



CONCERNS RAISED AS REPORT SUGGESTS CANADIANS SPENDING MORE TIME ONLINE

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HALIFAX -- Canadians are spending more time surfing the web than ever before, according to a new report that's raising concerns about how technology distracts from real-world relationships.

The report from Media Technology Monitor released Tuesday said on average, anglophone Canadians who were surveyed spent 24.5 hours online per week in 2016, up about two hours from the previous year.

But, it said young Canadians between the ages of 18 to 34 spent even more time on the Internet -- an average of 34 hours per week in 2016, or nearly five hours per day.

"As technological change and increased options for Internet activity have emerged in recent years, Canadians are spending an increasing amount of time online," said the report, which also found that 91 per cent of Canadians have used the Internet in the past month.

Psychologist David Mensink said the figures concern him because the more time people spend online, the less time they're devoting to cultivating deeper real-life relationships.

Mensink, who works in student affairs at Dalhousie University in Halifax, said even if people are communicating with others on the Internet, they still need to make time for real contact because it is the essence of being human.

"It's who we are...We're meant to interact with others. We're meant to help each other. It's just the way we're made. It's very important," said Mensink in a phone interview.

"It's called social media, but in some ways that's a misnomer because we're not always interacting with people. You're looking at news feeds and photos, but you're not talking to the person and catching up. I think relationships, because of the use of the Internet and social media, may not be as deep as they used to be."

Mensink said Canadians should moderate their Internet usage and make dedicated time for face-to-face interactions with their loved ones.

Internet use also appears to be increasing among seniors.

The report said 74 per cent of people aged 65 and older were using the Internet regularly in 2016, up from about 54 per cent 10 years ago. That made it the highest growth in any age category.

The report also said that 88 per cent of Canadians owned a home computer in 2016, down from 90 per cent the previous year,

while 90 per cent had home Internet access, down from 92 the previous year. Twenty years ago, only 14 per cent of Canadians had home Internet access.

The report is based on telephone interviews conducted with 4,157 anglophone Canadians from all regions between Oct. 7 and Dec. 12. The results are accurate within plus or minus 1.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.