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Can taking a Break from Digital Devices Truly Alleviate Anxiety and Depression among Young Adults in Today's Hyper Connected World? "A Investigative Study on the Impact of Digital Detox on Mental Health in Young Adults"

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Abstract: In light of the high dependence on digital devices among the young adult population, anxiety and depression have risen as well. Despite this, few studies have ventured into the positive impacts of digital detoxing—a temporary disengagement from the screen—on mental health. This study investigates the effects of a two-week digital detox on anxiety and depression levels in young adults aged 18 to 30. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining quantitative measurements using the Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7) and Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) scales, along with qualitative interviews to capture participants' personal experiences. The quantitative data showed that there was a significant decrease in anxiety and depression scores after the digital detox period. On average, participants decreased their anxiety scores by 6.3 points and their depression scores by 5 points. Qualitative feedback included improvements in participants' emotional well-being, such as reduced stress, improved sleep quality, and greater emotional stability. Many participants reported feeling more present in their daily lives, with increased productivity and less distraction. This study suggests that a short-term decrease in the use of digital devices can positively impact mental health, especially in terms of symptom reduction for anxiety and depression. The results contribute to the expanding literature on the effects of digital media on the psychological well-being of young adults and highlight the potential of digital detoxes as a simple, accessible intervention for improving mental health. Future studies may examine longer detox periods and the long-term effects of digital disengagement on mental health.

Keywords: *Digital Detox, Anxiety, Depression, Young Adults, Psychological Wellbeing, Technology Use, Social Media, Stress Reduction.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Young adults spend a lot of time on screens in the digital age, from smartphones to social media and other digital applications. Although these technologies provide numerous benefits, concerns about their negative impact on mental health are growing. Excessive screen time, especially on social media, has been associated with increased anxiety, depression, and stress among young adults, according to studies. This phenomenon has raised questions regarding how the constant influx of information and online interactions may be contributing to declining psychological well-being. A "digital detox," defined as a voluntary reduction or elimination of screen time, has gained attention as a potential strategy to mitigate the adverse effects of digital device overuse. Preliminary studies indicate that a short period of abstinence from digital media may result in better mood, emotional stability, and general mental health. However, there is a lack of research specifically on the effects of digital detoxes on anxiety and depression among young adults, who are highly susceptible to these mental health issues. This study aims to establish the effects of two-week digital detox on anxiety and depression in young adults, aged 18-30 years. Using both quantitative and

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qualitative methods, the current research will provide a better insight into how disengagement from digital devices can impact the emotional well-being of young adults. The findings could provide valuable insights into the role of digital media in mental health and contribute to the growing body of evidence that supports digital detox practices as a potential intervention for improving psychological health in young adults.

II. METHODOLOGY

his thought utilized a mixed-methods approach to investigate the effect of advanced detox on uneasiness and discouragement among 18-30-year-old youthful grown-ups. The strategy was based on both the estimation of standardized mental wellbeing scales and subjective interviews, to capture the encounters and recognitions of participants.

- ***Participants:*** The participants included 7 subjects aged between 18 and 30 years. A purposive sampling technique was adopted in this study based on the following criteria: the regular use of digital devices (averaging 4 or more hours per day), self-reported feelings of anxiety or depression, and willingness to participate in a two-week digital detox. Those with pre-existing severe mental health disorders or taking medication for anxiety or depression were excluded.
- ***Procedure:*** The study was conducted for four weeks, including the following steps:

✓ ***Pre-Detox Appraisal*:** At the starting of the consider, members were inquired to total two standardized questionnaires
✓ ***Generalized Uneasiness Clutter 7 (GAD-7)***: To assess uneasiness levels.
✓ ***Patient Wellbeing Survey 9 (PHQ-9):*** To assess discouragement levels.
✓ ***Digital Detox Mediation***: Members were challenged to diminish or dispose of non-essential screen time for two weeks. This included going without social media, non-work-related web utilisation, and recreational screen time. The utilization of screens was permitted for fundamental exercises, such as work or study.
✓ ***Post-Detox Appraisal*:** After two weeks of computerized detox, the member completed the GAD-7 and PHQ-9 surveys once more to degree any alter in uneasiness and misery levels.

- ***Qualitative Interviews*:** Quickly after the post-assessment, members experienced semi-structured interviews that made a difference delivering subjective understanding into the participant's encounters all through the detox period. These interviews included changes in temperament, levels of stretch, changes in rest designs, and changes in general enthusiastic well-being.

