

## 'It made my day more meaningful': the Japanese gen Zers attempting a two-hour limit on smartphone use

### Level 2: Intermediate

#### 1 Warmer

a. Look at the image and discuss the questions.



1. Where is it appropriate to see a sign like this? Where is it not appropriate?
2. Why do people want to control how much smartphones are used?
3. How could using your smartphone less change your daily routine?

#### 2 Key words

a. Match the correct word to each definition. Then find them in the article to read them in context.

measure  
conceded  
survey

controversial  
devote  
toll

excessive  
interfering  
sacrificing

claimed  
scrolling  
worthwhile

sleep deprivation  
meaningful  
struggle

1. a set of questions to find out what people think or do \_\_\_\_\_
2. an action taken to achieve or control something \_\_\_\_\_
3. causing strong disagreement or discussion among people \_\_\_\_\_
4. enjoyable and useful, although it needs a lot of effort \_\_\_\_\_
5. giving up something important to get or do something else \_\_\_\_\_
6. having a serious or important purpose for the person doing it \_\_\_\_\_
7. more than is reasonable or necessary; too much \_\_\_\_\_
8. the bad effect caused by something over a long period of time \_\_\_\_\_
9. the condition of not getting enough sleep \_\_\_\_\_

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10. admitted that something was true or that you were wrong \_\_\_\_\_
11. getting involved in something that is not your business \_\_\_\_\_
12. to spend a lot of time, energy, or attention on doing something \_\_\_\_\_
13. moving text or images on a screen up or down to see more \_\_\_\_\_
14. said that something was true, even if it may have not been proven \_\_\_\_\_
15. a situation in which you try very hard to do something difficult \_\_\_\_\_

**b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity. You might have to change the form of the word.**

1. Don't study all night before a test because \_\_\_\_\_ makes it hard to concentrate.
2. Please don't \_\_\_\_\_ in their argument—it's a personal thing between them.
3. Eating \_\_\_\_\_ amounts of sugar is bad for your teeth and your mood.
4. The box was so heavy that it was a real \_\_\_\_\_ to lift it.
5. The police may finally \_\_\_\_\_ that they have made mistakes in the case.
6. Parents will often \_\_\_\_\_ their happiness for their children.
7. My aunt used to \_\_\_\_\_ that she often saw famous people in her local supermarket.
8. She will often \_\_\_\_\_ several hours a day to studying English.
9. His phone has so many photos that he can \_\_\_\_\_ for ages before finding the right one.
10. She wants to have a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ job that helps people.
11. Stress can take a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ on your physical and mental health.
12. The company did a customer \_\_\_\_\_ to learn what people really like.

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13. The government introduced a new \_\_\_\_\_ to reduce pollution.
14. It is a very \_\_\_\_\_ new law and there are many protests.
15. The course is difficult, but it is \_\_\_\_\_ because of the amount you learn.

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*Authorities in Japan are taking action against excessive phone time – but what is it like to restrict scrolling to 120 minutes a day?*

**Justin McCurry**  
8 October, 2025

- 1 Despite working full-time for a company in Tokyo, Shoki Moriyama manages to eke out eight hours a day to devote to his smartphone. Moriyama, 25, is part of a generation that can't imagine life without scrolling through news and social media, messaging apps and off-the-wall video clips.
- 2 He is not alone. While excessive smartphone use is a worldwide phenomenon, authorities in Japan are taking action, amid growing concern over its physical and psychological toll, particularly on children and young people.
- 3 Last week, the town of Toyoake in central Japan introduced a measure limiting smartphone use among its 69,000 residents to two hours a day, in what officials say was an attempt to tackle evidence of online addiction and sleep deprivation.
- 4 Moriyama, who habitually checks LINE – an instant-messaging, news and entertainment “super app” popular in Japan – as well as TikTok, Instagram and X, conceded that staying off the sites had been a struggle. “I spend around eight hours a day on my phone, so two hours is way too little ... and not enough time for me to stay up to date with everything,” he says. “In the end I used my smartphone for an hour and 50 minutes, which is a massive reduction on my usual screen time. I used the extra time to read a book, study a little and go to the gym, so my day wasn’t wasted.”
- 5 His colleague Tomomi Hanaoka also managed to rein in her habit. “I spend about three hours on my phone on weekdays and six or seven hours at weekends, so two hours felt very short. Most people need at least three to four hours,” says Hanaoka, who usually “can’t do” without LINE, TikTok and Instagram. “I kept my usage to two hours and used the free time to read and do other things.”
- 6 Toyoake’s mayor, Masafumi Koki, defended the measure, which drew dozens of complaints from residents who accused the local government of interfering in their private lives. Koki says he was worried that children and younger people were sacrificing sleep and family time in favour of scrolling, texting and posting.
- 7 After a wave of online criticism, some of which wrongly claimed the two-hour limit would be strictly enforced, he told the Mainichi Shimbun newspaper: “If someone hears two hours, they’ll stop and think about how long they really use their smartphone for. That’s the point.”
- 8 Young Japanese spend an average of over five hours a day online on weekdays, according to a survey released this year by the Children and Families Agency.
- 9 Aya\* spends considerably more time on her device than the national average, regularly clocking up eight hours a day. “I couldn’t limit myself to just two hours, but just being conscious of the challenge made a difference. In the end, I was able to cut down my usual smartphone use by about 60 per cent, which felt significant,” the university student says, conceding that she had consulted a travel planner and checked her emails and texts. And she did not miss the hours she usually spends “aimlessly scrolling”.
- 10 “I spent more time enjoying conversations and taking notice of what was happening around me. It made my day feel more meaningful.”
- 11 That will be music to the ears of Koki. On the eve of his town’s controversial experiment in social engineering, the mayor insisted it would be worthwhile. “This is about sleep, family and wellbeing,” he says. “If the ordinance makes even a few people stop and talk about their habits, then it’s working.”

