

Trends Report

The Slow Dopamine Shift: Reclaiming Connection in a Digital World.

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Introduction

As the media landscape continues to flood with endless content—from streaming shows and podcasts to vlogs, substacks and reels—the question arises: at what cost?

In 2024, Australia took a bold step by banning social media access for under-16s, while growing evidence links “too much” screen time to shorter attention spans, stifled creativity, and rising anxiety. The bottom line? We’re more connected online than ever, but often feeling more isolated and overwhelmed.

As 2025 approaches, a social reckoning is underway.

In a new research study in partnership with insights platform Ideally, Mediahub explored the fallout of digital fatigue across generations, revealing a shift toward real-life interactions. Hobbies, analogue entertainment like vinyl and print, and the desire for authentic community experiences are making a comeback. The new currency? Connection in the physical world, not just through screens.

Could media engagement become more intentional in this age of digital burnout? While people aren’t ready for a complete digital detox, slower dopamine hits might be the key to a healthier, happier society.

Let’s explore the three trends driving the slow dopamine shift:

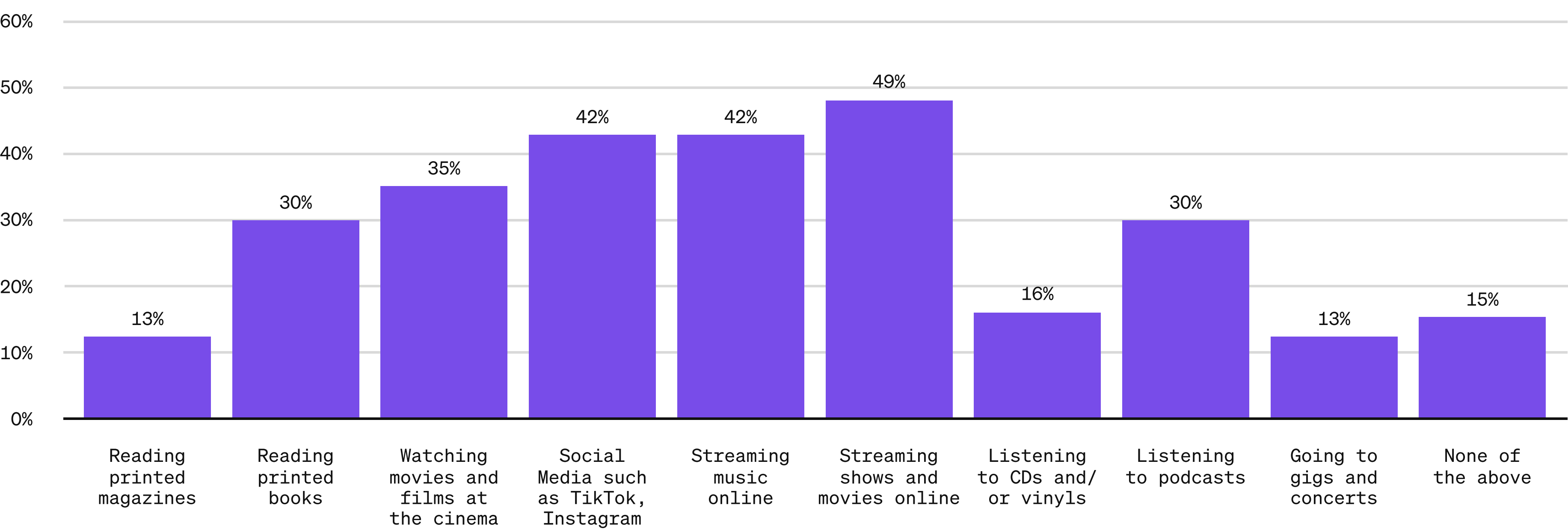
1. The Joy of Analogue Entertainment
 2. Taking a Break: The Rise of Digital Detox
 3. Young Women & the Social Media Trap

The joy of analogue entertainment

Australians are diversifying their media and entertainment consumption. Digital platforms—such as video and music streaming, podcasts, and social media—are seeing the highest growth in usage. However, there’s also a notable rise in offline

activities, including reading printed books, listening to CDs and vinyl, and engaging with magazines. Additionally, more people are attending live events like gigs, concerts, and the cinema, signalling a growing interest in analogue experiences.

Thinking back over the past year, have you spent more time with any of the following forms of media and entertainment?



Young Adults have spent more time engaging with media and entertainment than any other generation over the past year. They are consuming a broader range of formats, with 75% of their media time spent on digital or online platforms.

