THESIS

ON

DIGITAL DETOX & ITS IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF

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BY

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Declaration Of Originality

I, Ms. HarshitaDigwasia hereby declare that my research paper on the topic "Digital Detox & Its Impact On Mental Health & Lifestyle" is an original work done by the researcher. I further reaffirm that the paper has not been published yet.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis titled, 'Digital Detox And Its Impact On Mental Health & Lifestyle' submitted to Dr. Nidhi Singhal faculty, Department of Journalism, Delhi College of Arts and Commerce, University of Delhi, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the reward of the Bachelors of Arts Journalism, is an original work carried out by Ms. Harshita Digwasia.

This research was undertaken under my supervision and guidance, and to the best of my

knowledge, the thesis has not been submitted for the reward of any degree or diploma,

associateship, fellowship, or any other similar title at any other university or Institution in India

or abroad.

April 21, 2025

Dr. Nidhi Singhal
Superviser

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DIGITAL DETOX AND ITS IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

INTRODUCTION

We live inside our screens. What began as innovation meant to make life easier has quietly turned into a form of everyday captivity. Most people can't go a full hour—let alone a day—without checking their phone. Notifications interrupt meals. Group chats bleed into sleep. Social media has taken a seat at the dinner table, in classrooms, in workspaces, in moments that used to belong to us. Somewhere along the way, life became background noise to the digital world we perform inside.

So we invented a new ritual: the digital detox. The act of stepping away—whether for a weekend or a month—from the always-on, always-watching nature of modern technology. A rebellion, however temporary, against the attention economy. These breaks are often praised for helping people feel more "grounded," less anxious, more present. That's the narrative we hear the most: unplugging helps your mind rest. But what if we've been asking too little from this idea?

What if the digital detox is more than a mental reset? What if it shifts the entire way we live?

Most research so far doesn't go that far. It tends to orbit one space—mental health. Studies tell us screen fatigue is real, that scrolling increases stress and comparison, that social media platforms often worsen anxiety and attention. These insights matter, yes. But they don't finish the picture. Because mental health doesn't exist in a vacuum. It is shaped by the choices we make, the environments we build, and the habits we follow every day. So what happens when digital distraction is removed from that equation?

That's the missing link. There's little serious investigation into how digital detoxing impacts *lifestyle*. Not in fragments, but as a whole system. Does screen-free time translate into better sleep? Do eating habits shift? Does real-world social connection deepen when online connection quiets down? Do people work better, spend more intentionally, move their bodies more, or finally return to the practices—reading, walking, praying—that technology quietly replaced? These aren't soft questions. They're sharp, practical, and deeply personal. And in a world where attention is currency, they're becoming urgent.

This research exists to ask them. Its purpose is to examine the broader lifestyle effects of digital detoxing, beyond the overused language of "mental clarity." It explores areas too often treated as afterthoughts: fitness, food, rest, face-to-face relationships, money habits, spiritual life, satisfaction with living itself. Not as side benefits, but as central outcomes. Because if detoxing digital life changes how we live, not just how we feel, then the implications run much deeper than we've been willing to admit.

This study matters because it moves the conversation from temporary relief to long-term transformation. It asks not just what screens are doing to our minds—but what they've done to our lives. And what might return to us when we finally look up.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review of the research paper *"Impacts of digital social media detox for mental health: A systematic review and meta-analysis"* by Ramadhan et al. (2024):

General Introduction-The increase of technology and social media platforms in the recent years has raised substantial concerns regarding their implication on mental health. Their has been an overall raise in the day to day online social engagement in people — it is characterised by excessive and often compulsive use of such platforms. Such engagement is also linked to psychological concerns of depression, anxiety, stress and reduced life satisfaction. As a result of this the concept of "digital detox" has emerged to combat the adverse effects of social media.

Emergence & growth of digital detox- Digital detox entails taking a voluntary abstinence or reducing use of digital devices in particular social media — generally to focus on mental well being. The practice originates from the growing emperical evidence associating social media with negative mental health outcomes such as social comparison, cyberbullying and cognitive overload (Elhai et al., 2018; Yang et all., 2020). And digital overuse has been correlated with disrupted sleep patterns and hormonal imbalances specifically in cortisol levels which are linked to depression and anxiety (Small et all., 2020).

Previous Research and Gaps- Previous studies have explored the psychological impacts of digital detox like — Hunt et al.(2018) and Turel et al.(2018) found reduction in symptoms of depression correlating with decreased use of social media. That being said not many studies have

dedicatedly explored the effects of digital detox on the various aspects and dimensions of lifestyle — some studies like Hanley et al., 2019 ; Fioravanti et al., 2019 do study the correlation of digital detox on stress and life satisfaction however their results did not coincide and were inconclusive.

Findings from the Meta-Analysis of Ramadhan et al., 2024- The scholars conducted a systematic review and meta analysis of 10 independent studies — ranging from Randomized controlled trials (RCTs) to experimental studies; involving 2,503 participants. The common mental health outcomes chosen to be studied across these were - Depression, life satisfaction, Stress and general mental well-being.

The outcomes were as follows-

1. **Depression**: The review found a **statistically significant reduction in symptoms of depression** post-detox (SMD: -0.29, p = 0.01), thereby proving that digital detox can be used as a mental health tool.
2. **Life Satisfaction**: A small, non-significant improvement was reported (SMD: 0.20, p = 0.23). Although, factors like social engagement—beyond digital interactions weren't documented properly.
3. **Stress**: No meaningful reduction in stress levels was found (SMD: -0.31, p = 0.24), suggesting that stress is multifactorial and not solely driven by social media use.
4. **Mental Well-being**: Despite theoretical support, no significant effect was observed on general mental well-being (SMD: 0.04, p = 0.90), possibly due to the heterogeneity in the researches' contructs and measurement tools.