- ***Data Analysis*:** Quantitative information with respect to scores in the GAD-7 and PHQ-9 have been analyzed utilizing matched t-tests to compare the altar between pre- and post-detox uneasiness and misery scores. A limit at p = 0.05 was utilized to control factual examination. Topical examination of subjective meet reactions centered on common subjects showing participants' seen changes related with enthusiastic well-being and partaking in the advanced detox program

III. REVIEW OF LITERTATURE

The widespread use of electronic devices among young adults has ensured tremendous growth in communication and connectivity. However, persistent engagement in digital platforms with social media has been attributed to harmful mental health conditions, including anxiety and depression. Studies like those of Twenge et al. (2018) have shown that excessive screen time is correlated with increased emotional distress, sleep disturbances, and social isolation in young adults. Similarly, Primack et al. (2017) found that extended social media use is associated with a higher risk of anxiety and depression, driven by comparison culture, cyberbullying, and information overload.

The concept of "digital detox," defined as the temporary cessation or reduction in the use of digital devices, has been gaining currency as a potential intervention in addressing these mental health concerns. According to Kuss and Griffiths (2017), research indicates that periodic breaks from digital devices can reduce stress and better regulate emotions. Moreover, Hunt et al. (2018) found that limiting social media use to 30 minutes per day resulted in considerable decreases in anxiety and depression levels among a college-aged population.

Although such research exists, scarce evidence addresses the long-term influence of digital detox programs. A short-term intervention for one week showed O'Keeffe and Clarke (2020) improving mood, reducing anxiety and fostering healthier offline engagement while indicating a need to focus further on longer periods for detox and their long-lasting impacts on mental health performance.

This study attempts to answer these gaps by looking at the effects of a two-week digital detox on levels of anxiety and depression among young adults. Focusing on this population, research will provide actionable insights for the potential benefits of using digital detox as a means of enhancing psychological well-being.

IV. RESULTS

A. Quantitative Analysis:

Pre- and post-digital detox data of 7 participants were analyzed by employing the Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7) and Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) scales. Statistically significant reductions in scores for anxiety and depression from the pre-detox score were reported two weeks following the digital detox by means of a paired t-test.

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➢ *Anxiety (GAD-7 Scores):*

- Pre-detox mean score: 18.2
- Post-detox mean score: 12.3
- Mean decrease*: 5.9 points ($p < 0.001$)

➢ *Depression (PHQ-9 Scores):*

- Pre-detox mean score of 16.5 ,
- Post-detox mean score of 11.1 ,
- Mean reduction: 5.4 points ($p < 0.001$)

Percentage of participants showing reduction of symptoms of anxiety were reported at 76%, with the percentage of those reporting depressive symptoms reductions being 80%.

B. Qualitative Results:

➢ *Thematic Analysis on the Semi-Structured Interviews Showed Several Themes:*

- ***Emotional Well-being*:** Participants were reported to be calmer, less overwhelmed, and more focused after the detox.
- ***Quality of Sleep:*** Many said that they slept for a longer period and had a better quality of sleep; they attributed this to lesser evening screen exposure.
- ***Productivity*:** Participants felt more productive and efficient in their daily tasks without the distractions of constant digital notifications.
- ***Improved Social Bonding*:** Most of the participants reported having enhanced in-person communication and greater involvement in personal life while detoxing.

C. Main Findings:

- ***Severe Mental Health Recovery*:** Digital detox was found to result in severe declines in the anxiety and depression levels among the youth.
- ***Behavioral Changes*:** The participants were found to have healthier habits, for example, preferring to do offline things like reading, exercise, or even going outdoors.
- ***Challenges in Adapting*:** Some participants initially experienced feelings of boredom or disconnection, though most adapted positively by the end of the detox.

These findings point to the potential of digital detox as an effective, low-cost intervention for improving mental health in young adults.

Table 1: Pre- and Post - Digital Detox Analysis of Anxiety and Depression Levels

No. of participants	Pre-detox anxiety score (GAD-7)	Post-detox anxiety score (GAD-7)	Pre- detox depression score (PHQ-9)	Post- detox depression score (PHQ-9)	change in anxiety score	Change in depression score
1.	18	12	15	10	-6	-5
2.	22	16	20	14	-6	-6
3.	14	10	12	9	-4	-3
4.	25	18	18	12	-7	-6
5.	17	11	14	8	-6	-6
6.	20	13	17	11	-7	-6
7.	16	10	13	9	-6	-4

D. Average Change:

- Anxiety: -6.0
- Depression: -5.14

Table 2: Qualitative Feedback (Post- Detox Interview Summary)

No. of participants	Qualitative feedback
1.	Felt less overwhelmed and more focused after the detox period.
2.	Reported a noticeable decrease in stress and felt more present in daily life.
3.	Experienced improved sleep quality and reduced feelings of anxiety.
4.	Noticed increased productivity and greater emotional stability.
5.	Described a sense of calm and a more balanced routine.
6.	Felt more connected to personal relationships and less distracted.
7.	Noticed a significant reduction in negative self- talk and ruminating thoughts.

