

# Twitter and Tumblr Leaders Ditch Smartphones to Combat Addiction

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Arianna Huffington, co-founder of the Huffington Post.

Photographer: David Paul Morris/Bloomberg

From Arianna Huffington to strategists at Twitter Inc. and Tumblr, technocrats are taking a break from their smartphones to show they can survive without digital media -- for a few hours at least.

In interviews at the Digital Life Design technology conference in Munich this week, hyper-connected executives said they were plagued by the same sense of data overload, and dependency fears, as many of their customers.

As a result, some are seeking to escape from their phones to find time to think or relax. Huffington, editor-in-chief of the Huffington Post, said she had a regular routine of switching off at night before taking a hot bath, while Deutsche Telekom AG Chief Executive Officer Timotheus Hoettges said he was taking a “digital timeout” by attending the event without a mobile device.

David Hayes, head of creative strategy for Yahoo Inc.’s social media site Tumblr, said he sometimes goes without a mobile phone for weeks -- describing it as stepping “back into the wild.” Twitter’s Chief of Data Chris Moody quits his when he heads off snowboarding.

The executives made their comments as philosopher Luc de Brabandere, an adviser to consulting firm BCG, asked the Munich attendees yesterday: “Is technology making us stupid?”

The answer, for de Brabandere and the executives, was “not necessarily,” though there was an acceptance that the increasing ubiquity of smartphones and “always-on” social media was having a profound impact on how we think and relate to the world. If we “remain hyper-connected, it will make us much less wise,” was Huffington’s response.

## Dependency Fears

By 2020, 90 percent of the world’s population over 6-years-old will have a mobile phone, according to a November report from Ericsson AB, the wireless-network maker. Francisco Jeronimo, an analyst at researcher IDC, said six out of 10 people in Western Europe now have a smartphone.

Even telecommunications executives voiced misgivings about the impact of mobile computing on sitting down to dinner, going on vacation or simply doing nothing.

“Things tend to go overboard at some point. I think that’s where we are at the moment with new technologies,” said Thorsten Dirks, Telefonica Deutschland Holding AG’s CEO. “We are making ourselves dependent in many ways. Everyone has to find their own way of handling that.”

## Digital Timeouts

Explaining his decision to leave his phone at home, Deutsche Telekom’s Hoettges said on Sunday: “It’s an enormous challenge to have digital timeouts,” before adding: “Sharing is why I get up every morning; making it easy to share everything that can be shared digitally, that’s what Deutsche Telekom tries to do. But at some point, that’s got to stop.”

Some attendees at the Munich conference, which ends today, gladly left their phones in their pockets to play a game of Star Wars-themed pinball, interact with robots being showcased by Hanson Robotics, or try out Facebook Inc.’s virtual reality goggles, dubbed Oculus Rift. Entrepreneurs, venture capitalists and executives sat down for lengthy chats over meals of Bavarian white sausage and pretzels.

Others are keeping the faith about the benefits of mobile technology, including on our intelligence.

Dropbox Inc. Chief Operating Officer Dennis Woodside said he never disconnects, and while he conceded remembering phone numbers may not be his forte anymore, he argued that constant access to information could only be a good thing. “I think storing things in the cloud makes us smarter because we have all this data accessible all the time.”

For Huffington, the answer for executives will not be in switching off from technology entirely, rather just realizing that an occasional break is necessary.

“It’s not like we are going to become Luddites,” she concluded. “But we are going to recognize the

importance of unplugging from technology, reconnecting with ourselves and our own inner wisdom.”