Interpretations- The noted significant improvements in depression in the meta analysis of Ramadhan et al. 2024 align with the findings of Brailovskaia et al. 2020 and Reed et al. 2023 , who have noted that abstinence from certain platforms like Facebook and Instagram helped reduce the symptoms of depression; especially of those with higher baseline depression levels. These findings can be attributed to the reduced social comparison and digital presence fatigue which follows.

However the inconclusive results in life satisfaction and stress suggest digital detox alone isn't a sufficient intervention for such needs. Particularly stress stems from a range of offline factors, notably - family problems and pressures and occupational pressures.

All that being said personalized, holistic and context aware mental health tools need to be developed to deal with problems that arise with the digital age.

Appreciation - I would like to congratulate the scholars on their methodological quality, heterogeneity in the detox strategies and mental health studies and also the longitudinal nature of their study that has contributed to the strength of its findings.

Litrature review for the research paper titled **"The Impact of Digital Detox on the Mental Well-Being of Active Social Media Users: A Systematic Literature Review"** by Aisyah Kamila and JatiArianti (2024)

Review of methodology- This research paper used Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and content analysis as its research paper methodology. And used the PICO method to formulate the research question. PICO stands for: population which were the active social media users; intervention which was the detox; comparison was with individuals who didn't detox; and lastly outcomes refer to the psychological outcome being assessed (sleep quality, stress levels, life satisfaction) then using a predetermined research strategy they looked for studies that could help answer the question and used them as evidence to formulate their own conclusion by using the systematic literature review method.

Key studies reviewed and their findings-

- Studies by Twenfe et al. and Shensa et al.(2018) found that adolescents and young adults heavily using social media daily showed higher risk of developing anxiety and depression and elevated symptoms of anxiety and depression respectively.
- LaHue et al.(2024) conducted a study where participants were asked to practice a one hours social media break daily over two weeks and it was observed that they showed notable improvements in sleep quality and stress reduction.

- De Hessellle and Motang (2024) conducted a group experiment in which one group was asked to abstain from social media for two weeks — the abstained group showed reduction in problematic smartphone usage, anxiety and depression and improvement in body image.

- Arenas-Escaso et al.(2024) introduced the concept of digital detox during travel calling it — Digital Free Tourism (DFT). The participants of this study disconnected from technology during travel and experienced mental relief from digital saturation and also somehow ended contributing to more sustainable tourism practices.

- Research by Schmitt et al.(2021) concluded digital overload led to cognitive overload within teleworkers during the COVID 19 pandemic. Digital detox was used to counter these effects and improve work related well-being.

- Wrede et al.(2023) executed a longitudinal study over two years to investigate the existence of digital stress experienced during work from home. It did exist and there was persistent association of it with negative emotional and physical outcomes. Hence Wrede's study reinforces the need of digital detox.

- These studies make it seem like that digital detox has universal positive effects. However, a study by Przybylski et al.(2021) suggests that digital detox is effect conditionally. Through 3 field experiments it found that short term abstinence from social media does not lead to any significant improvement in well being outcomes such as social relatedness and life satisfaction. Infact in some cases participants revealed sudden or short term breaks yielded reduced satisfaction and connection.

Conclusion- Though study lacked its original data, It still did answer the question that digital detox generally is a beneficial practice however if abruptly or briefly implemented it may not be suitable for all individuals. Therefore individual habits, lifestyle and intervention duration needs tobe kept in mind.

Litrature review for the research paper titled **"Digital detox: An effective solution in the smartphone era? A systematic literature review"** by **ThedaRadtke, Theresa Apel, Konstantin Schenkel, Jan Keller and Eike von Lindern (2021)**

General Introduction- The word "detox" forms an image of cleansing and reclaiming balance and control. And in today's hyper-connected digital landscape, the idea of a digital detox promises just that—a brief escape. But does it work? Is disconnecting from your smartphone actually the solution to reclaiming mental space and emotional well-being?

This systematic review by Radtke et al. (2021) doesn't offer easy answers—but it does something more valuable: it confronts the chaos, the contradictions, and the hopeful experiments scattered across the literature.

Understanding digital fatigue and its roots -Smartphones, for all their utility, have **blurred the boundaries** between work, rest, relationships, and solitude. What used to be private is now public, what was once peaceful now buzzes with notifications. The studies included in the review paint a grim but familiar picture—rising levels of **depression** (Lepp et al., 2014), **anxiety**, **sleep issues** (Thomée, 2018), and even **musculoskeletal problems** (İNal et al., 2015) linked to constant digital use. There's also a cognitive cost: lower productivity, attention fragmentation, and the pervasive phenomenon of *phubbing*—ignoring someone to scroll your feed (McDaniel &Radesky, 2018).

This isn't a minor inconvenience; it's a cultural reckoning.

Brief contemplation on the idea of digital detox- Digital detox, once a niche idea, now feels like a modern necessity. It's everywhere—self-help books, unplugging holidays, apps that monitor your screen time while ironically requiring a screen to do so. The term "digital detox" first surfaced around 2012 (Felix & Dean), and since then, it's evolved into both a movement and a marketing strategy.

But here's the truth: **we don't even agree on what "digital detox" means**. Some studies define it as staying off *all* devices, others target specific apps, still others just ask for reduced usage. Voluntary or forced? One app or your whole phone? Detox for a day, a week, a month? The **lack of clarity**—even in academic definitions—is not just a technical problem. It's a philosophical one. What are we really trying to detox from?

Reflection on the studies methodology and findings - The review covers **21 intervention studies**, including **12 randomized controlled trials**—the gold standard in evidence. Participants ranged from university students to elite athletes, with interventions lasting anywhere from **two days to a month**. And the findings? Frustratingly mixed.

