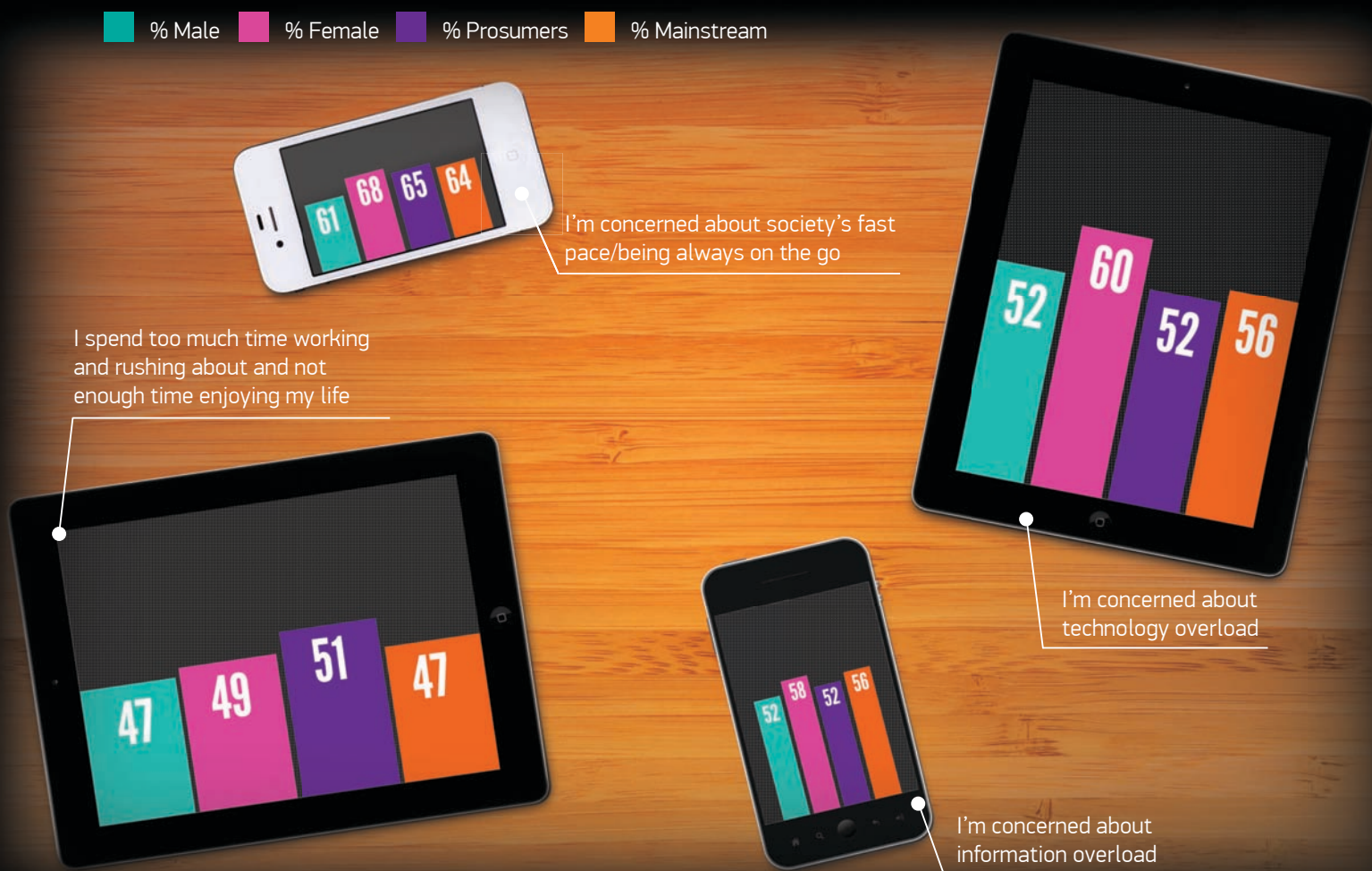I enjoy deliberately taking breaks from my phone/mobile devices

■ % Prosumers   ■ % Mainstream

Is There an "Off" Button?

Technology is also seen as the primary contributor to a pace of life that many feel is beyond their capacity and control. Around half the sample (48 percent) complain that they spend too much time working and rushing around and not enough time simply enjoying life. Just under two-thirds (64 percent) express concern about being "always on the go," and 55 percent complain of moderate-to-severe technology and/or information overload. Faced with an insane amount of ever-proliferating content, it's likely that many people fantasize about life pre-multitasking and pre-überconnectedness, but we can't begin to imagine how we could accomplish all we think we need to without it. The questions we're left with: How do we slow our pace of life without falling behind? How can we shut out our various digital distractions in order to think deeply and at length? What do we need to do to reconnect with the natural world? And how do we ensure—assuming we desire to do so—that future generations are connected to the authenticity and traditions of a simpler world that is rapidly ceasing to exist?

% Male   % Female   % Prosumers   % Mainstream

I'm concerned about society's fast pace/being always on the go
61 68 65 64

I spend too much time working and rushing about and not enough time enjoying my life
47 49 51 47

I'm concerned about technology overload
52 60 52 56

I'm concerned about information overload
52 58 52 56

The answers to those questions may well lie in the aforementioned notion of the hybrid existence—in lifestyles that intentionally retain treasured elements of our past while embracing the most up-to-date tools the modern world has to offer. Already we can see the juxtaposition of old and new in products such as hardwood cases for iPads and hand-tooled leather pouches for our smartphones. We can see it, too, in hotels that retain the option of a personal wake-up call rather than limiting guests to a digital interface. The further we move away from them, the more valuable natural materials, face-to-face interactions, and age-old traditions become.

Intimacy Is a Mirage, and We've Lost Control Over Our Personal Narratives

Does Privacy Still Exist?

When information belongs to everyone, and when everyone is able to post, forward, share, and comment on every conceivable subject in real time, no one can control the communication channels. The security defenses of even the most powerful nations and corporations are routinely breached by individuals and by networks of pirates and hackers. Yet are these people the most pernicious threat we face in our new digital world? Or is the greater threat not malicious codes or viral attacks, but the very existence of social media and its capacity to stealthily chisel away at our expectations of privacy, lulling us into complacency while robbing us of something fundamental to a civilized society? At its worst, could social media be the powerful hand of a new inquisition that will ultimately judge and perhaps even exert some measure of control over everyone and everything?

The results of our global survey make clear that most people are not just aware of the dangers lurking beneath the surface of social networking but are also concerned about them. A majority of respondents (55 percent) worry that technology is robbing us of our privacy, and 6 in 10 think people are wrong to share so many of their personal thoughts and experiences online; they believe that, as a society, we need to reestablish our privacy boundaries. Around a third of the sample already regret things they have posted online: 33 percent regret things they've posted about themselves, and 29 percent regret things they've posted about a friend or family member. Given their own regrets, it's not surprising that nearly half the sample (47 percent) worry that friends or family will share personal information online about them that they don't want to be made public.