	Number of media and entertainment formats (avg)	Online formats (avg)	Offline formats (avg)
Young Adults (18-34)	4	3	1
Mid-Life Adults (35-54)	3	2	1
Mature Adults (55+)	2	1	1

As people spend increasing amounts of time on digital media, there's a rising trend of turning to offline hobbies for balance. Through a mix of qualitative and quantitative data collected via Ideally, we explored not just how many people have adopted new hobbies, but also the types of activities they're embracing.

The findings are striking: over 68% of respondents reported picking up a new offline hobby in the past year. From reading and running to crafting and gardening, people are actively seeking creative and mindful ways to engage their minds — stepping away from the dopamine-driven pull of digital devices.

Interestingly, this shift aligns with the growing "Dopamine Detox" trend on TikTok, where users challenge themselves to find joy in non-digital activities. Participants report feeling a renewed sense of positivity and fulfillment, showcasing a cultural pivot towards more intentional, offline pursuits.

Describe your latest hobby



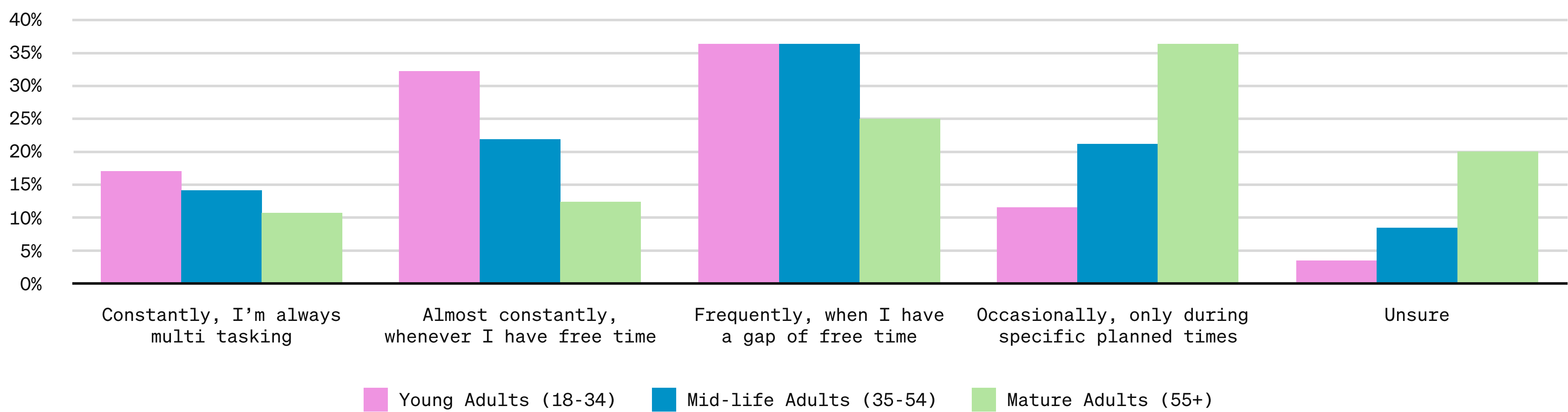
Insights powered through Ideally

Taking a break: The rise of digital detox

While more people are embracing offline hobbies, staying focused on them remains a challenge. Over 86% of surveyed individuals admitted to frequently reaching for digital distractions.

For many, almost every waking hour involves some interaction with digital media. The only time people report being less distracted by devices is when they're in bed—a rare moment of disconnection in an otherwise media-saturated day.

How frequently do you seek out digital distractions



Insights powered through Ideally

Reaching for digital distractions has become second nature, especially for Young Adults, reflecting a stark contrast in how younger and older generations interact with media.

Many Young Adults are digital natives, having grown up in a world where information and connections are constantly at their fingertips. In contrast, Mature Adults experienced life before the digital age, giving them a different perspective. The days of saying “brb” in online conversations are long gone—we are now permanently connected. This shift has significantly influenced relationships with both the digital world and the real world.

Using Ideally’s interactive reporting tools, we delved into generational attitudes toward living an offline life. Our findings reveal distinct differences:

Young Adults

View going offline as requiring immense self-control, making it a deliberate and challenging choice.

Mid-Life Adults

See it as a smart and practical decision for balance.

