

UDC: 004.8:159.9

221. THE DIGITAL DETOX PARADOX: HOW TECH COMPANIES CAPITALISE ON THE FEAR OF TECHNOLOGY

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Annotation. It reveals the interest in the digital detox paradox, a phenomenon in which technology companies profit from products and services designed to help users reduce their dependence on digital technologies. At the same time, a growing trend shows that many consumers are increasingly interested in simpler devices and tools that limit constant connectivity. The article analyses the emerging market for minimalist technologies, the shift in consumer behaviour from the fear of missing out to concerns about excessive digital engagement, and the ethical implications of an industry that offers solutions to problems partly created by its own business models.

Keywords. digital detox paradox, smartphones, consumer psychology, wellbeing, technology, sustainability, attention economy, human-computer interaction.

In the last twenty years, technology has grown faster than ever, with devices constantly adding new features, notifications, and ways to keep us glued to screens. Smartphones, which once were just tools for calling and texting, are now little computers in our pockets, supporting everything from socializing to work and entertainment. This boom has expanded the global smartphone market and pushed device capabilities to new heights [1]. At the same time, many people are starting to notice a downside: being always connected can negatively affect attention, social interactions, and mental health.

The deep integration of tech into everyday life has led to digital burnout, where users feel stressed by constant connectivity and the need to always be online. Smartphones, initially tools of power, now cause mental overload because of too many apps competing for users' attention. Research shows features meant to improve our experience, like notifications and social media, can lower well-being and raise anxiety [1].

Consumers are increasingly seeking ways to disconnect, manage screen time, and regain focus, which has led to the digital detox movement. This phenomenon represents **a significant market trend rather than a niche development**. Minimalist phones, for example, increased by 27% from 2023 to 2024, showing that more consumers want less complex devices [2].

Notably, the response to technological overload often involves the introduction of additional technologies, like minimalist phones or apps that block other apps. Companies are selling products by admitting the downsides of digital life, positioning themselves as solutions. This includes accessories; the global phone case market is predicted to increase from \$26.3 billion in 2024 to \$54.2 billion by 2034, and minimalist Bluetooth speakers have become more popular, showing people want tech that works without being intrusive [2].

To understand the Digital Detox Paradox, it is important to examine consumer psychology. Tech companies have long recognised that capturing attention requires understanding how people think and what concerns them. For instance, the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) encourages constant checking of social media, while notifications and news feeds keep users online even when they wish to disconnect. People also observe others' behaviour, creating social pressure to stay connected and fostering strong attachment to devices. Normally, ease of use and perceived usefulness drive technology adoption, but with minimalist devices, simplicity and limited features become the most valuable traits. These devices help users reduce distractions, conserve battery life, and focus on what truly matters.

As concerns about constant connectivity and its effects on attention and social interaction grow, more people are looking for ways to spend less time on screens. This trend has several drivers. First, users are realizing that too much phone time can harm mental health, causing anxiety and stress. Second, simpler devices are usually cheaper than high-end smartphones, which appeals to those on a budget. Third, these devices are easier to use, helping people focus better. Finally, many want to cut distractions and pay more attention to the world around them.

Analysis of consumer data reveals interesting demographic patterns in the adoption of minimalist technology, though these patterns also expose significant quality gaps. Products like ultra-thin tempered glass watch screen protectors attract a surprising user base: 61.8% of buyers identify as non-tech savvy individuals, while Apple enthusiasts account for another 9.98%. Similarly, minimalist Bluetooth speakers appeal primarily to casual listeners (45.38%) and home users (22.66%), with home enjoyment and home office use being the primary scenarios [2]. However, despite this broad mainstream appeal – demonstrating that minimalist technology resonates beyond tech-elites – these products face notable quality challenges. Minimalist Bluetooth speakers, despite surging search volumes of 34.6%, maintain average ratings of only 4.15 out of 5, with users reporting issues with Bluetooth connectivity and build quality. Ultra-thin watch screen protectors show consistent growth but face complaints about poor touch sensitivity and durability [2]. This demand-quality gap

presents both a challenge and an opportunity: consumers are eager to embrace minimalist alternatives, but many existing products fail to meet expectations.