Some studies are downright inspiring. Participants reported **less stress**, **better sleep**, **reduced fear of missing out (FoMO)**, even **improved self-control**. For instance, Hinch and Sheldon (2013) showed reduced procrastination and increased life satisfaction in students after just 48 hours away from Facebook.

But then the contradictions arrive. Other studies found **no effect** at all. Some even reported **negative outcomes**—increased boredom, loneliness, even a decline in emotional well-being (Hanley et al., 2019; Eide et al., 2018). What gives?

Part of the answer lies in the **intensity of our dependence**. For people deeply embedded in digital life, a sudden disconnect doesn't feel freeing—it feels like withdrawal. Like being socially exiled. That's not a detox. That's distress.

Research Gaps –

1. **There is no unified definition** of digital detox. Some target apps, others phones, others screens altogether. The review tries to fix this by proposing a multi-level taxonomy (based on Meier &Reinecke, 2020), but the field is still playing catch-up. Without shared language, how can we build shared understanding?
2. There's a clear **overreliance on student samples**. Out of 21 studies, 15 used students. This narrow demographic bias limits the generalizability of results. What about parents, professionals, older adults?
3. Very few studies account for **individual differences**. Is detox more effective for people with high baseline stress or digital dependence? Do extroverts suffer more from disconnection than introverts? These nuances are **completely underexplored**.
4. Perhaps most striking—no one is asking *what replaces the digital void*. Detox is not just about taking something away. It's about what you put in its place. If someone puts down

their phone but picks up nothing else, have they truly detoxed, or are they just waiting for the clock to run out?

Conclusion - The paper doesn't pretend detox is a miracle cure—and that's refreshing. Instead, it forces us to ask better questions: Is detox a solution, or is it just another digital product with a different label? Should the goal be moderation, not abstinence? And most importantly—**are we treating the symptom or the cause**?

This review matters not because it answers everything, but because it proves **how much we still don't know**. And maybe that's where the real detox begins—not in switching off our phones, but in switching on our awareness.

Literature review for the research paper titled **"The Digital Revolution on Society Through Digital Detox in the Modern Era"** by **Ms. Sharmila P. Nayak** (2024)

General Introduction- The phrase "digital detox" feels like a buzzword—catchy, commercial, overused. But strip it down and it becomes something a little more raw: the human urge to step away from the noise, the pull, the glowing screens that never quite shut up. In this paper, the author grabs hold of that impulse and digs through the social, psychological, and even physical implications of our entanglement with technology. The result? A fragmented but brave attempt to decode a very modern affliction.

The Hidden Costs of Our Digital Obsession -The study wastes no time in acknowledging what most of us already feel in our bones: the digital revolution, for all its promise of connection, has made people more isolated, more anxious, more addicted. Platforms designed to empower communication have blurred into agents of distraction and dependence. And while tech has undeniably shaped how we live and work, it's also shaping how we burn out. There's nothing abstract about it—there's back pain, eye strain, nerve tension, mood swings. It's not just virtual stress. It's physical. It's hormonal. It's real.

Digital Detox as a Rebellion, Not Just a Retreat - So what is this digital detox solution that's being pitched? The author doesn't propose a one-size-fits-all miracle. Rather, she offers a

flexible window—24 hours, a week, maybe more—where a person refrains not just from using digital devices but from interacting with apps, media, notifications, and basically anything that demands constant clicking, swiping, reacting. And this is where things start to get interesting. Because detox, in this framing, isn't just abstinence. It's rebellion. It's quiet resistance against compulsive design.

Technostress: A Word for What We've All Been Feeling - The review of related literature does some heavy lifting here. Drawing from studies by Orlikowski& Scott, Wilcockson et al., and others, the author sketches out a picture of modern technostress. The term isn't just poetic—it's clinical. It captures the sensation of being stretched thin across emails, screens, expectations, and all the while pretending that this is the new normal. Most workers now find it difficult to unplug even after work hours. There's guilt attached to logging off. There's fear of missing out—on tasks, news, relevance. That constant psychological taxation leaks into both professional and personal spaces.

Who's Burning Out and Who's Unplugging? The Study's Real-World Pulse

When we look deeper into the paper's core—its **methodology** and data collection—we see an earnest, if not perfectly refined, attempt at exploring how people relate to detox in the wild. The researcher used **simple random sampling**, surveying 100 participants from a range of professions. What stands out immediately is the **age distribution**: a significant chunk of respondents fell in the 30–45-year range, with a noticeable concentration among postgraduates. This suggests something powerful—that the problem isn't just generational. It's professional. Educated. Widespread.

The Digital Load on Working Lives - The job-wise breakdown adds even more complexity. IT workers and teachers—arguably the ones most chained to screens—were overrepresented in both exposure and stress. Unsurprisingly, **IT employees experienced the highest levels of "techno-overload"**, the sensation that tech demands you to work faster and longer without pause. Techno-invasion, that creeping pressure to always be available, and techno-complexity, the confusion that arises when digital systems become too convoluted, also feature heavily. These are not fringe concerns. These are chronic conditions of a hyper-connected labor force.

Who Actually Detoxes - But the real kick in the gut comes when the study tries to examine who's actually embracing detox. A large number of people surveyed had not engaged in any form of digital detox. Many were unaware of the concept entirely. Some had dabbled, mostly children during exam times—pushed into disconnection rather than choosing it. In fact, **the most prominent detoxers were IT employees and children**, which feels both ironic and tragic.

Gaps That Can't Be Ignored-

The study depends heavily on **self-reported data**. No device-tracked screen time, no biometric stress measurement.