Are We Giving Away Our Right to Privacy?

% Age 18–34   % Age 35–54   % Age 55+

54   **55**   **57**

I worry that technology is robbing us of our privacy

57   **62**   **71**

People share too much about their personal thoughts and experiences online; we need to go back to being more private

39   **30**   **21**

I have regretted posting personal information about myself online

35   **26**   **17**

I have regretted posting personal information about a friend or family member online

51   **44**   **38**

I worry that friends or family will share personal information online about me that I don't want to be shared

Who Owns Your Past?

In a world obsessed with security and control—increasingly rare commodities—people are seeking assurances that they are protected against the misuse of their personal data. This concern has caught the attention of governmental organizations and the legal community: The European Union's digital "right to be forgotten" law gives individuals the right to request that their social networks delete everything they have ever published about themselves online. After all, there comes a time in everyone's life when photos of drunken revelry during college are no longer viewed with quite so much affection. Companies that breach these new privacy rules could face fines of as much as 2 percent of their annual revenues.

While virtually everyone who posts personal information online is exposed to at least a minimal level of privacy risk, our respondents are most concerned about young people's unguarded use of social networking sites. Fully 70 percent of respondents agreed that young people today have **no sense of personal privacy** and are willing to post online anything and everything about their lives. And that's not just criticism from older generations; two-thirds of millennials agreed. A majority of the overall sample also worry about the impact digital technology and social media are having on young people. There is concern that the boundary between public and private is becoming far too permeable and that the younger generation is losing its perspective on what is appropriate to share in what places and in what contexts.

Just how much personal data is out there? Last year, an Austrian named Max Schrems took advantage of Europe's privacy laws to request that Facebook send him all the information it had archived on him. He received far more than anticipated: 1,222 PDF files, to be exact. Every move he had ever made on the social networking site had been recorded and retained—every friend, every "like," every comment, every photo (including everything he had deleted). In cyberspace, nothing ever truly disappears; everything we type or upload is stored somewhere on a cybercloud—poised to rain on a future day.

Millennials and Privacy

53   57   61

I worry about the impact digital technology and social media are having on young people

Young people today have no sense of personal privacy; they're willing to post anything and everything about their lives online

66   74   79

● % Age 18–34   ● % Age 35–54   ● % Age 55+

Loss of privacy in the virtual sphere can have very real repercussions in "real life," of course. Euro RSCG's Digital Love 2012 study found that a third of Americans—and 4 in 10 millennials—know someone whose offline romantic relationship ended because of things they'd done online. And around three-quarters of Prosumers and two-thirds of mainstream consumers in our Digital Life study say they worry about digital identity theft. The problem is, according to a 2011 Harris Interactive survey, while just about all consumers consider online privacy important, only 37 percent actively take steps to protect it. We develop intimate relationships with people online—current friends and colleagues, people from our distant past, friends of friends, and total strangers—and we sometimes forget to censor ourselves or to truly consider who may be "listening in." Social media and our daily online conversations have become so integral to our lives that we shrug aside our concerns and simply hope we won't fall victim to a privacy breach or foul play.

No Place to Hide

Intimacy has become a mirage in a time when the group Anonymous is attempting to reign over the Internet with the motto "We are Anonymous. We are Legion. We do not forgive. We do not forget. Expect us—always." Their real-world identities hidden behind pseudonyms and Guy Fawkes masks, this network of hackers, or "hacktivists," promotes total freedom of information online and doesn't hesitate to make public confidential information about companies or individuals. The group somehow manages to encapsulate both anarchy and coordinated action as its members work together against a variety of targets.

Virtually everywhere we look, we find evidence that modern society is inventing new social mores, new ways of communicating and influencing, and new fears and concerns regarding the shape and timbre of the world we are creating for coming generations. Day by day, we're devising rules and experimenting with behaviors—all of which have implications for individuals and the collective society. What remains to be seen is whether we will reach a point at which we will pull back and reconsider our enthusiastic embrace of our new digital existence—or whether we will continue to hurtle forward blindly in whatever directions innovators choose to take us. Current trends strongly favor the latter, leaving plenty of scope for brands that can offer at least some semblance of peace of mind. As privacy concerns escalate, entrepreneurs are moving into the space. New smartphone and tablet apps include Exfoliate and Facebook APR—both promising to permanently delete Facebook posts.

The Tyranny of Algorithm

Social media has the power to surprise us, amuse us, shock us, anger us, and disturb us. As we surf through YouTube, Pinterest, Google+, and other sites, we're looking for the "wow" factor—for things that grab our attention and make us want to share.

But what happens when the "wow" gets programmed out by the algorithm? What happens when these sites anticipate our natural inclinations and tastes in order to show us only things we already know and love? When our past interests and acts determine what tomorrow will bring? What happens when the 57 signals monitored by Google to tweak and personalize results create a "filter bubble," as Moveon.org founder Eli Pariser calls it? In his words:

> " *The filter bubble is your own personal, unique universe of information that you live in online… What's in your filter bubble depends on who you are and it depends on what you do, but the thing is that you don't decide what gets in—and more importantly, you don't actually see what gets edited out. This moves us very quickly toward a world in which the Internet is showing us what it thinks we want to see, but not necessarily what we need to see.* "

In his TEDGlobal Talk on "How algorithms shape our world," entrepreneur Kevin Slavin argues that we're living in a world increasingly designed for—and controlled by— algorithms. He shows how these complex computer programs determine everything from espionage tactics and stock prices to movie scripts. And he warns that we are writing code we don't understand, with implications we can't control. In our digital world, the algorithm has been elevated to almost godlike status—wielder of infinite power, beyond human understanding, and capable of great acts of destruction. Pariser has called on his fellow netizens to pressure Facebook, Google, and other companies to reconsider their approach and replace current algorithms with those that show us not just what we would likely choose but also things that challenge us and even make us uncomfortable.

An uprising of humanity against the all-powerful computer code. The future envisioned by the sci-fi writers of the last century may finally be upon us.

