



# LOST IN THE DIGITAL ABYSS: HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

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## The Digital Dilemma : How Constant Connectivity is Undermining Mental Health.

By Jyoti Rawat

In our modern society, the allure of constant connectivity through digital devices has become an inextricable part of life. In the rapidly digitizing landscape of India, smartphones and the internet are no longer luxuries but necessities that penetrate every aspect of life. The evolution of technology has brought about revolutionary changes in how we communicate, work and interact with the world. While these advancements offer unprecedented level of convenience and accessibility, they also present significant challenges, particularly regarding mental health. The term "digital dilemma" refers to paradoxical effects our interconnected lives, where the tools designed to enhance our capabilities and foster connections can also leads to cognitive overload, social isolation, and disrupted sleep and other issues. This dilemma is rooted in the constant barrage of information and social interaction mediated through screens, which demands continuous attention and engagement. As a result, individuals find themselves tethered to their devices, often at the cost of their mental wellbeing's. The advent of technology has brought about profound changes in the way individuals access the information and communicate. As highlighted by (Vannucci et al.,2019), the digital age has ushered in an era where individuals are inundated with an overwhelming amount of information and stimuli, a condition often referred to as "information overload". This constant connectivity can lead to decreased productivity, heightened anxiety and impaired cognitive functions. Moreover, the compulsion to check notifications and engage with digital content creates a state of partial attention, which further strains mental resources and reduces the capacity for deep focused thoughts (Ophir et.al,2009).

This article delves into how our digital interactions, while superficially enriching, are paradoxically leading to a decline in mental health.

### Increased screen time and mental health

A significant consequence of India's digital revolution has been a dramatic increase in screen time. Extended screen time has been associated with mental health issues, such as increased anxiety, depression and disrupted sleep patterns. A study by (Kelly et.al.,2019) highlighted the relationship between screen based activities and psychological wellbeing's among children and adolescents. The study is notable for its detailed analysis of different types of screen time, including TV, social media, and gaming, relating these activities to symptoms of anxiety and depression.

### The effects of social media

The pervasive reach of social media has woven a complex web of digital interactions that are not without psychological consequences. Social media platforms, which play a major role in this problem, enhance these impacts by creating an atmosphere that is conducive to cyberbullying, social comparison, and the spread of misinformation—all of which have been connected to negative outcomes for mental health, especially in young people and adolescents. (Vidalet.al.,2020) highlights the psychological impact of continuous connectivity and the stress associated with social media usage. It particularly focus on the concept of "technostress" and its implications for mental health.

### Remote work and mental strains

The shift to remote work has further complicated the digital landscape surveys by Assocham and KPMG highlights an alarming increase in work related stress, exacerbated by the erosion of the distinction between home and office the constant need for digital connectivity in telecommuting setups has led many employees to experience burnout, challenging the mental health of a significant portion of India's workforce. While the

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digital age brings unprecedented opportunities for growth and connectivity, it also necessitates robust strategies to safeguard mental health. To effectively address the mental health challenges posed by increased digital connectivity in India, several strategic solutions can be implemented across different sectors. Here's detailed list of potential solutions.

- Programs for promoting digital literacy and awareness - launched nationwide and local efforts to inform people about the dangers of excessive digital use and to encourage better digital habits. Teach kids about digital wellness, safe internet usage and the psychological effects of social media.
- Regulations of content- increase laws governing digital content to make sure it is appropriate for the target audience and not exploitative, especially when it comes to content that minors and young adult access.
- Encouraging healthy lifestyle programs like physical activity programs and community engagement initiatives.
- Building resilience and coping skills which includes offering workshops and resources on building psychological resilience and effective coping strategies to manage stress related to overload, integrated mindfulness exercises and mental well-being programs in daily routines both at school and workplace.
- public health programs should be launched to promote frequent digital detoxes, in which people abstain from using digital gadgets for a set amount of time in an effort to lower stress and strengthen interpersonal relationships.

