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75% of Americans think a simpler relationship with technology is a lifestyle upgrade

Research from The Harris Poll and Quad reveals how brands should interact with digitally fatigued audiences

SUSSEX, Wis., October 14, 2026 — Quad/Graphics, Inc. (NYSE: QUAD), a marketing experience company that solves complex marketing challenges for its clients, and The Harris Poll released ["Return of Touch: The Human Advantage,"](#) a new study examining how digital fatigue is prompting Americans to rebalance their digital lives—and how that shift is reshaping the way marketers can reach consumers.

Building on the initial 2025 "Return of Touch" report, which found that 81% of Gen Z wish it was easier to disconnect from digital devices, the latest survey of more than 2,000 Americans details how Gen Z and other generations want more tactile, real-life experiences and human craft from the brands they encounter.

Digital detoxes become lifestyle upgrades

Gen Z feels the burden of digital life most acutely: nearly half of Gen Z (49%) say social scrolling makes them feel drained. This sentiment extends beyond the feed, with 41% of Gen Z saying that texting and emailing are draining (vs. 26% Americans), and 33% of Gen Z (vs. 20% Americans) saying AI tools are draining. Eighty-two percent of Gen Z report improved mental health from social media breaks, which is a six-percentage point increase compared to last year.

Seventy-five percent of Americans believe a simpler relationship with technology feels like a lifestyle upgrade rather than a sacrifice. That intention to disconnect is especially visible among Gen Z: seven in 10 plan to pick up more hands-on hobbies this year to reduce screen time, and they're more likely than Americans overall to have tried analog alternatives such as paper planners or physical cameras (25% vs. 20%) or a "dumb" phone (17% vs. 10%). More broadly, 53% of Americans say they intentionally leave their phones at home or turn them off to be more present with others.

"This generation didn't grow up without technology. They grew up inside it. And now they're doing something the industry didn't predict: they're choosing constraints. Film cameras with 27 shots. Paper planners. Phones that don't scroll. These aren't anti-tech choices: they're pro-human ones," said Libby Rodney, Chief Strategy Officer, The Harris Poll. "For marketers, the opportunity isn't to pull back from digital. It's to show up differently. Give people something to hold, something to

touch, something worth the trip. Because what the data keeps telling us is that people don't want less from brands. They want more of the stuff that feels real.”

The cultural cachet of collectibles

Collecting has emerged as an important hobby as Americans strive for balance. Seventy-nine percent of Gen Z say collecting physical objects helps them feel more connected to the real world, while 84% of Americans say owning physical items feels more satisfying than owning digital items.

Collecting is far from niche: 68% of Americans currently collect at least one type of physical item, such as apparel/sneakers (28%), toys/figures (26%), movie media (24%) and trading cards (22%). Gen Z and Millennials over-index across all categories, which underscores how collecting is widely normalized among younger generations. As for why people collect, nostalgia (46%), the enjoyment of touching and interacting with physical objects (42%) and self-expression (40%) are the top motivators.

The need for human craft

The appeal of collectibles reflects a broader consumer desire to see evidence of human care and craft within the brands they encounter. Roughly six in 10 Gen Z respondents say they seek a human touch in product packaging (67%), online ads (62%) and catalogs (60%). Nearly two-thirds (64%) of Americans would pay a premium for products guaranteed to be human-designed or handcrafted, while 80% say brands that feel human and imperfect stick with them more than those focused on AI-generated perfection.

For marketers, this points to an opportunity to make the human touch tangible through thoughtful design, quality materials and finishes. The survey findings suggest these details drive consumer actions: 68% of Americans say print can influence them to purchase from a brand's website; 72% say mail, print materials or catalogs make them likely to visit a physical store; and 66% say print could lead them to choose one brand over competitors. More than half (55%) of Americans say physical packaging has influenced them to buy a product.

If you build it, they will stay and hang out

As 80% of Americans say they're drawn to real-world experiences that don't revolve around screens, the physical store becomes increasingly important. Many Gen Z (84%) say they've gone out of their way for an in-person shopping experience, such as visiting a flagship store or attending a special event. Seventy-six percent of Gen Z and Millennials (63% of all Americans) say a store's design alone can convince them to visit, even when they don't need anything.

Stores are important third spaces for younger generations—78% of Gen Z and Millennials express preference for retailers that encourage them to stay and explore, whether through cafés, live entertainment, hosted workshops or places to gather.

“People notice when brands put thought and care into how they show up—from the substance of a package to the way a store welcomes people and invites them to stay. Those details make brands feel more human, build confidence and create experiences worth remembering,” said Heidi Waldusky, VP of Brand, Content & Creative, Quad. “In a world where more interactions are becoming efficient and predictable, human attention to detail is a real advantage for building brand loyalty.”



From the self-expression of collectibles to thoughtful ads and welcoming stores, the “Return of Touch: The Human Advantage” demonstrates that consumers want more control over how technology fits into their lives and more opportunities to connect with brands through human, tangible experiences.

This study was conducted by The Harris Poll on behalf of Quad from July 23 to August 12, 2026, among 2,004 U.S. adults ages 18 and older. The second of a multi-year study, this year’s wave includes 134 Gen Z (ages 18-29), 509 Millennials (ages 30-45), 562 Gen X (ages 46-61), and 738 Boomers (ages 62 and older). Data are weighted where necessary by age, gender, region, race/ethnicity, household income, education, marital status, size of household, employment status and political party affiliation to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population.

Find additional data from the survey [here](#) and the full press kit [here](#).

About Quad

Quad (NYSE: QUAD) is a marketing experience, or MX, company that helps brands make direct consumer connections, from household to in-store to online. The company does this through its [MX Solutions Suite](#), a comprehensive range of marketing and print services that seamlessly integrate [creative](#), [production](#) and [media](#) solutions across online and offline channels. Supported by state-of-the-art [technology](#) and data-driven [intelligence](#), Quad simplifies the complexities of marketing by removing friction wherever it occurs along the marketing journey. The company tailors its uniquely flexible, scalable and connected solutions to each client’s objectives, driving cost efficiencies, improving speed-to-market, strengthening marketing effectiveness and delivering value on client investments.

Quad employs approximately 10,000 people in 10 countries and serves approximately 2,100 clients including industry leading blue-chip companies that serve both businesses and consumers in multiple industry verticals, with a particular focus on commerce, including [retail](#), [consumer packaged goods](#), and [direct-to-consumer](#); [financial services](#); and [health](#). Quad is ranked among the largest agency companies in the U.S. by Ad Age, buoyed by its full-service media agency, [Rise](#), and creative agency, [Betty](#). Quad is also one of the largest commercial printers in North America, according to Printing Impressions.

For more information about Quad, including its commitment to operating responsibly, intentional innovation and values-driven culture, visit quad.com.

About The Harris Poll

The Harris Poll is one of the longest-running surveys in the U.S., tracking public opinion, motivations, and social sentiment since 1963. Now part of Harris Insights & Analytics, we provide market intelligence that helps businesses and policymakers make informed decisions. To learn more, visit <https://theharrispoll.com>.

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