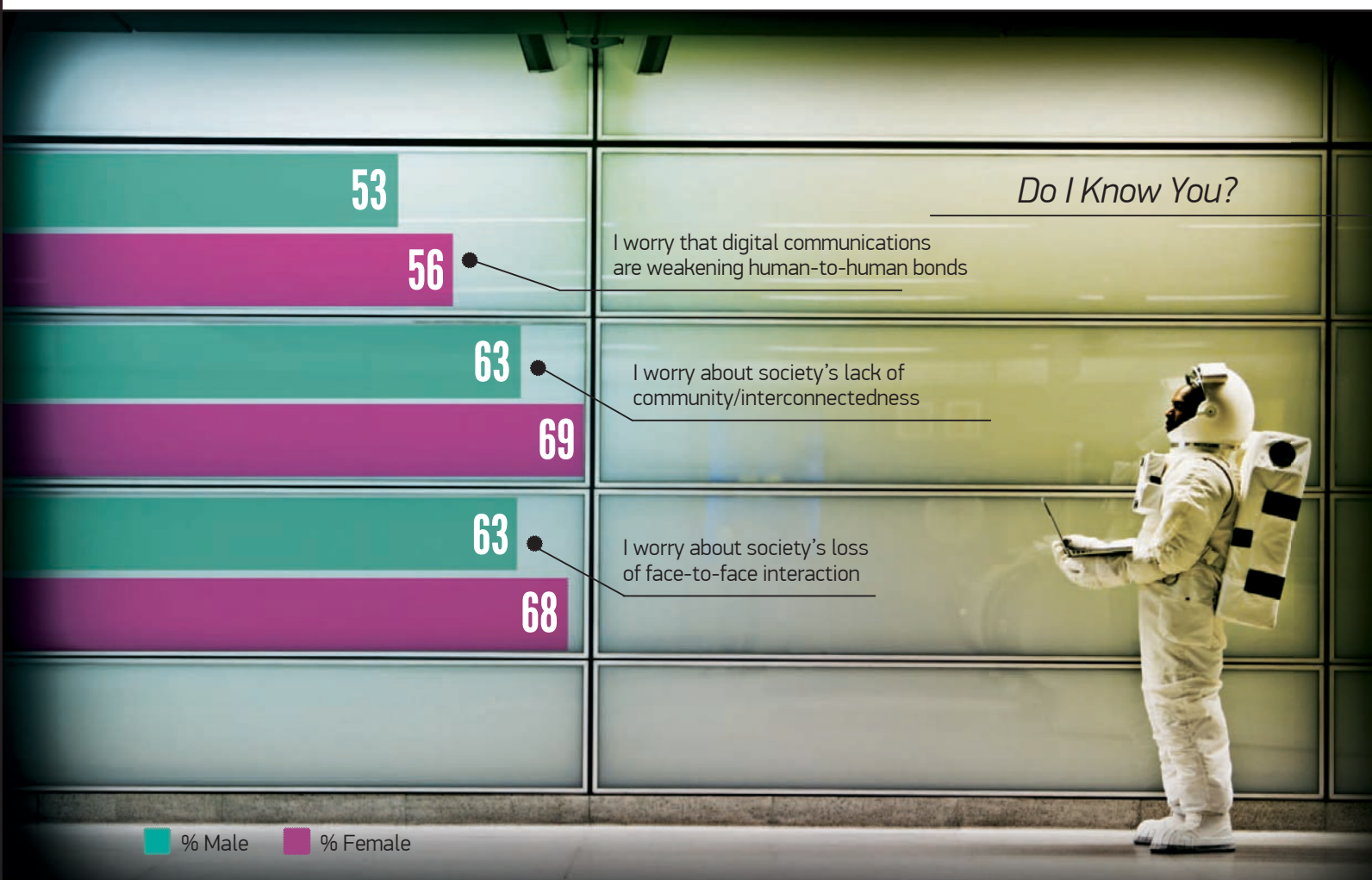# What Happens When Meaning Gives Way to Minutiae?

We're living in an age in which we might not know our neighbors' names, but, thanks to Zillow, we can recite the market value of their homes. Even as our access to information grows by leaps and bounds, our face-to-face interaction with humans outside our families and workplaces is becoming more limited. We are losing the traditional social structures—neighborhoods and villages, service clubs, town centers—that used to define us and bring us together.

All Spokes, No Wheel

There's some irony in the fact that we are learning so much about so many things but less about one another—and that this age of hyperconnectedness is making us feel less connected. Sure, we may know through social networking what an old friend had for dinner last night and what movie she intends to see this weekend, but we likely haven't had an actual conversation or in-person visit with that friend in some time. A majority of respondents (54 percent) worry that digital communication is weakening human-to-human bonds, and 65 percent are moderately to extremely worried about the decrease in face-to-face interaction. Two-thirds of the global sample worry about our lack of community and interconnectedness. It's telling that when we asked people to grade 14 aspects of their lives (not shown in charts), the absolute lowest grade went not to financial security or stress management but to charity/volunteerism/community involvement, suggesting this is an area they feel is in need of improvement. People are feeling a desire to be part of a real community, not just a virtual one on Facebook, Google+, or another site.

Do I Know You?