This internal conflict – wanting to stay connected while avoiding technological overload – lies at the heart of the Digital Detox Paradox. Consumers seek balance: they value smartphones for their utility but increasingly prioritise mental health and real-world relationships over constant connectivity. This tension drives demand for minimalist alternatives that offer the benefits of technology without its controlling aspects.

Currently, tech companies have a real shot at success if they can create gadgets that are simple and easy for people to use. Users want to make their lives easier and concentrate on the things that really matter to them. Therefore, companies that develop technologies supporting functionality while minimizing distraction may achieve competitive advantages. This phenomenon highlights a contradiction where tech companies now sell products by admitting the bad sides of what they do. In essence, companies commercialise solutions to problems generated by their own business models. Major technology companies that built their business models around maximising user engagement are now introducing digital wellbeing features into their platforms. For example, Apple has Screen Time, and Android has Digital Wellbeing. These features provide users with information about their screen time and allow them to restrict access to specific applications. However, despite their potential benefits, such tools operate within digital ecosystems that continue to encourage prolonged user engagement. The revenue models of these companies remain unchanged. Reports show that people care about digital wellbeing and are willing to spend money on it. The phone case market demonstrates high sales volumes and frequent replacement cycles.

Google Trends analysis provides valuable insights for companies developing minimalist products. Search interest for "minimal phone design" shows intermittent spikes, with peaks reaching values of 53 and 52 in August and December 2025 respectively. More significantly, emerging queries like "simple phone interface" showed a brief spike in December 2025, indicating growing consumer interest in the software experience of minimalist devices rather than just their hardware aesthetics. For product developers, this suggests that investment in user interface and user experience research for simple interfaces could align with emerging consumer preferences. Continuous monitoring of search trends for new related queries can help optimise both product development and marketing strategies. The pricing strategy of minimalist devices carries particular significance for emerging economies. With most minimalist phones priced between \$120 and \$300, they are substantially more accessible than flagship smartphones that often exceed \$1,000 [3]. This affordability factor is crucial in markets like Jordan, where smartphone penetration already exceeds 78% but disposable income may limit access to premium devices. For students, young professionals, and consumers in developing economies, minimalist phones offer a pathway to smartphone ownership without the financial burden of conventional devices. This positions minimalist technology not merely as a lifestyle choice for affluent Western consumers but as a practical solution for global markets where value and durability outweigh feature quantity [2].

Paradoxically, consumers seeking relief from digital overload are turning to the industry that created the problem. This contradiction raises an important question: how did technology companies become both the cause of and the solution to digital distraction?

It is noteworthy that criticism of technology has become profitable within the technology industry. Companies benefit both from capturing user attention and from offering tools designed to reduce digital distraction. Apple, for instance, sells iPhones designed to **maintain user engagement** but also provides Screen Time to control how much you use them. Google sells Android, which is designed to grab your attention, but then offers Digital Wellbeing to help you take back control. In other words, the tech business profits from the problem which is excessive digital content and interaction and also from the solution. Users depend on digital technologies, but they also need protection from them, and they end up paying for both. This situation raises important questions regarding the effectiveness of digital wellbeing tools and whether they represent genuine solutions or primarily marketing strategies. Companies and researchers studying consumer behaviour need to understand this phenomenon so that consumers can make more informed decisions as the market continues to evolve. The implications for companies are significant, and they must consider the future of tech minimalism. For companies in the minimalist and digital wellness area, the strategic direction appears clear, although implementation remains challenging. They need to rethink how they design, sell, and position their products because consumers are increasingly questioning traditional technological values. The minimalist tech market should keep growing. Minimalist smartphones have increased by 27% annually, phone cases will be a \$54.2 billion **market** by 2034, and consumer demand for minimalist products continues to grow. But this market will change [2].

