

EFFECT OF DIGITAL DETOXIFICATION ON PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING: A NEWER HEALTH AND WELLNESS TREND IN THE CURRENT ERA

Iqra Tariq¹

Clinical Psychologist & Senior Demonstrator of Behavioral Sciences, Multan Medical and Dental College & Ibn-e-Seina Hospital Multan: **Email:** psy.iqra@gmail.com

Iram Shahzadi²

Ph.D Scholar of Department of Teacher Education of International Islamic University Islamabad: **Email:** iramkarim207@gmail.com

Abdul Waheed³

Life Institute of Counseling and Research Training: **Corresponding Author Email:** abdulwaheed.licrt@gmail.com

Sumaira Riaz⁴

Department of Applied Psychology Bahuddin Zakariya University Multan
Email: licrtpakistan@gmail.com

Abstract

With increasing reliance on digital devices, concerns about their impact on mental health have grown, particularly among young adults. The growing concern over the negative impact of excessive digital media use has led to the emergence of digital detox interventions, which aim to mitigate these risks by encouraging individuals to disconnect from their digital devices for specific periods. This study aims to investigate the impact of a digital detox as intervention on psychological well-being among young adults. Sample of 40 students were targeted for their high digital device usage. Digital Detox Practices Questionnaire (Anandpara et al., 2024) and Psychological Wellbeing Scale (Ryff, 1989) were used as research instruments to measure study variables. Data were analyzed using Paired Samples t-Test on SPSS. Participants' psychological well-being was assessed before and after a two-week-long digital detox intervention, which encouraged reduced digital device usage. Findings indicated statistically significant improvements in psychological well-being scores post-intervention, with p -values $< .0001$ for all comparisons. Students' mean score of autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life and self-acceptance was enhanced by digital detox as intervention. Digital detox can significantly improve mental health of students in educational settings.

Keywords: Digital detoxification, psychological well-being

Introduction

The proliferation of social networking platforms has resulted in a rise in usage frequency among young adults. Digital detox interventions have been suggested as a solution to reduce the negative impacts of smartphone use on outcomes like well-being or social relationships. While social media can provide benefits, overuse can have negative impacts, especially on mental health and quality of life (Ansari et al., 2024). The pervasive use of digital devices, particularly smartphones and social media platforms, has significantly transformed the daily lives of individuals worldwide, including Pakistan. While these technologies have provided numerous benefits, such as enhanced communication, access to information, and entertainment, their excessive use has raised concerns about potential negative consequences on mental health. In Pakistan, as in many other countries, the rising dependency on digital media has led to the phenomenon of digital overload, resulting in adverse psychological effects, such as stress, anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances (Modibbo & Inuwa, 2020; Ansari et al., 2024).

Digital detoxification refers to the intentional process of abstaining or reducing the use of digital devices, particularly social media, to counterbalance the negative effects of overuse. This practice has gained attention in recent years as a means of improving mental health, increasing productivity, and fostering better social connections in real life. The concept of digital detoxification is especially relevant in the Pakistani context, where the digital

landscape is growing rapidly, and individuals are increasingly engaged with online platforms for personal, professional, and educational purposes (Adeel, 2019; Ansari et al., 2024). The rapid proliferation of digital technology has significantly transformed the daily lives of young adults, leading to pervasive engagement with social media, mobile devices, and other digital platforms. While these technological advancements offer numerous benefits, such as increased connectivity and access to information, they also present substantial risks to mental health (Altaf Dar et al., 2023).

The widespread availability of social networking sites on smartphones poses significant distractions, particularly for younger age groups, leading to potential problematic usage behaviors, even addiction (Schmuck, 2020). These platforms can lead to problematic usage behaviors, such as compulsive checking and extended screen time, which can disrupt daily routines and negatively impact mental health. The potential for smartphone addiction is a growing concern, characterized by an inability to control phone usage, preoccupation with online activities, and withdrawal symptoms when not using the device. This addiction can lead to negative outcomes such as reduced academic performance, impaired interpersonal relationships, and heightened levels of stress and anxiety (Schmuck, 2020). The need for digital detox arises from the growing awareness of the negative impacts of excessive digital device usage on mental health, productivity, and overall well-being. Research reveals that a significant proportion of young people exhibit high levels of smartphone addiction, primarily driven by social networking applications. Research highlights fear of missing out as a key predictor of addictive behavior and identifies poor sleep quality as a consequential impact. These findings underscore the critical need for digital detox initiatives to mitigate excessive smartphone usage among young people (Handa & Ahuja, 2020).