53
56
I worry that digital communications are weakening human-to-human bonds

63
69
I worry about society's lack of community/interconnectedness

63
68
I worry about society's loss of face-to-face interaction

■ % Male ■ % Female

This sense of disconnectedness is having societal implications. Ever since the Internet became popular in the 1990s, we've known that the way people behave online isn't necessarily reflective of how they conduct themselves offline. The most mild-mannered milquetoast in the "real world" may be an aggressively opinionated flamer in an online forum. Now a growing concern is that the bad habits and behaviors we've cultivated online are spilling over into our face-to-face interactions. Around three-quarters of respondents are moderately to extremely worried about society's loss of civility and politeness. This issue is of greater concern to women than men and is especially vexing to members of the oldest age group.
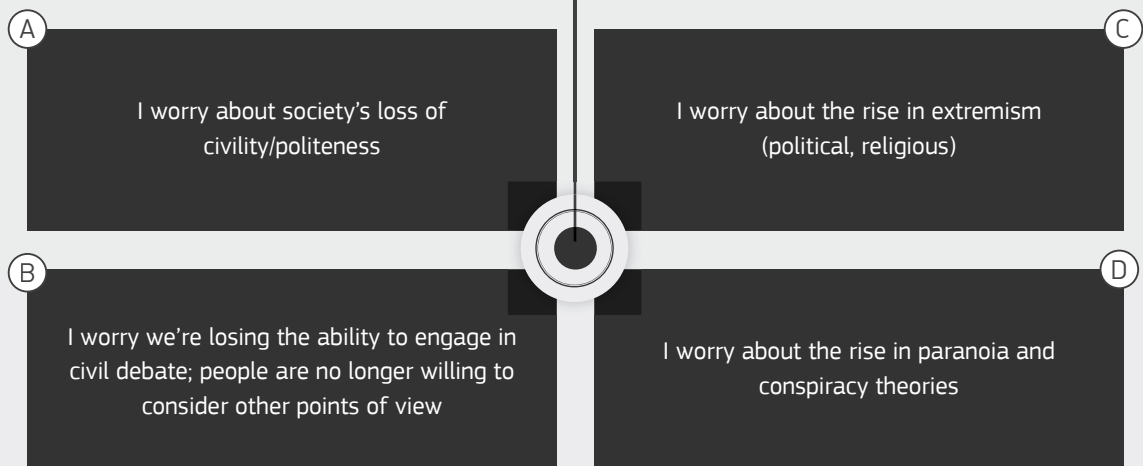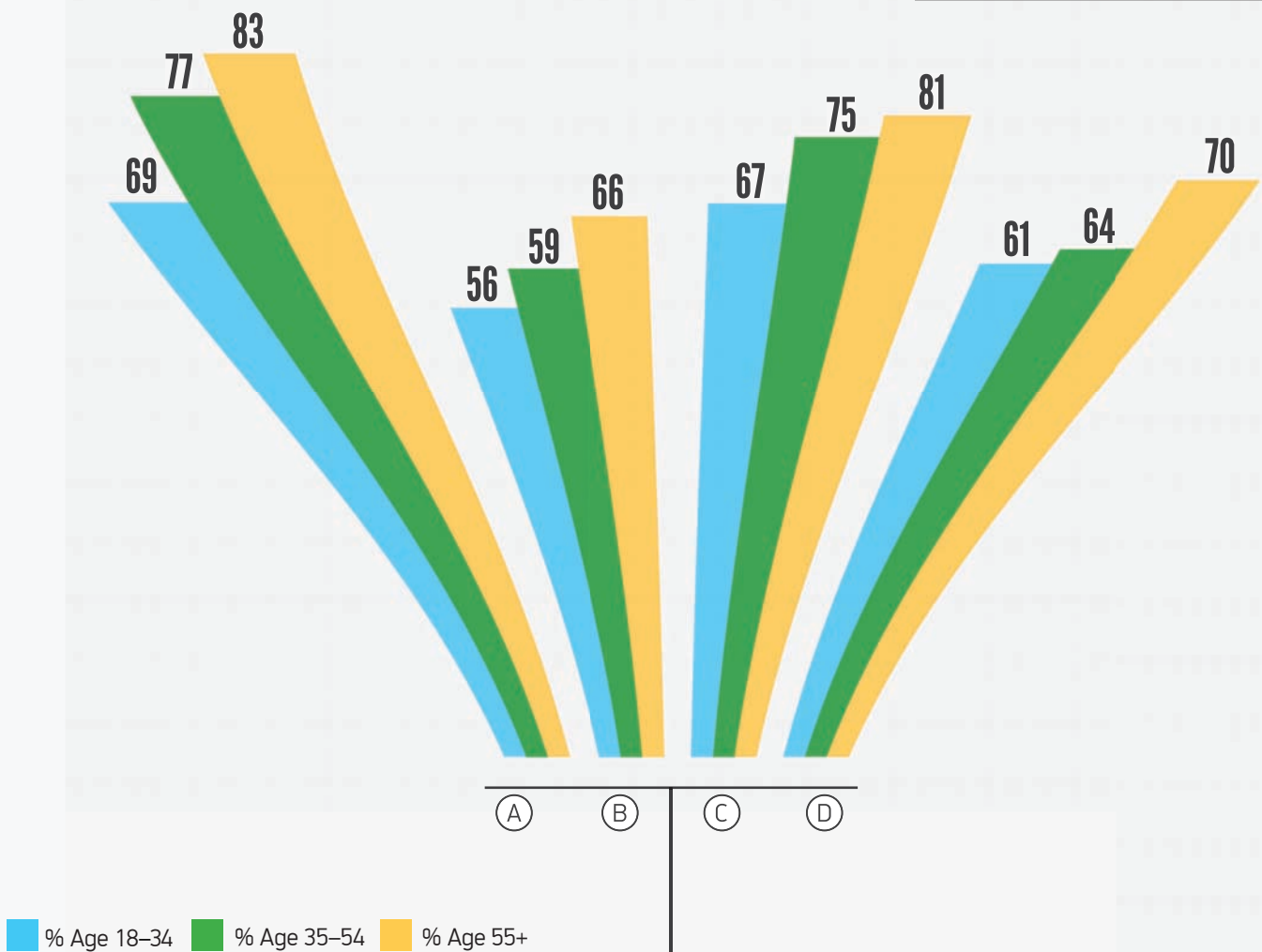
Our loss of civility is certainly being felt in the political arena: A majority of the global sample (58 percent) worry we're losing the ability to engage in civil debate and that people are no longer willing to consider other points of view. Hand in hand with this concern is a perceived rise in extremism, a concern for 7 in 10 respondents. Almost as many (64 percent) express worry about the rise of paranoia and conspiracy theories.

It's interesting to note that, despite all these worries about other people's bad behaviors and loss of human connections, three-quarters of the sample rated their own personal relationships an A or B on a standard U.S. report card scale of A=excellent, B=good, C=average/acceptable, D=poor, F=fail (not shown in charts). Even more (91 percent of Prosumers and 83 percent of the mainstream) gave themselves high marks for "character/integrity/ honor," so apparently it's mostly *other* people whose personal failings are dragging society down.

> " *Our study has uncovered a strong sense of ambivalence toward the future. While consumers are embracing all the new technologies and conveniences that are so much a part of the modern lifestyle, they are also wistful about those aspects of life—including simplicity, intellectuality, and strong ties to nature's rhythms—that are slipping away. There is a growing sense that we need to take some time, individually and as a society, to think about the direction in which we're moving and whether we're going to be happy with where we end up. It's too late to change course entirely, but we may be able to tinker with those aspects of the future that are most unsettling to us.* "

—Marianne Hurstel
Vice President, BETC Euro RSCG
Global Chief Strategy Officer, Euro RSCG Worldwide

83
77
69
66
59
56
81
75
67
70
64
61

A   B   C   D

■ % Age 18–34   ■ % Age 35–54   ■ % Age 55+

A I worry about society's loss of civility/politeness

B I worry we're losing the ability to engage in civil debate; people are no longer willing to consider other points of view

C I worry about the rise in extremism (political, religious)

D I worry about the rise in paranoia and conspiracy theories

The Nuclear Family Is Disintegrating

Are Today's Children Losing Out?

■ % Age 18–34   ■ % Age 35–54   ■ % Age 55+

Though the notion of the nuclear family goes back centuries in the West, it wasn't until the early 20th century that increased wages began to make father-mother-child(ren) households the norm. And not just the norm: Nuclear families in recent decades have been regarded as one of the most important building blocks of a stable, productive society. It's easy to understand, then, why current fluctuations in household structure are of great concern to many. In the United States, only 26 percent of 20-somethings were married in 2008, down from two-thirds in 1960. And the percentage of households made up of married couples with children under 18 declined from 45 in 1960 to 24 in 2000. In the United Kingdom, women are now more likely to give birth before age 25 than to get married. Globally, one-quarter to one-third of all families are headed by single mothers.