A Call for Smarter Questions, Not Just More Data- Closing statement

The literature cited throughout builds a decent theoretical scaffolding, although it often leans on older or broadly referenced works. Future studies could benefit from more granular research— platform-specific usage, demographic-diverse perspectives, cross-cultural comparisons. The paper gestures toward this need but doesn't fully deliver on it.

And yet, maybe that's not a failure. Maybe that's an invitation.

Because what this paper reminds us, in all its imperfections, is that **we're only beginning to ask the right kinds of questions**.

Literature review for the research paper titled **"Level of Insomnia, Symptoms of Depression, and Anxiety among College Students with Mobile Phone Addiction: Basis for Guidance and Counseling Program Enhancement"** by Xiaowei He and Elna Lopez (2023)

Where Addiction Disguises Itself as Routine

What makes mobile phone addiction so insidious is that it's not loud. It's not a dramatic breakdown. It's invisible. It looks like checking notifications 50 times a day. It sounds like that one last scroll before bed. It hides behind productivity apps and educational platforms and

convinces us it's necessary. This is exactly the culture the researchers tackle head-on. And they don't do it abstractly—they dig into it with data, measurements, and grounded observations pulled from nearly 400 students in China, filtered down to 155 participants with confirmed high addiction scores.

What's shocking—but not surprising—is that these students were not outliers. Most were average users, caught in routines that seem normal. But when put under the microscope? The emotional toll shows. Big time.

How the Study Probed into the Invisible

Here's the methodological backbone of the paper: the researchers used the **Mobile Phone Addiction Tendency Scale (MPATS)** to identify participants who were deeply enmeshed in their phones. Then they layered on other tools—the **Insomnia Severity Index (ISI)**, the **Hamilton Depression Scale (HAMD)**, and the **Hamilton Anxiety Scale (HAMA)**—to map out what was really going on beneath the surface. Smart move. Because addiction doesn't exist in a vacuum—it bleeds into sleep, into thought patterns, into how we feel about everything.

The tools they used weren't slapped together either. MPATS had high internal consistency (α = 0.87) and test-retest reliability (0.85), with the others also carrying scientific weight. In short, the study didn't just throw questions at students. It **listened for patterns**.

Insomnia:

One of the clearest signals from the study is that **addicted students struggle with sleep**. Not the kind of sleep you fix with a nap or a better pillow—**rest that feels broken**. Difficulty falling asleep, waking up too early, waking up mid-sleep, and most critically, **poor sleep quality overall**. And it's not just tiredness—it's daytime dysfunction. Lack of focus. Low energy. Irritability. Every college student knows that foggy feeling, but not everyone connects it to phone use.

That's the power of this finding. It doesn't just say "phones are bad for sleep." It **proves the mechanism**: addiction leads to poor habits, poor habits lead to insomnia, and insomnia leads to emotional unraveling.

Depression:

Next comes depression. And this is where things get heavier. Students with mobile phone addiction showed **moderate symptoms of depression**. That means persistent sadness, a loss of interest in once-enjoyable activities, feelings of guilt, even signs of suicidal thinking. The data was crystal clear: the higher the addiction score, the worse the depressive symptoms.

But what the paper doesn't dwell on—but should—are the **emotional triggers** of this depression. Social media apps (the most-used category) thrive on comparison. We don't just scroll for fun. We scroll to measure ourselves against others. To perform. To curate. That emotional labor is exhausting, especially for students already under pressure to look like they have it all together.

Anxiety:

The anxiety data tells another compelling story. Most students fell into the **mild to moderate anxiety** range. On paper, that might sound manageable. But in real life? That's chronic restlessness. Constant tension. Worry you can't switch off. Sleep that doesn't come easily. Heartbeats that race for no reason. And yes—screens make it worse.

What this study shows, and what needs more attention, is that **anxiety in students isn't just academic pressure or future stress—it's digital noise**. Always being available, always being stimulated, always being compared. Phones aren't calming anyone down. They're keeping brains revved up 24/7.

The Hidden Math: How Insomnia and Anxiety Predict Depression

What might seem like just three separate mental health issues—insomnia, anxiety, depression— are, in this study, intricately linked. The authors ran a regression model that found **insomnia and anxiety together could predict over half of the variance in depression** scores. Let that sink in:

sleep and worry are **the pillars holding up depression** in these students. Take one out, the structure may wobble. Take both out, and maybe - mental health improves.

This is more than a statistic. It's a blueprint for intervention.

What's Missing, What's Needed

Now let's talk about the holes. No study is perfect, and this one leaves a few doors wide open.

- **Gender imbalance**: Most participants were female. It limits how confidently we can talk about how addiction affects male students, or how gender dynamics might influence coping mechanisms.
- **Cultural scope**: The participants were from one region, one academic community. Useful, yes—but not enough. Digital addiction has global shades. It shows up differently in different cultures, and we need cross-border studies to see the full picture.
- **No qualitative voice**: The study is all numbers. But what do students **say** about their addiction? What do they feel when they disconnect?

The Takeaway:

And this study—dense as it is—screams one thing: **this is a wake-up call**. Phones aren't going away. Screens are the world now. So we need to **understand this addiction, not just demonize it**.

This study gives us a starting point. It shows us that mobile phone addiction isn't just about usage—it's about **pain, loneliness, habits, and the quiet erosion of mental peace**.