According to Miksch and Schulz (2028), young adults actively employ strategies to limit digital technology interaction across professional, private, and social contexts. Their motivations include maintaining self-control, enhancing performance, and fostering real-life relationships. These findings provide insights into how young adults navigate their digital lives, which can be viewed as both encouraging in terms of awareness and proactive management and concerning in terms of the challenges posed by digital technology use. Green et al. (2022) claim that the exploration of smartphone disconnection practices suggests that fostering periods of digital detox could empower teenagers to regain control over their personal technologies. Coyne and Woodruff (2023) explored the effects of digital detox periods on mental health, focusing on reduced smartphone and social media usage. Their findings showed significant improvements in addiction levels, sleep quality, stress reduction, and overall life satisfaction among participants. Qualitative insights underscored increased mindfulness and awareness of the negative impacts of excessive digital consumption, suggesting that structured detox interventions may support healthier technology habits and improve wellbeing

Literature Review

The practice of digital detox, which refers to the deliberate abstention from electronic devices such as smartphones, is gaining popularity in the health and wellness industry. It is considered a viable solution to mitigate the negative consequences of excessive smartphone usage on one's well-being, social connections, and other areas of life. Radtke et al. (2022) performed a comprehensive analysis of existing research to evaluate the efficacy of digital detox programmes in enhancing factors such as well-being and health, social connections, discipline, or productivity. A further study conducted by Coyne and Woodruff (2023) examined the consequences of a 14-day period in which young individuals abstained from social media, limiting their use to 30 minutes each day. Results reveal that this digital detox improved sleep quality, overall life satisfaction, and decreased stress level.

Jauhar et al. (2025), reveal that interventions of digital detoxification reduced depression and anxiety levels among young adults and improved mental health. Moreover, male adults significantly improve their level of mental health as compared to female. Furthermore, unemployed adults reported higher level of depression and anxiety as compared to employed. In addition, demographic variables play a significant role in reducing psychological burden. The growing concern over the negative impact of excessive digital media use has led to the emergence of digital detox interventions, which aim to mitigate these risks by encouraging individuals to disconnect from their digital devices for specific periods (Radtke et al., 2022). This literature review examines existing research on the relationship between digital media use, mental health outcomes, and the efficacy of digital detox interventions in reducing anxiety and depression among young adults. A substantial body of literature has documented the association between excessive digital media use and adverse mental health outcomes, particularly among young adults (Shutzman & Gershy, 2023). The practice of digital detox, which refers to the deliberate abstention from electronic devices such as smartphones, is gaining popularity in the health and wellness industry. It is considered a viable solution to mitigate the negative consequences of excessive smartphone usage on one's well-being, social connections, and other areas of life (Rehman & Malik, 2020; Anandpara et al., 2024). Findings of Salepaki et al. (2025), reveal high addiction rates, reduced productivity, and disrupted sleep. Women reported more difficulty disconnecting and a greater need for detoxification than men. Students and unemployed individuals showed higher addiction symptoms and negative productivity impacts compared to employed respondents. Excessive mobile phone use among young people poses significant challenges, including addiction and adverse effects on productivity, relationships, and sleep, influenced by gender and employment status. The growing recognition of negative impacts of social media has led to the emergence of the digital detox movement. Digital detox refers to a period during which individuals refrain from using digital devices to reduce stress, improve focus, and enhance overall well-being (Salepaki et al., 2025). Research indicates that digital detox can lead to improved mental health, reduced anxiety, and better sleep quality (Hager et al., 2023). Studies have shown that regular digital detox practices can significantly mitigate the adverse effects of excessive smartphone usage and help individuals regain a healthy balance between their digital and offline lives (Radtke et al., 2022; Coyne & Woodruff, 2023). As such, adopting digital detox strategies is becoming increasingly important in managing the pervasive influence of smartphones on daily life.