Most respondents to the Digital Life survey find the move away from the nuclear family troubling. Two-thirds are moderately to extremely worried about the number of children growing up without fathers, and 63 percent are concerned about the rise in single-parent homes. Sixty-five percent worry about children being reared without a stay-at-home parent, and nearly as many (59 percent) are concerned about children being "outsourced" to daycare facilities and private childcare workers. There is a sense that children are being shortchanged: 69 percent of Prosumers and 62 percent of the mainstream worry that, in general, today's children aren't given enough of a chance to just be kids.

63 67 73 — I worry that too many children are growing up without fathers

62 67 69 — I worry about children being reared without a stay-at-home parent

58 60 63 — I worry about childcare being "outsourced" to daycare facilities and private employees

58 66 70 — In general, today's children aren't given enough of a chance to just be kids

I'm Concerned About the Loss of Nuclear Families/Increase in Single-Parent Homes

63	61	65	65	63	60	64	71
Total	Male	Female	Prosumer	Mainstream	Age 18–34	Age 35–54	Age 55+
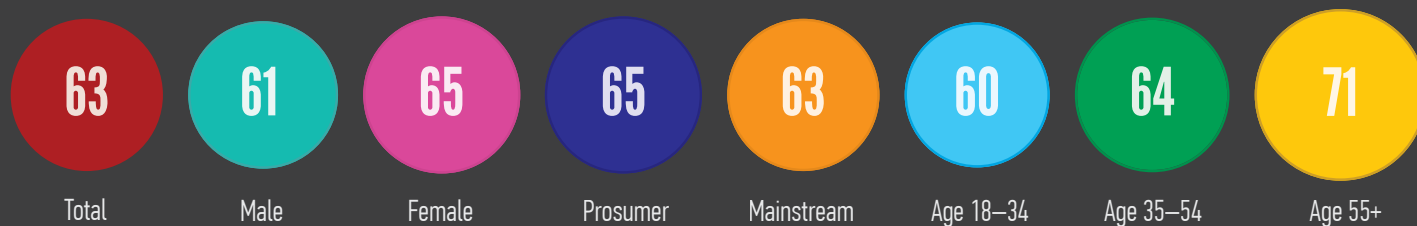
% agreeing strongly/somewhat

In addition to the breakdown of the nuclear family, there is concern over the diminished presence of older relatives in the lives of modern-day kids. Around 6 in 10 respondents express moderate to extreme concern about society's loss of extended family and "village elders." And nearly three-quarters (73 percent) worry about the lack of respect for elders these days—a development that may reflect seniors' less central societal role. There were significant differences between countries on all the questions pertaining to family (not shown in charts). On the whole, the United States and the more traditional cultures (e.g., India, China) evince far more concern about the rise in single-parent households and children growing up without the presence of a father. In contrast, fewer than 1 in 5 respondents in France, Ireland, the Netherlands, and the Czech Republic express concern about these issues. People in the latter countries seem to take in stride the evolution of the family into new, more flexible forms.

Diminished Role of Elders

- 67
- 77
- 81 — I'm concerned about society's loss of respect for elders

- 57
- 61 — I'm concerned about society's loss of extended family and "village elders"
- 63

% Age 18–34   % Age 35–54   % Age 55+

Google and Facebook Are the New Gods, But Jesus Died and His Name Was Steve Jobs

According to Google Trends, the term *Google* is searched for more than the terms *God, Jesus, Allah, Buddha, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism,* and *Judaism* combined. Are our web and social media platforms becoming our new gods? Our new religion?

Granted, that seems far-fetched—but consider all the fundamental elements that apply to both social media and religion, including knowledge, community, and prophets and gurus.

Omniscience: God, by whatever name, is said to know all things—past, present, and future. If he were a social media platform, he no doubt would find himself in the middle of a privacy firestorm, as Facebook and others have been. The reality is, social networking sites know a good deal more about their users than most people realize. They can even track people's movements through GPS coordinates on uploaded photos. People may not care if marketers get ahold of this information (more coupons!), but what about hackers, insurers, potential employers, or government agents? At least with God, you're assured of high-level discretion.
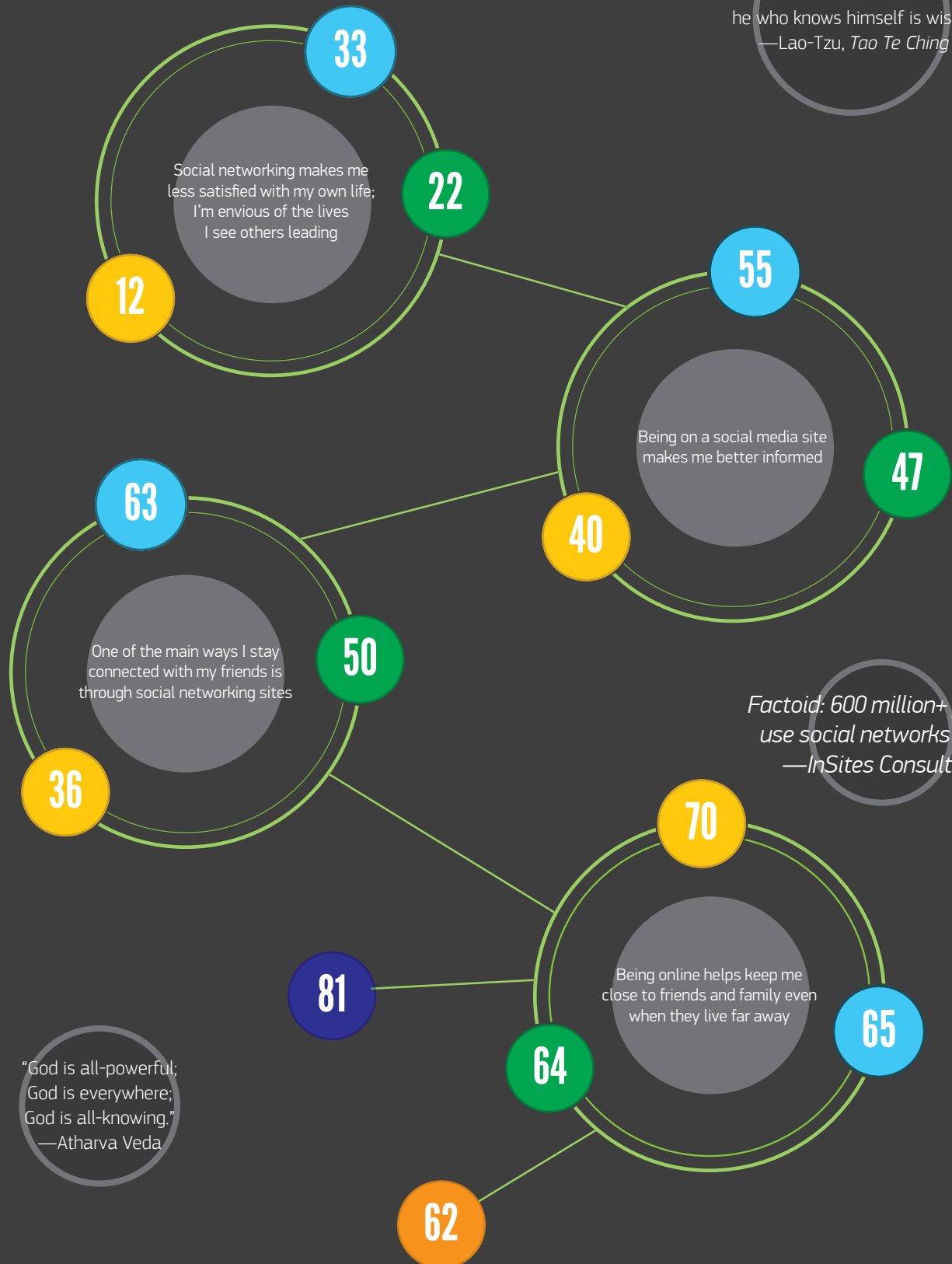
"The Lord was so wise in building the church, because He knew His people would need each other. There is great value to people of like faith being together to keep each other strong."
—Phil Sanders, "The Church Jesus Built"