Literature review for the research paper titled *"Internet Addiction, Digital Detox, and Mental Health: A Review of the Evidence with Clinical Examples"* by Subramanian Neelakandan (2024)

A Culture on the Brink: The Internet Addiction Crisis

It isn't just about screen time. It's about lives being quietly, insidiously consumed by digital compulsions masquerading as routine engagement. The literature surrounding Internet addiction increasingly reveals a phenomenon more systemic than incidental—a structural, behavioral, and cognitive dependence cultivated by our omnipresent gadgets. Neelakandan's review enters this saturated discourse by asking an essential question: *what is the mental cost of living online?*

The conceptual foundation of this work rests on Internet addiction as both a behavioral condition and a psycho-social epidemic. Citing diagnostic advancements such as the DSM-5's inclusion of Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD), the article situates Internet addiction not as fringe curiosity, but as a legitimate public health concern. The multiplicity of terms—PIU (problematic Internet use), compulsive use, pathological use—already signals theoretical ambiguity. And maybe that's the problem. We don't yet have a consensus on how to name this monster, and while we debate its nomenclature, its grip tightens.

Studies cited in the review (e.g., Lin, 2019; Mataix-Cols, 2014) collectively identify anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, and ADHD-like symptoms as predictable outcomes of prolonged digital immersion. But here's the provocation: if we know the outcomes, why is intervention still reactive? Why aren't we redesigning our environments to disincentivize this dependency?

Technostress: The Unspoken Plague

Enter the term "technostress," coined to describe the negative emotional and physiological fallout from technology overuse. Unlike addiction, which implies loss of control, technostress implies *enforced endurance*. A quiet panic borne from perpetual notifications, information overload, and the fear of missing out (FOMO). Not a pathological craving, but an existential compliance.

Neelakandan uses this framework to position digital technology not just as a trigger for mental illnesses but as a chronic stressor in itself. The literature he references—particularly work by Quintela&Raghavan (2017) and Schnall et al. (2013)—connects technostress with burnout, cognitive fatigue, and emotional volatility. And yet, despite mounting evidence, these conditions rarely appear in diagnostic manuals or corporate wellness policies. Why? Because acknowledging technostress means confronting the unsustainable architecture of modern life.

A unique contribution of this review lies in its recognition of the physical manifestations of technostress. Sleep disturbances due to blue light exposure, musculoskeletal strain, and even digestive issues linked to chronic stress—all are brought into frame. The digital world doesn't just hijack our minds; it colonizes our bodies.

Digital Detox: Cure or Cop-Out?

Neelakandan introduces digital detox as a practical, though admittedly imperfect, response to digital overwhelm. On the surface, it's a simple intervention—intentional abstinence or controlled exposure to digital devices. But here's where things get layered. Detox is not just about pulling the plug. It's about rewiring habits, re-structuring environments, and re-learning how to be present without a screen.

The article doesn't romanticize detox. It acknowledges the pitfalls: withdrawal anxiety, FOMO backlash, and relapse risks. Detox, as the review argues, is not a universal fix. It is deeply context-sensitive. People whose livelihoods depend on constant connectivity—freelancers, remote workers, gig laborers—often cannot afford this luxury.

However, the review pushes past these limitations by offering *clinical examples*. Here, detox is not an abstract lifestyle choice, but a clinical adjunct. It works *when done deliberately, consistently, and alongside professional intervention*. A young woman with anxiety reduces symptoms through scheduled phone use and meditation. A man with depression shows marked improvement after reducing screen time and engaging in real-world social activity. These vignettes, though anecdotal, provide a compelling lens into detox as a viable clinical tool.

Neurobiology and Addiction: What's Wired Can Be Rewired

Most literature reviews brush past the neuroscience, reducing it to a paragraph of vague allusions to dopamine. This one doesn't. Neelakandan taps into emerging brain imaging research (e.g., Park et al., 2017; Weinstein &Lejoyeux, 2020), which reveals alarming structural changes in the orbitofrontal cortex, anterior cingulate, and prefrontal areas in Internet-addicted individuals. These are not neutral observations—they are diagnostic red flags.

What does it mean that digital addiction lights up the same reward circuits as substance use disorders? It means that this isn't merely a willpower problem. It's neurochemical. It's structural. And critically, it may be reversible. But not through willpower alone. Intervention needs to be multimodal—therapy, medication, lifestyle change, and yes, digital detox.

Methodology: What It Did Right—and What It Didn't

Neelakandan's paper, structurally, is a *narrative review* enriched with *clinical case studies*. There's a clear benefit to this approach—it makes the findings relatable, human, and easy to contextualize. Each case is layered with medical background, pharmacological treatment, and behavioral interventions. This brings a kind of depth often lacking in statistical or meta-analytic reviews.

However, the methodology also has blind spots. The cases are anecdotal, not systematically selected or controlled. There's no quantitative analysis, no comparison group, no pre-post measures with validated scales except cursory mentions of HAM-D scores. The detox interventions are loosely described, lacking standardization or replicability. In short: it's compelling, but not generalizable.

This doesn't make the review useless. But it does make it a launchpad, not a destination. It opens questions rather than answers them. Could randomized controlled trials validate detox as a clinical treatment? Could wearable tech be used to monitor real-time physiological improvements during detox? Could schools incorporate digital hygiene into their curricula the same way they teach physical hygiene? These are the questions left hanging.

Research Gaps: The Silences That Matter

Perhaps the most glaring omission in both this review and the broader literature it synthesizes is the lack of attention to *social and economic variables*. Who gets addicted? Who gets to detox? Digital addiction isn't evenly distributed. Marginalized communities may be more vulnerable due to fewer alternative recreational or occupational outlets. Children from overstimulated households may use screens as self-regulation tools. These factors aren't discussed.

Another gap is gender. The review doesn't differentiate how Internet addiction or detox outcomes might differ between men and women, or across age groups beyond anecdotal cases. Are women more prone to social media addiction while men gravitate toward gaming? Are the interventions equally effective across these spectrums? We don't know, because the questions aren't even being asked.