The tech industry is moving towards simplicity. Instead of cramming devices with features, the focus will be on perfecting core functionalities. The digital detox paradox manifests differently across cultural contexts. Research on smartphone purchase intentions reveals significant variation in factors influencing consumer decisions across countries. In Indonesia, brand image and perceived quality dominate; in India, social influence and product features take precedence; in Iran, quality consciousness and brand orientation are key. These cultural variations suggest that the minimalist technology trend will likely evolve differently in different markets. In collectivist cultures where social influence heavily shapes purchasing decisions, minimalist phones may face

adoption barriers if they are perceived as different from what peers use. Conversely, in markets with high environmental consciousness, sustainability messaging may resonate more strongly. Understanding these cultural nuances will be essential for companies seeking to expand minimalist technology globally [3].

Recent developments in e-ink screens are expected to improve readability and reduce power consumption while maintaining functional design. Operating systems are projected to become more streamlined, focusing on essential features. Environmental considerations are increasingly influencing product design, including the use of recycled materials and improved repairability. This minimalist approach is likely to extend to other electronics, such as cameras with simplified controls and smart home systems with privacy-focused features.

This shift presents a real opportunity for companies who understand that some consumers want tech that enhances their lives without being intrusive or distracting. They want gadgets that serve a clear purpose and respect their time and attention. Also, simplicity itself will become a luxury so people may pay more for less. The Light Phone offers limited functionality while being relatively expensive, and minimalist speakers cost as much as fancy ones. If getting away from tech is pricey, then only rich people can get that relief. Even with a good outlook, the minimalist tech market could face problems. Everyone has regular smartphones and most applications are designed for them.

The Digital Detox Paradox is both a chance and a warning for businesses, investors, and people. The chance is in meeting the real and increasing need for tech that values our attention spans and minds. The warning is that real answers can turn into fake marketing, and it's hard to create lasting businesses when the big companies don't want true digital wellness. The winners in this area will be the ones who deal with these issues honestly. They will sell items that really help users, talk truthfully about what they do, and create business plans that match what users want. It's not certain if these businesses can do well when they have to compete with huge companies that feed off our attention. But, more and more people want choices, so that shows there's a real chance here. Initial assumptions suggested this was a niche phenomenon that people wanting to go back to old phones. But the more I looked at the numbers – the 27% increase, what's hot on Google, the rising accessory market – the more I saw this is a big change in what people want. This trend reflects not a rejection of technology but a desire for a different mode of engagement with it [1].

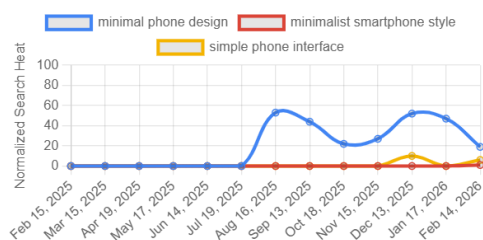


Figure 1 – Global search interest over time for minimalist phone-related.

This paradox highlights both opportunities and challenges in the minimalist technology market, particularly regarding consumer adoption and affordability. This indicates that the market is responding to genuine consumer needs. This suggests that consumer preferences can influence market trends. If everyone decide that more isn't better, companies will listen.

At the same time, this situation highlights a paradox within the technology industry. Companies whose business models have historically depended on capturing and sustaining user attention are increasingly offering tools intended to limit excessive digital engagement. This contradiction raises important questions regarding the effectiveness of digital wellbeing solutions and whether they represent genuine attempts to address digital overload or primarily function as additional market opportunities.

The affordability of minimalist technologies also presents a challenge. Although such devices are designed to reduce distraction and support more focused technology use, their relatively high prices may limit accessibility for certain groups, particularly students and young consumers. As a result, the ability to reduce digital engagement may increasingly become a privilege available mainly to those who can afford alternative devices.

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