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### Lost in the Digital Abyss

**By Arshdeep**

The digital age, as we know it, has been under tight scrutiny recently. We often see a discourse hitting the headlines- How much Internet is too much Internet? Well, we will discuss that in detail in some time. There is no

doubt that the Internet plays a crucial role in our day-to-day lives. From the morning news to online classes, from a toddler to a grandparent, everyone uses the internet. However, every advantageous facet can become a bane if misused.

We observe the same happen with the usage of the internet. Social Media ensures we are always connected. One may wonder if that is a good thing. Everyone has easy access to us; our whereabouts are on their fingers. Not only is that a Privacy breach but it also serves as a great threat to our well-being. Why is it so important for my friends to know what cafe I visited and what I ordered there, if at all? But do I still click a picture before eating at a fancy place? Yes. Do I upload it on my socials? Of course! I even tag the location. Is not this behavior alarming? It can become a safety hazard in no time. We are always on the hunt for new places to visit, new restaurants to eat at, trendy reels to make, and new movies to watch. We are always trying to catch up to our peers and by doing that we miss out on our 'real' life. This disconnect happens each time one comes online. The Internet serves as a distraction from the inner turmoil one is witnessing. Unfortunately, the turmoil only amplifies when one sees all their friends sharing happy moments, victories, professional achievements, partners, and perfect bodies. You start comparing your failures, bad days, and distraught work life, and feel pathetic about yourself. Social media thus ends up disrupting one's daily life.

All the unrealistic beauty standards and display of only the milestones make one feel like a failure. It gives rise to issues like sleep disturbances, prolonged despair, and anxiety often leading to grave problems like Insomnia, Body Dysmorphia, Eating Disorders, and Depression. There are several studies undertaken to assess the correlation between Internet usage and mental health, especially in adolescents. Owing to other contributing factors, a direct and strong relationship cannot be established. Yet, a significant association between Screen time and mental health and well-being has been observed in all of these studies. Excessive screen time impairs one's cognitive function and has a detrimental impact on the attention span. The exposure to Radiation and blue light is believed to be behind this. Children and Adolescents are a vulnerable group that is at high risk currently. They

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are more susceptible to being preoccupied with the Internet and cut off from the world around them. This behavior continues and results in a Sedentary lifestyle, further causing problems like muscle weakness, obesity, and cardiovascular difficulties. Should we stop using the Internet and Social Media altogether? Not at all. We must regulate our usage and pay attention to the intent and desired outcomes of our screen time. Meeting friends in person instead of sending them memes and reels is a far more fulfilling and enriching experience. Instead of habitually bingeing on doom-and-gloom news, one must consciously choose the type of content they are consuming and for what period. In times of boredom and emotional disturbances, reach out for support to your family and friends or join a hobby class, instead of doom scrolling on your smartphone for hours. Some applications and timers help limit your screen time. An accountability partner may help in this regard to keep you in check.

The next time you are overwhelmed, try pursuing grounding exercises, and creative and refreshing activities like coloring and doodling. You should weigh the pros and cons of that extra time and assess what you could do instead of using the Internet. Take that much-needed nap you always complain about. Switch off notifications and use the Do Not Disturb and Airplane Modes when you can. There is no need to be available around the clock. Notice the changes in your health by stepping away from all your electronic devices for a couple of hours. It is also pivotal to maintain healthy boundaries to not let peer pressure exacerbate the situation. Not indulging in temptations catalyzes your recovery from unreasonable dependence on the internet. There is no harm in using it for work or leisure, but regulating one's motives and time spent is of utmost importance. With regulated use, we can all reap the benefits of the Internet to its full potential, without harming ourselves in the process. No technology is valuable enough to replace the significance of human connection. That is something we all must together reflect on.