Conclusion: More Than Just a Break from Screens

What Neelakandan's review makes vividly clear is this: we are overdue for a cultural and clinical reckoning with our devices. The literature he draws upon paints a world hurtling toward emotional disintegration under the guise of connectivity. And yet, there is hope. Detox, therapy, education, even community awareness—these tools are not just possible, they are necessary.

But it will take more than unplugging. It will take redesigning. Retelling. Rebuilding. The literature gives us blueprints. Now someone has to do the hard work of turning those blueprints into livable futures.

OBJECTIVES –

1. To find out the effects of digitaldetox on peoples's mental health.
2. To find out the effects of digital detox on people's lifestyle
3. To find out people's digital usage pattern.

HYPOTHESES-

1. Digital detox has a significant positive effect on individuals' mental health, such as reduced anxiety, improved mood and better emotional regulation.
2. Engaging in digital detox leads to a noticeable shift in lifestyle behaviors, such as increased time spent on physical activities, face-to-face interactions, and spiritual growth.
3. People who practice digital detox most commonly do so through scheduled screen breaks, use of digital wellbeing apps, and engaging in outdoor or mindfulness activities.
4. A majority of individuals spend more than 4 hours per day on digital devices.
5. Other than work majority of individuals spend time on digital devices to access social media.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY –

This study followed a quantitative approach, believing that structured data could offer a clearer glimpse into the patterns shaping different lives. A total of 80 participants took part, representing a wide range of age groups, including men, women, and a few individuals who identified beyond traditional gender categories. While students made up the majority — a reflection of the spaces where the survey was shared — others included those who were employed, unemployed, homemakers managing invisible work, and retired individuals carrying decades of experiences that deserved to be heard.

Participants were approached primarily through social media platforms, with invitations shared across Instagram, WhatsApp, and a few community groups. No elaborate randomization was attempted; instead, convenience sampling was intentionally chosen. It felt honest and necessary given the realities of time, access, and human willingness — not every study can afford the luxury of perfect sampling, and sometimes data collected through real-world accessibility carries its own kind of truth, rough-edged but revealing. Those who responded did so voluntarily, creating a participant pool that was both organic and shaped by the digital spaces they occupied.

Data collection took place over 15 days — a short window, perhaps, but enough to capture a living snapshot rather than a carefully staged portrait. The survey was designed simply, stripped of unnecessary complexity, aiming to collect quantitative data that could later be analyzed without losing sight of its original human context. SPSS software was used for analysis, offering a framework sturdy enough to hold the scattered voices and translate them into patterns without draining them of meaning.
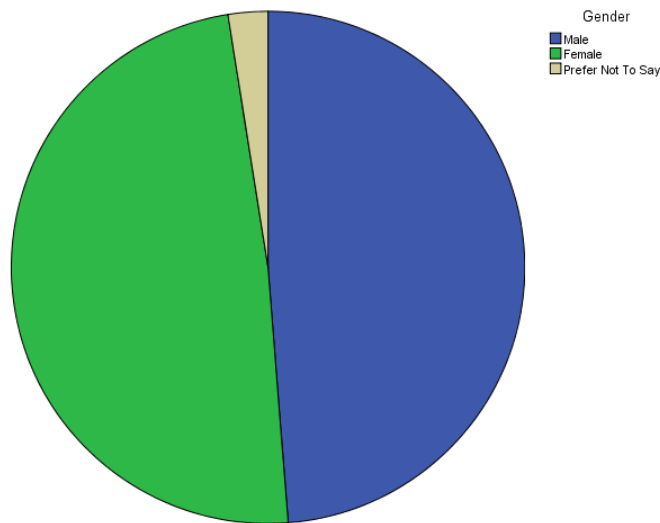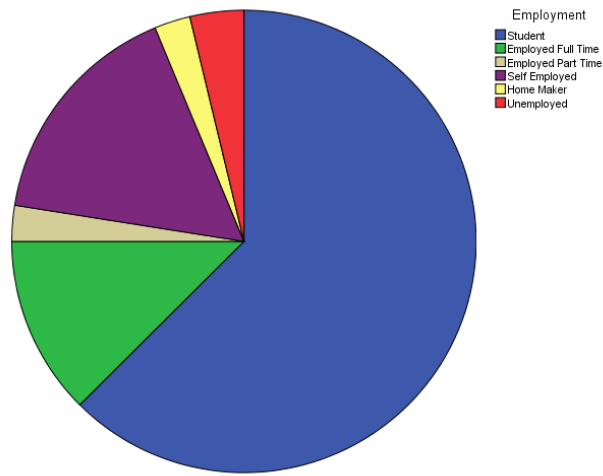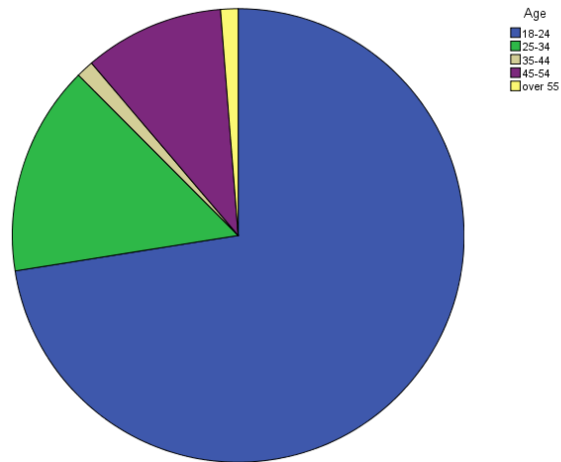
Ethical considerations were woven into every step, not treated as a formality but as a commitment. Participants were fully informed that their responses would be used solely for academic purposes; no hidden agendas, no misuse of trust. Confidentiality was promised as a given, not a favor. Anonymity was offered as a choice, acknowledging that for some, their words felt safer when detached from their names. No external ethical review board approval was required, as the research was conducted independently, but internal standards of respect and responsibility were held firmly.