Mature Adults

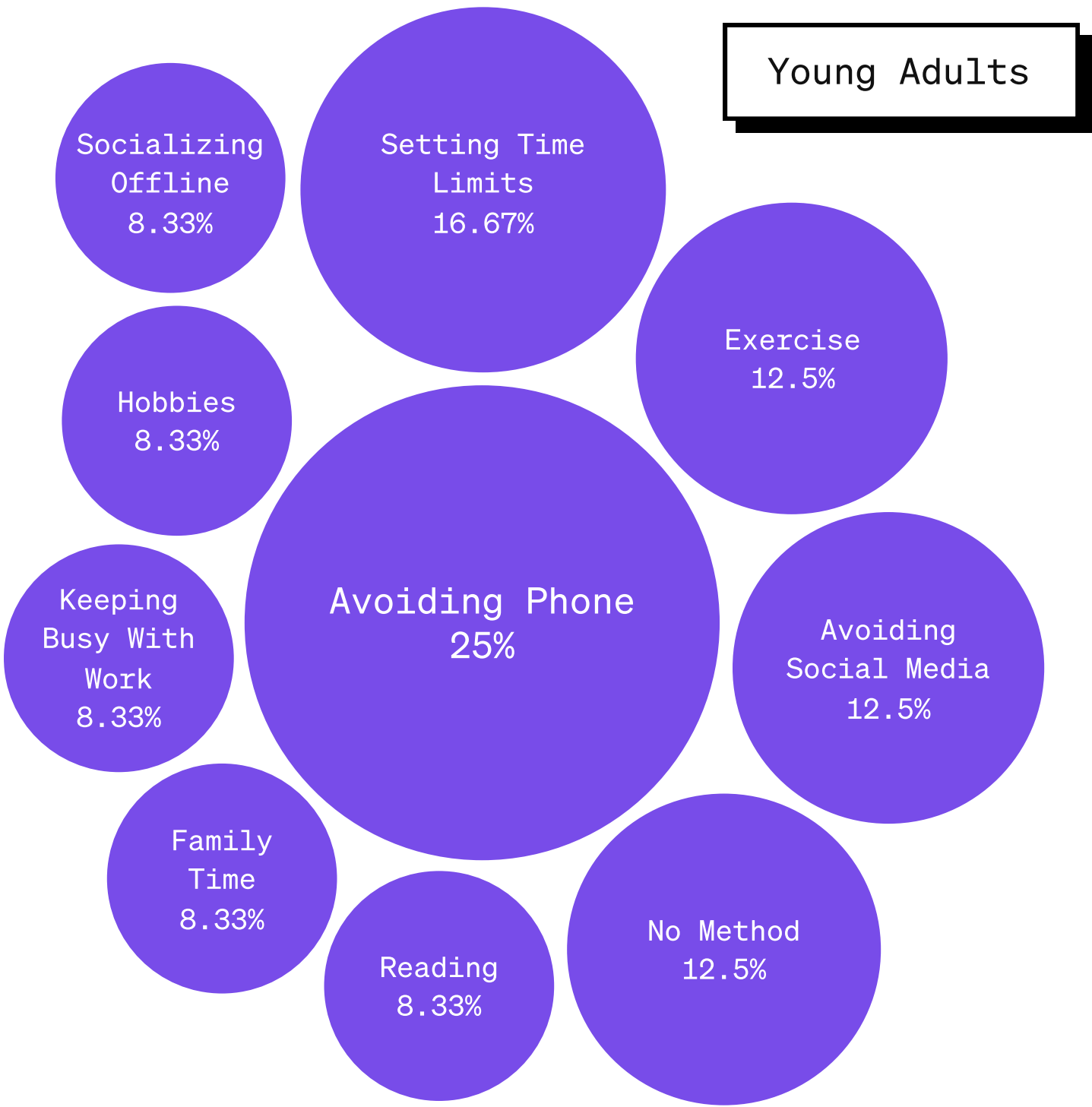
Consider it a personal choice, indicating that being online feels less intrusive in their daily lives.

For Young Adults, disconnecting is especially difficult. Many believe it’s only possible by setting clear physical boundaries—like keeping devices out of sight—or using tools like app usage limits. These insights highlight not only the generational divide but also the unique challenges of navigating a hyperconnected world.

This highlights how being online has become a deeply ingrained habit for younger generations, trapping them in a cycle that often feels difficult to break. In contrast, older generations don’t rely on specific methods to limit their screen time. Instead, their enjoyment of hobbies and offline activities naturally draws them away from their devices.

This contrast paints a clear picture of the generational divide in digital relationships. Young Adults often describe their connection to the online world as out of control or even “toxic,” while Mature Adults enjoy a healthier, more intentional “opt-in” approach to being online.