Community: Going to church on Sunday or synagogue on Saturday is more than a religious ritual or commitment; it's a way to keep in touch with members of the community. More than half of respondents to the Digital Life survey—and two-thirds of millennials—agree that one of the main ways they stay connected with friends is through social networking sites. And two-thirds say being online helps keep them close to faraway family and friends. Staying connected to loved ones in absentia used to be mostly about keeping them in your thoughts and prayers; now it's about checking status updates on Facebook.

Knowledge: People pray to God for knowledge—for answers to questions big and small. Today, Google—thanks to the millions of minds that post content online—can answer virtually any question one might have. And, like God, the mechanics behind Google are invisible. As of June 2011, comScore put Google's worldwide reach at 1 billion *unique* visitors per month, and it continues to grow. Online analysts estimate there are 34,000 Google searches every second—or 3 billion a day. Facebook and other social networking sites are also giving us the answers we crave: Half our global sample and 72 percent of Prosumers say being on social media makes them better informed. If knowledge truly is power, our hours spent prostrate before the altars of our digital gods are an important source of strength.

Self-Examination: A central tenet of religion is self-knowledge (the importance of self-examination in the Christian religion, the role of meditation to explore one's conscious in Eastern philosophies, and so on). In modern times, how much are our self-perceptions affected by what we see online? Just more than a quarter of the global sample—and a third of millennials—say **social networking is making them less satisfied with their own lives** and that they're envious of the lives they see others leading through social media. This envy is most pronounced in India and China. We now have at least four parallel lives, including the life we are living in the "real world," the life we are living online, our perceptions of our life as shaped by what we see via social media, and other people's perceptions of our life as shaped by what we post and say online.

Is Social Media Our New Religion?

33
22
12

Social networking makes me
less satisfied with my own life;
I'm envious of the lives
I see others leading

55
47
40

Being on a social media site
makes me better informed

63
50
36

One of the main ways I stay
connected with my friends is
through social networking sites

*Factoid: 600 million+ people
use social networks daily.
—InSites Consulting*

70
81
64
65
62

Being online helps keep me
close to friends and family even
when they live far away

● % Age 18–34   ● % Age 35–54   ● % Age 55+   ● % Prosumers   ● % Mainstream

Living out our lives in the relative open of social networking (the average Facebook user has 120 "friends" and exponentially more "friends of friends") also provides a sense of celebrity and influence that used to be reserved for the rich and famous (at least until reality television opened the floodgates by putting a microscope on select members of the hoi polloi). Now ordinary individuals are able to act as their own life curators and personal paparazzi, putting on display whichever aspects of their lives, interests, and personalities they most wish people to see. People's sense of their influence increases with every "like," every item repinned on Pinterest, every tweet retweeted, every point gain on Klout. And this, in turn, feeds into a desire for more followers, more influence— and more public recognition of both. Finding more effective ways to harness this influence will continue to be a marketing obsession.

"To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit."
—1 Corinthians 12:8

Good Works: From Judaism to Sikhism, Christianity to Zoroastrianism, Islam to Falun Gong, the principles of charity and good deeds underlie most of the world's religions. And so, too, are these principles increasingly in evidence in the social media sphere. The Havas Social Business study, fielded in six countries at the end of 2010, found that a majority of respondents—and 78 percent of Prosumers—intend to use social media more and more to promote worthy causes. Thirty-eight percent of the global sample and 6 in 10 Prosumers say they already use social media to change the world for the better. Whether donating to a local cause via PayPal or helping to sustain public interest in the capture of a wanted war criminal, people are using the tools available to them in the digital world to create change in the real world.

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds."
—Hebrews 10:24

Prophets: In many religions, an invisible God is represented on Earth by a go-between: Christ, Muhammad, Mahavira, etc. Upon the death of Steve Jobs, quite a few cartoonists opted to depict him as an equivalent of Jesus Christ (despite his Buddhist faith); a few showed people wondering why he had not returned after three days. Blasphemous though that may be, there are some parallels between the former Apple CEO and the major religious prophets. Like Christ's teachings, Steve Jobs' word was accepted by many as an immutable truth. His "Stevenote" addresses at Macworld, Apple Expos, and other events were highly anticipated and packed with enthusiastic disciples. [A blog post from 2007 was titled, "The Yahoo Revival Meeting (Starring His Digital Holiness Steve Jobs)!"] Russell Belk, a consumer behaviorist at the University of Utah, describes what many call "The Cult of Mac":

> *The Mac and its fans constitute the equivalent of a religion. This religion is based on an origin myth for Apple Computer, heroic and savior legends surrounding its co-founder and current CEO Steve Jobs, the devout faith of its follower congregation, their belief in the righteousness of the Macintosh, the existence of one or more Satanic opponents, Mac believers proselytizing and converting nonbelievers, and the hope among cult members that salvation can be achieved by transcending corporate capitalism.*

Apple may not have set out to create a cult, but it has succeeded in doing so by offering a vision and philosophy that gives its devoted followers a sense of being a part of something both at their level and greater than themselves.

Power and Retribution: From the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street to the Susan B. Komen vs. Planned Parenthood furor, social media confers unprecedented power to organize, promote—and punish. The latest social media "crusade" is against Joseph Kony, leader of the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda and a self-proclaimed spokesperson of God. The world watches to see how long he'll be able to evade the thunderbolts from the new "on high."