However, the study carried limitations that cannot — and should not — be ignored. Despite efforts to open the survey to a diverse group, the sample leaned heavily toward students aged 18 to 24, reflecting both the reach of the chosen platforms and the demographic most likely to engage. The short duration of the study only deepened this imbalance, leaving certain voices — older adults, those less present online — quieter than they deserved to be. This skew inevitably shaped the data, coloring it with the perspectives of youth more than a fully balanced cross-section.

Still, what was gathered was genuine: an imperfect but honest piece of a much larger human story, captured not through flawless design, but through urgency, openness, and the willingness of people to share a little piece of their lives with a researcher.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

 I conducted a survey using google forms and it was divided into sections of demographic, digital usage pattern, digital detox practices, impact on mental health and impact on life style. my demographic ranged from students majorly between the age of 18-24 to people who were 55+ and consisted employed, home makers, unemployed and retired individuals, the ratio between males and females was also pretty balanced.

Age
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- over 55

Employment
- Student
- Employed Full Time
- Employed Part Time
- Self Employed
- Home Maker
- Unemployed

Gender
- Male
- Female
- Prefer Not To Say

In the next section about the data usage patterns we uncovered that most people about (32.5 percent of 80 individuals) use digital devices upto 5-6 hours, following 26.3 percent individuals

using it for 7-8 and 21.3 percent using it for more than 8 hours. Primarily for work and school purposes, social media and recreational purposes. 37.5 individuals feel compulsed to check their phones few times an hour while only 6.3 percent check it only when its necessary. When asked if they have consciously tried taking breaks from devices 75 percent reported yes.

Have you ever
conciously taken a
break from digital
devices?
■ yes
■ no
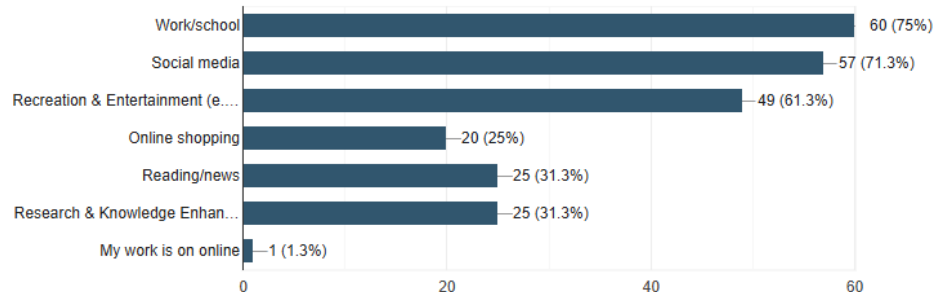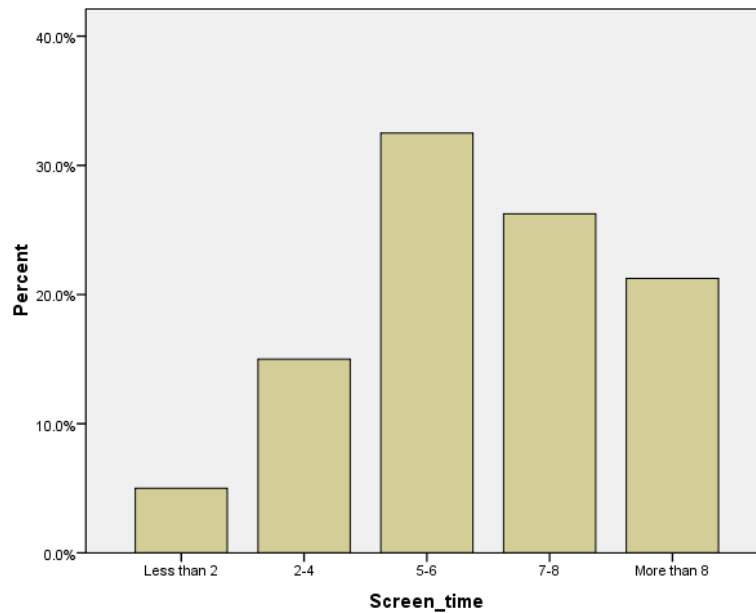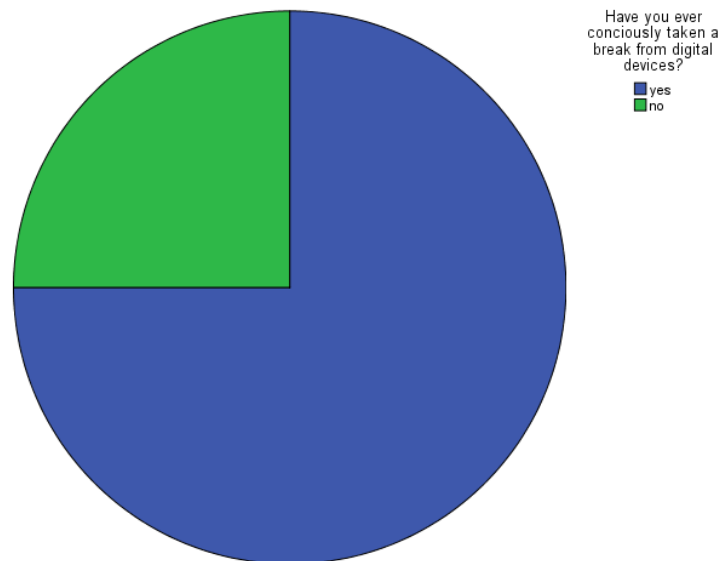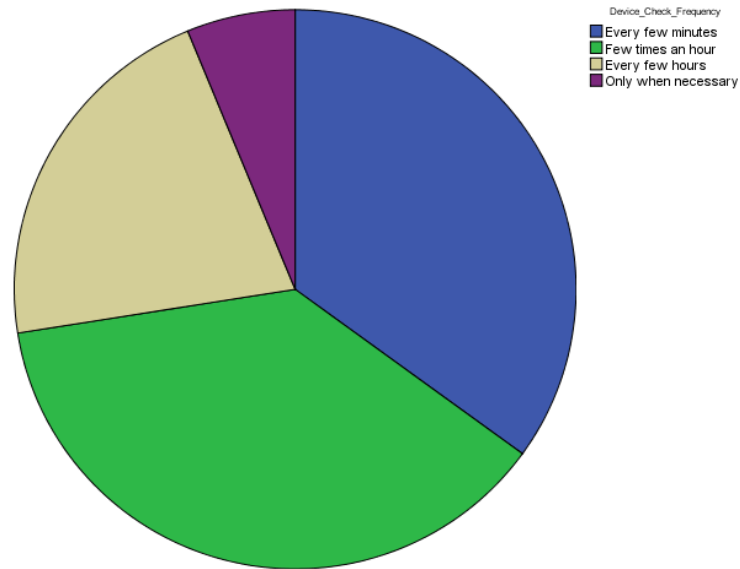
I found out that most people digital detox upon and according to need with their primary motivation being reducing eye strain, headaches, stress, anxiety and improving stress and productivity . Most people rely on combination turning off notifications, giving up the device entirely, deleting apps and getting involved in offline chores.