Please describe any method you use to spend less time on social media and/or online?



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Toxic

Healthy

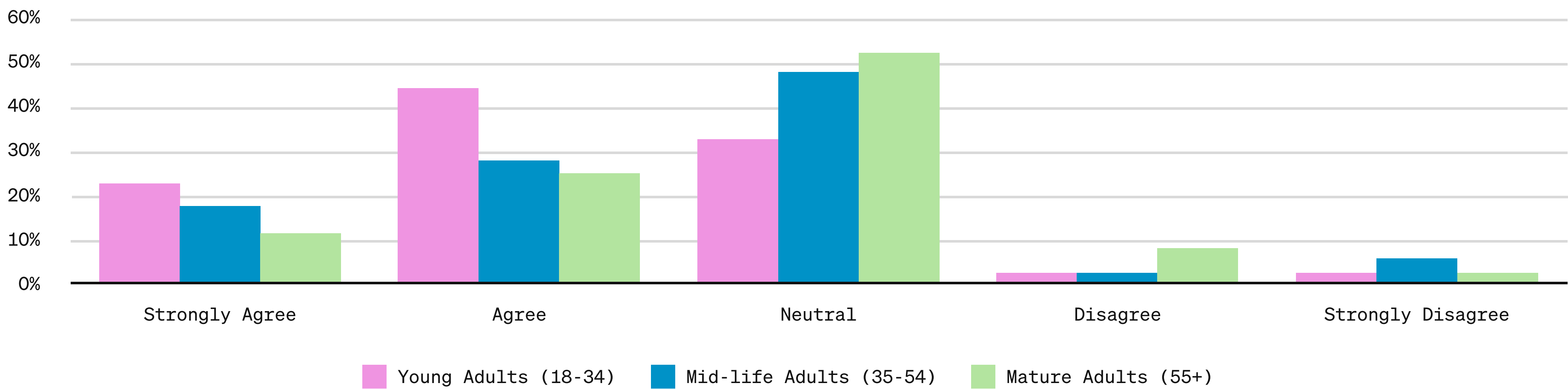
18-34

55+

People that opt to not have a life online have ‘self-control’
Must set physical boundaries to disconnect

People that opt to not have a life online is a personal choice
Engage in other hobbies to disconnect

Do you generally feel happier when you spend less time online?



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Young women & the social media trap

A deeper look into people's relationship with online media reveals that young females under 35 are the group most negatively impacted by heavy digital consumption.

According to Ideally insights, this group is 37% more likely than the general population to report feeling happier when spending time offline. Notably, when ranking activities that bring them joy, spending time online came last.

This aligns with ongoing discussions about the unique vulnerabilities young women face on social media, including heightened risks of body dissatisfaction, unrealistic expectations, and poor mental health. The growing awareness of these challenges seems to be driving more intentional behaviour, with young women actively choosing to step away from their devices.