Rational of the Study

With the rise of smartphones, social media, and constant connectivity, there has been an increasing dependence on digital technology. This constant exposure to digital stimuli can lead to feelings of anxiety, stress, and even depression. The overuse of digital devices has also been linked to poor sleep quality, reduced physical activity, and a lack of face-to-face social interactions, all of which are critical to maintaining mental and emotional health. In response to these concerns, many individuals and health professionals are advocating for digital detoxification — periods of time when individuals intentionally disconnect from digital devices to reclaim mental clarity and restore emotional balance. While the concept of a digital detox is becoming popular, there is a lack of comprehensive research on its specific impact on psychological well-being. Although anecdotal evidence and media reports often highlight the benefits of taking breaks from digital technology, there is still limited scientific research exploring the full extent of how digital detoxification can enhance psychological well-being.

Objectives of Study

1. To investigate the effect digital detoxification on psychological well-being.
2. To compare the mean score of psychological well-being pre-test and post-test of experiment group.
3. To analyze the mean score difference of psychological well-being between the experimental group and control group.

Significance of the Study

In today's digital age, individuals are constantly engaged with electronic devices such as smartphones, computers, and social media platforms. The overuse of these devices can lead to psychological strain, including stress, anxiety, and sleep disturbances. Understanding how digital detoxification (a break from digital devices) can alleviate these issues is critical to improving mental health in a digitally connected society. The study can provide insights into how reducing screen time or taking regular breaks from digital devices may improve psychological well-being. This can lead to reductions in symptoms of anxiety, depression, and feelings of overwhelm, helping individuals reclaim a healthier relationship with technology. Detoxification from digital screens could promote face-to-face interactions, which are often more fulfilling and beneficial for mental health than online communications. The study could highlight the psychological benefits of strengthening real-life social bonds, which can lead to greater emotional support and improved overall well-being. Research may demonstrate that digital detoxification could help individuals rediscover focus and productivity by minimizing distractions. A clearer mind could lead to enhanced concentration, creativity, and a sense of accomplishment, contributing positively to mental well-being. Chronic overuse of digital technologies has been associated with a range of mental health conditions, including burnout and digital addiction. Understanding how regular detoxing impacts long-term psychological well-being could offer preventive strategies to mitigate such risks. The findings from this research could help individuals, therapists, and wellness practitioners design more effective strategies for improving mental health in a digital age. It can also guide workplace wellness programs or educational policies to promote balanced screen time for better mental health outcomes.

Research Method

Research Design

A quantitative research on the effect of digital detoxification on psychological well-being, a quasi-experimental design was used. A quasi-experimental design is a type of research design that aims to evaluate the causal impact of an intervention or treatment but does not rely on random assignment to treatment and control groups, which is a hallmark of true experimental designs. Students were divided into two groups; experimental and control. The 20 students were selected for experimental group and 20 for control group.

Experimental Procedure

Pre-test Measurement: Psychological Well-being Assessment: Before starting the intervention, both groups were assessed by standardized scale, Ryff's Psychological Well-being Scale. Digital detox intervention was given to the students of experimental group by limiting or completely eliminating access to digital devices such as smartphones, computers, and social media for a set period (e.g., two week). Engaging in alternative activities such as mindfulness practices, physical activities, or socializing in person. The key idea is to reduce screen time and its associated stressors, encouraging students to reconnect with offline activities. While the students of control group will maintain their regular digital habits. They will continue using digital devices in the usual manner.

Post-test Measurement: After the digital detox period (e.g., after two week), both groups were assessed on psychological well-being scale as in the pre-test.