If yes, how often do you practice digital detox?

- ■ A few hours daily
- ■ A day/few days once every week
- ■ A few weeks in every month
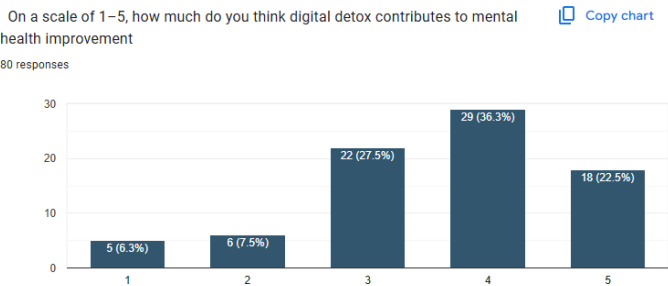- ■ Upon & according to need
- ■ Rarely
- ■ Never

Reduce stress/anxiety	37 (46.3%)
Improve sleep quality	36 (45%)
Increase productivity	40 (50%)
Improve real-life social interactions	23 (28.7%)
Reduce eye strain/headaches	50 (62.5%)
N/A	6 (7.5%)

Turning off notifications	41 (51.2%)
Deleting apps	28 (35%)
Setting screen-time limits	17 (21.3%)
Giving up the device for the tim...	31 (38.8%)
Switch off the device	14 (17.5%)
When I get onvolved in other c...	20 (25%)
I just don't use it, either will pla...	10 (12.5%)
I don't do a digital detox	4 (5%)
I give it to my parent for certain...	3 (3.8%)
	1 (1.3%)
Throwing it out of the window	1 (1.3%)

After reducing screen time people reported an equal mix of experiencing irritability and boredom however majority of them also reported better concentration, sleep quality, improved moods and reduced anxiety. Most of them also reported significant improvement in mental well being. And better coping with emotions and issues. 36.3 percent think that digital detox contributed to mental health improvement.

Digital_detox_withdrawal_symptoms
- yes
- no

Reduced anxiety — 22 (27.5%)
Better focus and concentration — 45 (56.3%)
Improved mood — 34 (42.5%)
Better sleep quality — 44 (55%)
No noticeable changes — 16 (20%)

Have you experienced any changes in mental well being?
- Yes, significant improvement
- Yes, slight improvement
- No change
- i feel worse

Do you process and cope better with your emotions and issues on digital detox?
- Yes
- No
- Maybe

On a scale of 1-5, how much do you think digital detox contributes to mental health improvement

Copy chart

80 responses

1 — 5 (6.3%)
2 — 6 (7.5%)
3 — 22 (27.5%)
4 — 29 (36.3%)
5 — 18 (22.5%)

In terms of lifestyle only few perimeters were influenced heavily namely- productivity, sleep quality and financial decisions which improved for about 40 percent of the people. Rest all factor

like fitness and eating habits weren't affected. Social interactions improved in varying ways ranging spending more time with family, having deeper conversations and being more present in conversations. Digital detox affects spiritual growth and life satisfaction moderately and effects are not certain.

Has the detox influenced your exercise or fitness habits?
- yes, more regular exercise
- yes, new physical act.y started
- no change

Has the detox affected your eating habits?
- Yes, i eat healthier meals
- Yes, i eat more mindfully
- No, my diet and habits are the same
- i snack more out of boredom

Has the detox improved sleep quality?
- yes, significantly
- yes, slightly
- no change
- no, sleep quality has worsened

Has the detox impoved social interactions?
- yes, i spend more time with family and friends irl
- yes, i have deeper and meaninful conversations
- yes, i am more present in conversations
- no change
- no i feel more disconnected

Has the detox affected work or study habits?
- Yes, i am more productive and focused
- Yes, but only slightly
- no change
- no, i struggle more without digital tools

Has the detox help you make more mindful financial decisions?
- Yes, significantly
- yes, to some extent
- no, not really
- not applicable

Would you consider continuing digital detox as a spiritual or personal growth practice?
- Yes
- no
- maybe

Since practicing digital detox, how satisfied are you with your overall lifestyle?
79 responses

Rating	Count
1	1 (1.3%)
2	8 (10.1%)
3	34 (43%)
4	28 (35.4%)
5	8 (10.1%)

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