Confession and Redemption: For those whose misdeeds are eating away at them, social networks have the capacity to serve as a place of confession and public contrition. There are even sites devoted solely to that purpose (e.g., Confessons4U.com, noteful.com, unburdened.net). And why stop at confession? Universal Life Church offers online absolution.

Social media will never replace religion. The secularization thesis propounded by Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, Max Weber, and others in the late 19th and early 20th centuries—which predicted that modernization would inevitably replace religious values and institutions with secular substitutes—has not come to pass. In fact, religious fundamentalism is on the rise in many parts of the world. Nevertheless, it can be argued that social media already is playing a quasi-religious role—offering a place to seek truths, to join with like-minded others, to invite judgment of one's perspectives and behaviors, and to find solutions to life's myriad challenges. Judging by escalating usage numbers, it certainly could be characterized as an "opiate for the masses." And it's one medium in which marketers would be smart to unleash their most persuasive brand evangelists.

"Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven."
—Genesis 19:24

Is Personal Freedom Making Us Insecure?

By just about every measure, people in most modern societies have more freedom than in times past: Most of us have access to technologies that allow us to travel to the far reaches of the earth—whether literally by plane or figuratively by Internet. We have all manner of devices through which to communicate with people near and far. And we can easily connect to information, ideas, and entertainment virtually anywhere on the planet.

What we don't have as much of are the rigid rules and social mores that used to narrowly channel people's behaviors—and even their thoughts. Things that once were taboo are broadly accepted. And people have many more options regarding where, how, and with whom they'll live their lives. For all the upsides of these freedoms—and there are many—we're also sensing feelings of loss, a longing for the order and structure of the way things used to be. We can see this in the fact that 6 in 10 respondents express concern about the loss of formality and rise of "casual everything."

Compare family photographs from the 1940s and 1950s with those of today, and you'll be struck by how much has changed, not only in terms of fashion and hairstyles but also demeanor. Half the sample also express concern about the lack of clear gender roles. Interestingly, there was virtually no difference between the male and female responses to this question. While it seems unlikely that most women would be willing to go back to traditional, restrictive gender roles, there do appear to be regrets about the so-called blurring of the sexes, as we saw in our 2010 Gender Shift study.

Nearly half the sample (49 percent) also are moderately to extremely worried about the loss of religious faith in modern times. And nearly three-quarters (72 percent) worry about what they perceive as society's moral decline. More than a quarter of Prosumers (26 percent) express extreme worry over this decline, compared with 1 in 5 mainstream consumers.
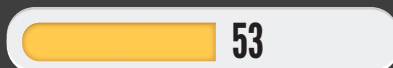
Adrift Without Clear Rules

■ % Age 18–34   ■ % Age 35–54   ■ % Age 55+

58
63
64
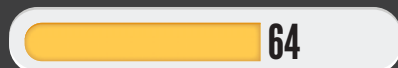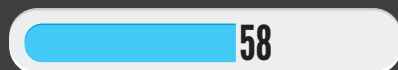
I'm concerned about society's loss of formality/casual everything

48
50
53

I'm concerned about society's loss of religious faith

67
75
79
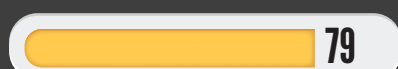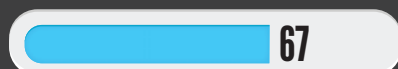
I'm concerned about society's moral decline

48
51
53

I'm concerned about society's gender merge—men and women no longer having clear roles based on gender

Feeling Lost—and Leaderless

Around two-thirds of respondents worry that society has become too shallow, focusing too much on things that don't really matter. Even more troubling, 4 in 10 sometimes feel as though they're wasting their lives. These findings suggest a fairly widespread lack of purpose. In the absence of rigid rules and clear societal expectations, there are no longer concrete goals and benchmarks against which to measure oneself. We have the freedom to do and be virtually anything, but we are lacking the comfort and security that comes from being certain of one's place in the world, of having a dependable blueprint to follow. This sense of insecurity is further exacerbated by our loss of faith in institutions and the men and women who lead them. Sixty-nine percent of the global sample express at least moderate concern about society's loss of trusted leaders and role models. There were significant differences in responses to this question across countries (not shown in charts): In Brazil, Colombia, Hungary, India, and South Africa, a majority of respondents say they are very or extremely concerned about the loss of respected leaders, compared with less than a third of the samples in the Czech Republic, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.

60   68   74
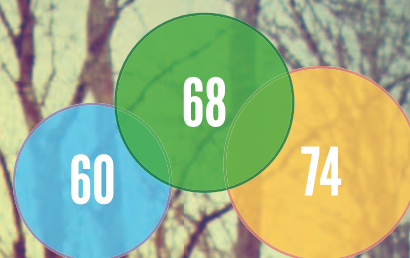
I worry that society has become too shallow, focusing too much on things that don't really matter

48   44   33

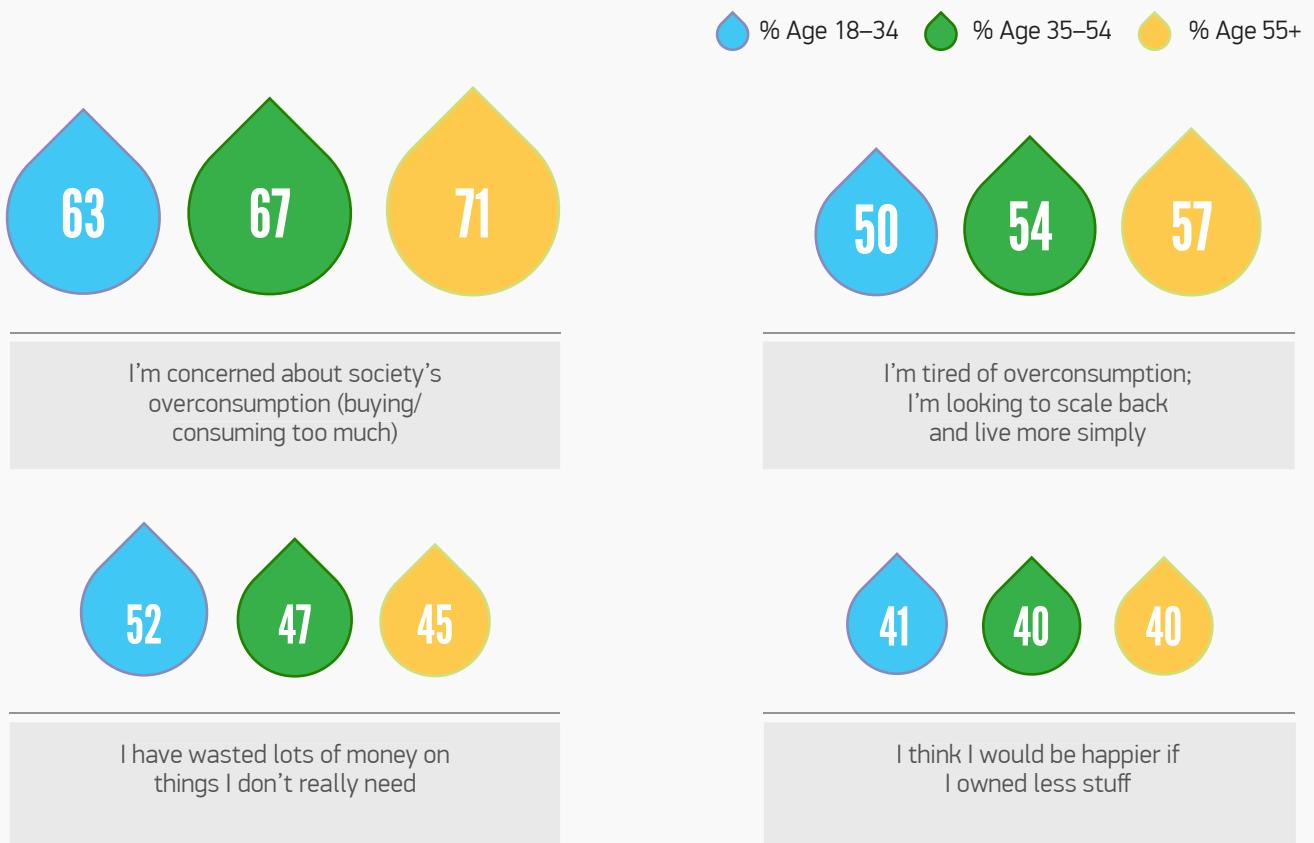I sometimes feel as though I'm wasting my life