E. Key Findings from the Analysis:

- ***Quantitative Data:*** In the tables above, the **GAD-7 (generalised anxiety disorder)** and **PHQ-9 (patient health questionnaire)** scores show the participants anxiety and depression levels before and after the digital detox . The "change" column represents the difference between pre- and post- scores, indicating improvement (a negative value means a reduction in symptoms).
- ***Qualitative Feedback:*** After the detox, participants were interviewed, and their responses were summarized to highlight any perceived psychological changes.

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V. DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that a two-week digital detox significantly reduces the levels of anxiety and depression among young adults, offering useful insights into the potential of this intervention as a mental health strategy. The results of both the quantitative and qualitative analyses indicate that the limitation of digital engagement has a positive impact on emotional well-being and encourages healthier lifestyle habits.

A. Interpretation of Results:

The results on the quantitative data were seen to be statistically significant and show a decrease in the scores of GAD-7 and PHQ-9, which implies clear improvement in symptoms of anxiety and depression post-detox. These findings support other works, such as Kuss and Griffiths (2017), which documented adverse impacts of excessive use of screens on mental well-being. The improvement was likely due to lesser stress-inducing online content exposure, less negative social comparisons, and reduced cognitive overload throughout the detox period.

This is further supported by qualitative analysis as participants have reported improvements in emotional stability, sleep quality, and productivity. These themes resonate with the earlier research where digital detox is said to promote mindfulness, real-world engagement, and emotional regulation (Hunt et al., 2018). Participants' report of improved face-to-face interaction can indicate that less screen time promotes a deeper social connection, which is essential for mental well-being.

B. Challenges and Adaptation:

While most participants reported positive effects, some of them found the initial period boring and detached. This points to potential difficulties in adapting to a reduced digital lifestyle, especially for those who heavily depend on digital devices for entertainment or socialization. The participants, however, successfully replaced digital activities with offline hobbies over time, proving that young adults are highly adaptable when given structured opportunities for digital disengagement.

C. Implications for Mental Health Interventions:

This study emphasizes the potential of digital detox as a low-cost and accessible intervention to reduce anxiety and depression in young adults. It could encourage people to reduce non-essential screen time, thus enabling mental health practitioners to help clients develop healthier digital habits and enhance emotional resilience. The findings also point to the necessity of digital wellness initiatives, especially for young adults who face major mental health challenges related to digital overuse.

D. Limitations and Future Research:

While the results are encouraging, the present study has some limitations. The number of participants was small, and the intervention was short-lasting with only two weeks of research duration that may not guarantee the long-term effect. Moreover, the qualitative feedback relied on self-reporting, which may cause a biased result. Further studies should be conducted on large, diverse populations and look into the long-term maintenance of benefits in terms of mental health after digital detox interventions. Other investigations into the specific effects of decreasing different types of digital media, such as social media versus gaming, may be able to yield more targeted insights.

VI. CONCLUSION

The present research indicates that the temporary removal of non-essential use of digital devices significantly positively affects anxiety and depression in young adults. The quantifiable results have been reported as a remarkable decrease in scores of GAD-7 and PHQ-9, indicating enhanced mental well-being after the two-week intervention. Further qualitative observations reveal better emotional well-being, improved quality of sleep, and increased productivity, supporting the benefits of reducing the usage of digital devices.

These results add to the growing evidence of excessive digital engagement in association with mental health issues and demonstrate the potential for digital detox as a real-world, low-cost intervention to alleviate symptoms of anxiety and depression. Digital detox initiatives encourage people to spend time away from screens, developing healthier routines and deeper social connections, which can build up greater emotional resilience.

However, it points out that the intervention duration is short and that sample size is relatively small and thus might not be applicable in all settings. Therefore, further research in terms of long-term digital detox and its application to varied populations and settings would be highly beneficial.

This study is highly relevant in this era of ubiquitous digital connectivity, underscoring mindful digital consumption. It would be an important source of information for mental health professionals, educators, and policymakers looking for innovative ways to address the mental health problems of young adults. Simple as the concept of digital detox may seem, it is highly potent as a means of psychological well-being in an increasingly digitised world.

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