\*Name has been changed on request.

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First published in *The Guardian*, 08/10/2025

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#### 3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. What smartphone habits are typical of Shoki Moriyama's generation?
2. How many hours a day does Moriyama usually spend on his smartphone?
3. What new rule did the town of Toyoake introduce for its residents?
4. Which smartphone apps do Moriyama and Hanaoka often use?
5. What did Moriyama do with his extra time when he reduced his phone use?
6. Why did some people complain about the new smartphone rule?
7. What did Toyoake's mayor say the town's young people were giving up?
8. According to a survey, how much time do young Japanese people spend online on weekdays?
9. What positive changes did Aya notice when she used her phone less?
10. According to the mayor, what will be the sign that the new rule is working?

#### 4 Key language

a. Complete the table using the adjectives from sentences a–c.

- a. Excessive smartphone use is a worldwide phenomenon.
- b. It made my day feel more meaningful.
- c. On the eve of his town's controversial experiment in social engineering.

Noun	Adjectives with <i>-ive</i>	Adjectives with <i>-ful</i>	Adjectives with <i>-ial</i>
excess	2. _____	----	----
1. _____	----	meaningful	----
controversy	----	----	3. _____

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b. Complete the sentences with adjectives using the noun in brackets and then add the new words to the table in task a.

1. The company was very \_\_\_\_\_ (response) and answered my email quickly.
2. She is \_\_\_\_\_ (sense) to cold weather, so she always wears a jacket.
3. My job interview was very \_\_\_\_\_ (benefit) for my career.
4. Many people in the \_\_\_\_\_ (industry) area of the city work in factories.
5. That restaurant is too \_\_\_\_\_ (expense) for me; let's go somewhere cheaper.
6. The garden looks \_\_\_\_\_ (beauty) in spring.
7. She is a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ (care) driver and never has accidents.
8. It was a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ (wonder) evening with my friends.
9. It is \_\_\_\_\_ (essence) to drink water every day.

c. Finish the sentences below.

I think excessive use of a smartphone is when \_\_\_\_\_.

Smartphones are essential because \_\_\_\_\_.

### 5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- Smartphone use only has a positive effect on our culture.
- Governments should control how we use technology.
- It is impossible to change the amount of time we spend on our phones.

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#### 6 In your own words

a. Conduct a survey on smartphones in your class. Record the answers of your classmates and be prepared to compare them. Use these questions to guide you.

- Which apps do you use on your smartphone?
- How many hours per day do you use your smartphone?
- At which times of day do you use your smartphone the most?
- How typical is your smartphone usage in your group of friends?
- How often do you check your phone when you are with family or friends?
- What else could you do with the time you spend on your phone?
- What effect has your use of your smartphone had on your life?
- How would you help someone who wanted to control their use of a smartphone?
- What changes would you like to make in your smartphone habits?

b. Present your survey results to the class. Compare the different members of the class and describe people who use their smartphones a little and those who use them a lot. Include adjectives such as *excessive*, *mindful* and *essential* in your presentation. Here is an example.

*The results of my survey showed there was a lot of variety in how people in the class use their smartphones. The most excessive use was using the phone for over nine hours a day. People who really wanted a mindful connection with their family and friends only used their smartphones when they were alone. Everyone in the class thought having a smartphone was essential.*