65   71   79

I'm concerned about society's loss of trusted leaders/role models

● % Age 18–34

● % Age 35–54

● % Age 55+

Exhausted by Hyperconsumption

The global shift from producer economies to consumer economies is well documented—and, for a time, raised few alarms. Increasing individuals' wealth and giving them more access to more goods was viewed as a goal, not a problem. Now that the world population has swelled to 7 billion and limited resources and global warming have become top-of-mind concerns, the picture is changing. Many are reconsidering modern society's approach to consumption and are questioning whether the planet can continue to support our hyperconsumerist lifestyles. We first explored this topic in our New Consumer study, fielded at the close of 2009. Our new study confirms the movement toward mindful consumption to one extent or another in every one of the 19 markets surveyed.

Two-thirds of the global sample worry about overconsumption in general—about the practice among modern consumers to buy and use too much. Examining their own lives and lifestyles, a majority say they personally are tired of overconsumption and are looking to scale back and live more simply. Around half admit to having wasted lots of money on things they don't need, and 4 in 10 say they think they would actually be happier if they owned less stuff. This feeling of having too much is strongest in India (63 percent agree strongly or somewhat) and weakest in the Netherlands (21 percent).

🔵 % Age 18–34　　🟢 % Age 35–54　　🟡 % Age 55+

63 **67** **71**

I'm concerned about society's overconsumption (buying/ consuming too much)

50 **54** **57**

I'm tired of overconsumption; I'm looking to scale back and live more simply

52 **47** **45**

I have wasted lots of money on things I don't really need

41 **40** **40**

I think I would be happier if I owned less stuff

Concerns related to overconsumption go deeper than worries over excess clutter, mindless splurges at retail, and depleted savings accounts. There is growing awareness of the impact our personal excesses are having on the planet and its less fortunate inhabitants. When we asked respondents which aspects of modern life concern them, the second most pervasive worry, behind crime and random violence, was environmental destruction and climate change—a worry afflicting 80 percent of Prosumers and 73 percent of the mainstream (not shown in charts). (The higher figures for crime and random violence reflect particularly high scores from respondents in Colombia and South Africa.) Just more than three-quarters of Prosumers and two-thirds of the mainstream worry about the world's lack of sustainable forms of energy. Seven in 10 global respondents are moderately to extremely worried about the planet's water shortages and lack of clean water. And nearly three-quarters are worried about the growing gap between rich and poor.

Global Concerns

76

76

70

78

68

73

I worry about the lack of sustainable forms of energy

I'm concerned about the world's water shortages/lack of clean water

■ % Prosumers   ■ % Mainstream

I'm concerned about the growing gap between rich and poor

Oftentimes when analysts talk about consumers scaling back, they all but roll their eyes and say our "shop till you drop" culture is too deeply ingrained for people to voluntarily reduce their consumption over the long term. What some fail to grasp is that, for many people, cutting back isn't about sacrifice or having less; it's about being happier and having more—more time, more freedom, more space, more financial security. More than two-thirds of mainstream consumers in the 19 markets—and three-quarters of Prosumers—say they feel good about reducing the amount of waste they create. Similar numbers say making environmentally friendly choices makes them feel good and believe most of us would be better off if we lived more simply. Smart companies will pay attention to these trends and find new and engaging ways to give consumers products they feel good about.

A New Way Forward

76 **66**
I feel good about reducing the amount of waste I create

74 **64**
Making environmentally friendly choices makes me feel good

68 **65**
Most of us would be better off if we lived more simply

■ % Prosumers   ■ % Mainstream

What It Means

Few would deny that recent decades have brought with them all sorts of reasons to celebrate—from vastly improved access to information to medical breakthroughs and exciting new means of communication and self-expression. That said, it is also true that our Culture of More and digital lifestyle have proved unsatisfying and unsettling for many. People are looking to replace hyperconsumption and artificiality with a way of living that offers more meaning and more intangible rewards—even as they wish to maintain the modern conveniences upon which they've grown reliant. Marketers will need to be mindful of these shifts as we work to create brand preferences and add values that speak to these new priorities.

Given the debt crisis, #occupywallstreet, rogue bankers, obscene bonuses, and political instability, it's no wonder people feel lost. The economic downturn of the past few years makes us question who's at the helm. And the very different world in which we live today leads us to wonder whether we are straying too far from time-tested values and traditions. Globalization and new technologies have given birth to a new world, run by a new order— but would we have chosen it if we knew 20 years ago what we know today? And what choices and changes should we be making now to ensure we're not still adrift or riddled with doubts when a new generation is born?

The communications industry will have a role to play in helping people feel a greater sense of control and security, including making consumer choices that offer long-term satisfaction rather than a quick "sugar fix." And corporations, as we have explored in depth in our Future of the Corporate Brand and New Consumer studies, have myriad new societal obligations and expectations to fulfill. This new study, Digital Life, makes even more apparent the extent to which people all over the world are anxious to reconsider our current path and make adjustments to ensure we're moving toward a destination we actually will be happy to reach.