Results

Table 4.1: Mean scores of psychological well-being of pre-test and post-test of experimental group

	Pre-test	Post-test
Type of Test	Psychological Well-being	Psychological Well-being
Total number of participants	20	20
Mean score	49.08	73.59

The p -value $< .001$. Findings of the study reveal that the mean score (49.08) for psychological well-being pre-test and (73.59) for the post-test is statistically significant. Digital detoxification improved students' psychological well-being (autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life and self-acceptance).

Table 4.2: Analysis of psychological well-being score of experimental group and control group

Type of Test	Group	N	Mean	df	t-value	p-value
Psychological Well-being	Experimental	20	39.27	38	11.401	.000
	Control	20	21.75			

The p -value $< .001$. Table 2 describe the mean score difference of psychological well-being of the students of experimental group and control group. Students of experiment group showed the greater level of psychological well-being ($M=39.27$) as compared to control group (21.75). Results indicated that digital detoxification is an effective intervention to reduce use of social media and enhancing psychological well-being.

Table 4.3: Effect size of digital detoxification as an intervention on psychological well-being of students of experimental group

Type of Test	Cohen'sd Value
Psychological well-being	1.69 4.82

Results suggest that there is strong effect of digital detoxification as intervention on psychological well-being of the students of experimental. Digital detox strategy significantly affect the students' psychological well-being in a positive way.

Discussion

The rapid proliferation of digital technology has significantly transformed the daily lives of young adults, leading to pervasive engagement with social media, mobile devices, and other digital platforms. While these technological advancements offer numerous benefits, such as increased connectivity and access to information, they also present substantial risks to mental health (Altaf Dar et al., 2023). The widespread availability of social networking sites on smartphones poses significant distractions, particularly for younger age groups, leading to potential problematic usage behaviors, even addiction (Schmuck, 2020). These platforms can lead to problematic usage behaviors, such as compulsive checking and extended screen time, which can disrupt daily routines and negatively impact mental health. The potential for smartphone addiction is a growing concern, characterized by an inability to control phone usage, preoccupation with online activities, and withdrawal symptoms when not using the device. This addiction can lead to negative outcomes such as reduced academic performance,

impaired interpersonal relationships, and heightened levels of stress and anxiety (Schmuck, 2020). The need for digital detox arises from the growing awareness of the negative impacts of excessive digital device usage on mental health, productivity, and overall well-being. A digital detox, especially reducing social media use, can have a profound positive impact on students' psychological well-being. Findings of the study reveal that digital detoxification improved students' psychological well-being (autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life and self-acceptance). Results of the study are consistent with the findings of the previous studies where, Radtke et al. (2022) performed a comprehensive analysis of existing research to evaluate the efficacy of digital detox programmes in enhancing factors such as well-being and health, social connections, discipline, or productivity. Jauhar et al. (2025), reveal that interventions of digital detoxification reduced depression and anxiety levels among young adults and improved mental health. Moreover, male adults significantly improve their level of mental health as compared to female. Furthermore, unemployed adults reported higher level of depression and anxiety as compared to employed. In addition, demographic variables play a significant role in reducing psychological burden. Research indicates that digital detox can lead to improved mental health, reduced anxiety, and better sleep quality (Hager et al., 2023). Studies have shown that regular digital detox practices can significantly mitigate the adverse effects of excessive smartphone usage and help individuals regain a healthy balance between their digital and offline lives (Radtke et al., 2022; Coyne & Woodruff, 2023). As such, adopting digital detox strategies is becoming increasingly important in managing the pervasive influence of smartphones on daily life. Moreover, the findings of the study suggested that digital detox is an effective intervention or strategy for improving psychological well-being of the students.

Conclusion

The study of digital detoxification and its effects on psychological well-being highlights an increasingly significant trend in today's technology-driven society. As digital devices and social media platforms continue to dominate daily life, the need for a conscious disconnection has become more apparent, given the detrimental impact on mental health. The findings suggest digital detox as intervention improved psychological well-being (autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life and self-acceptance). Digital detoxification, when practiced thoughtfully, offers a valuable pathway toward reducing the negative effects of technology on mental health, enhancing overall life satisfaction, and promoting long-term psychological resilience in the current era.

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