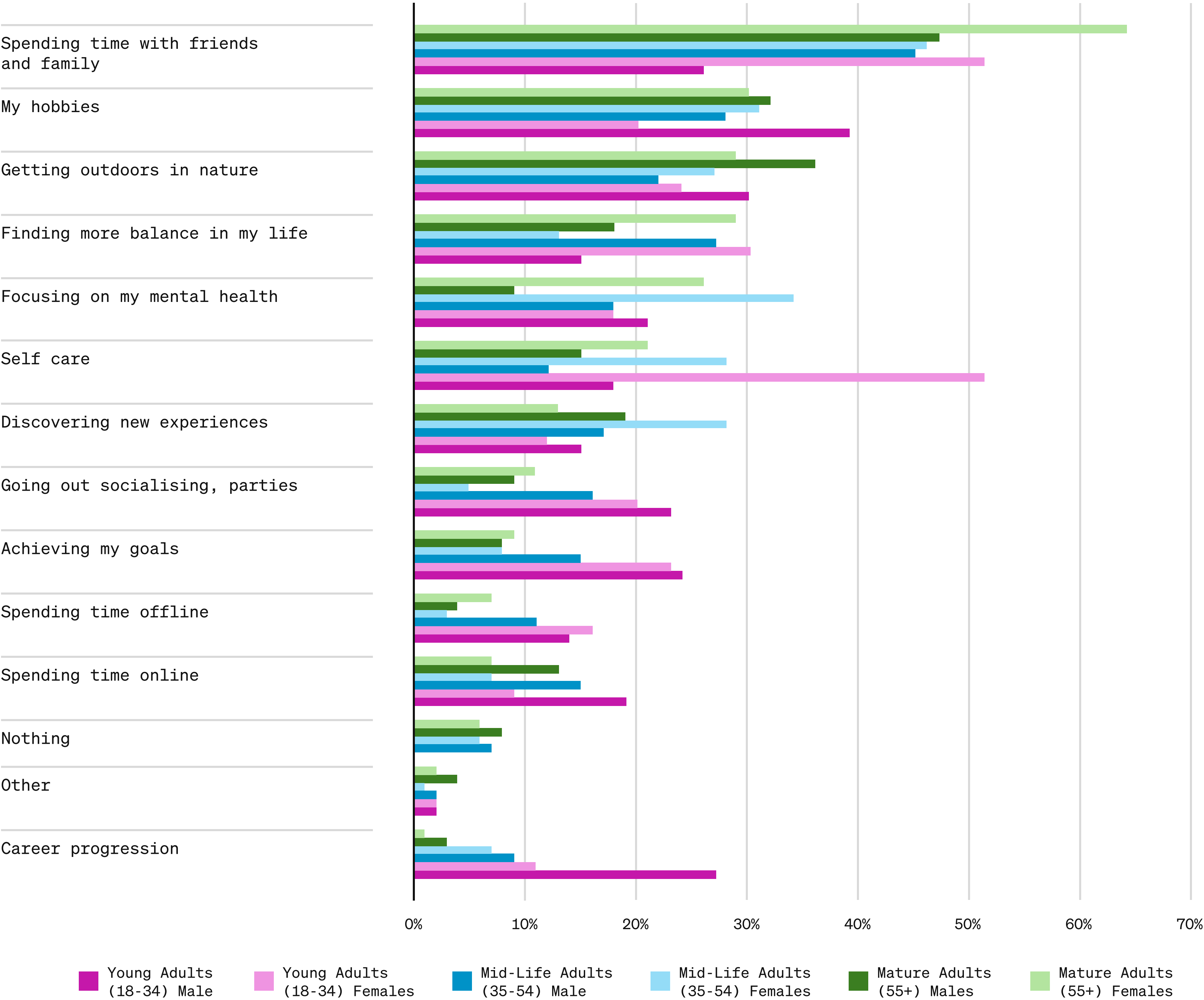
37%

Young females are 37% more likely than the general population to report feeling happier when spending time offline.

Young Adult female respondents shared that their greatest sources of joy come from spending time with friends and family and prioritising self-care, with over 50% citing each of these. Their strong focus on self-care reflects a desire to protect their mental and emotional energy and adopt a self-oriented approach to joy. However, it also suggests they may be overlooking the fulfilment that can come from other offline activities.

In contrast, young males reported finding joy through a wider range of pursuits, including hobbies, career progression, exploring nature, socialising at parties, and seeking out new experiences. This broader engagement highlights differing approaches to balancing digital and offline worlds across genders.

What gives you joy right now



Key takeaways for brands

Slower Dopamine, Richer Rewards

As people seek balance in a world of constant digital stimulation, there’s a growing shift toward slower, more rewarding experiences offline. Many are turning to analogue alternatives like magazines and print, finding joy in tactile, intentional media. Titles like Elle and InStyle have made a comeback in Australia, while digital-first publishers such as Broadsheet are now creating custom, limited-run print editions to meet this demand. The allure of these slower dopamine solutions lies in their ability to offer meaningful engagement, away from the endless scroll. How can your brand leverage these tactile opportunities to break through the noise?

Building Real-World Communities

Run clubs, book clubs, supper clubs—offline spaces are thriving as people crave genuine connection. Brands have a unique opportunity to create activations that not only build community but offer meaningful touchpoints with both their audience and their audience’s newly rediscovered hobbies. How can your brand foster these offline moments, bringing people together in authentic ways?

Interest-Based Media Environments

In a fragmented media landscape, niche platforms like Substack, Reddit, Strava, and podcasts are gaining traction. These spaces offer people the chance to connect over shared interests, hobbies and passions, creating a more intimate, targeted environment for brands to engage. How can your brand tap into these interest-driven communities to build deeper connections?

Respecting Young Women’s Relationship with Social Media

With young women increasingly disillusioned by their digital lives, brands must approach their social media strategies with empathy and care. Brands like Dove are leading the way, conducting research and crafting campaigns that speak to the vulnerabilities and desires of this audience. How can your brand authentically engage with young women, supporting their emotional well-being while building trust?

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