## Lost In The Digital Abyss : How Much Is Too Much?

By Fizzah Khan

The Oxford dictionary defines the abyss as a deep or seemingly bottomless chasm. As fancy as it may sound to us, it's quite literal, having given a huge chunk of each aspect of life, be it, education, social life and work life into the hands of digitalisation, how often do we really look up from our technology's screens to realise how we have missed our lunch, lost a good amount of time which could've been contributed towards our hobbies and creativity or even with family? If multiple piles of notebooks, essays, work files and documents were to be dumped on to us, how would we be able to cope? Digital media is just that, the only difference being that it is done so in a digital manner consequently making the softness of the soft copies seem much "lightweight" than the hardness of the hard ones. Anything in excess is not good, the same goes with digitalisation of everything these days. It may help us learn new skills, bring a massive change in the community and society as a whole, decrease the use of print media and enhance communication globally [1]. however, what it also brings with it is a dark abyss including addiction, lack of social skills, impatience and so on. As mental well-being has become a topic of great importance recently, these all seem like the surface of everything in regards to the deeper consequences of digitalisation, which tends to affect an individual on a personal level. For instance, digital overload, which is a phenomena that occurs when one spends too much time consuming media through screens which makes it hard to process information that they must've come across, given how research shows that college students multitask at double the frequency,

it's a matter of high concern, especially for the youth [2] and also, that it makes one extremely irritable, fatigued, and has physical symptoms like headache [1]. Several ways have been suggested to deal with high digitalisation, knowing full well that it will not be stopping anytime soon, and may in fact be induced in every industry. Some of these ways involve: setting Intentional Boundaries, Prioritising Quality Over Quantity, Practicing Digital Minimalism, Taking Breaks, Organising Your Digital Space and Staying Mindful. [3]

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### **Mirror Mirror on the Wall, Who's the Fairest of Them All? A Look at the Relationship Between Social Media Usage and Body Image**

**By Shreya Singh**

Social media has become an insidious part of our lives and cannot be ignored in today's hyper-connected world. It holds tremendous potential to impact various parts of our lives such as our relationships, opinions, mental health, etc. One such impact can be seen in its effects on our body image. The hyper-awareness of our appearance has increased in the current world with the advent of image-sharing platforms like Instagram, Facebook, etc. It has led to people constantly comparing themselves to others, causing an acute awareness of their appearance with attention being directed towards their perceived "imperfections".

In a world of changing trends, people's self-esteem and relationships with their bodies are taking a hit. Body image issues are not so much about what we look like but about what we think we look like. It draws our attention to our apparent "flaws". Social media use can spearhead our dissatisfaction with our bodies as it undoubtedly plays a huge role in shaping beauty standards. The content on social media centers on thinness, fairness, and sharp and perfect features as the ideal (Rounsefell et al., 2019). The standard for "beauty" is incredibly narrow and rigid and anyone who does not fit in is made to feel inferior. We are constantly bombarded with images of "ideal beauty" which exacerbate our dissatisfaction with our bodies. We see pictures of models and people with seemingly "perfect" appearances, and this leads to us comparing our bodies to unrealistic body standards. Attempts to conform to such standards can have disastrous consequences on our mental health and body image.

The availability of editing tools and filters has made these concerns worse. We inadvertently end up comparing ourselves to the highly edited pictures we see online. To achieve external validation, there is pressure to present the best version of the self online (Rounsefell et al., 2019). Appearing "normal" on social media

has also become hard work. One such example is the no 'make-up' makeup look trend where you apply make-up to look like you are not wearing any. Another dangerous trend is that of commenting on people's images online. Social media offers anonymity which leads to trolls and cyberbullies, possibly even saying things they would not otherwise do in real life. These factors put a lot of pressure on the kind of content one posts on social media.

Negative ideas about body image can lead to habits like negative self-talk. It can also lead one to engage in dietary patterns that are unhealthy such as fad diets, disordered eating patterns, etc (Rounsefell et al., 2019). In extreme cases, Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) is a likely consequence (Cleveland Clinic, 2023). Adolescents and young people are especially vulnerable to the negative effects of social media (Thai et al., 2023). Adolescence is a developmentally charged period as adolescents go through a lot of changes, be it physiological, emotional, or cognitive, which can make them especially vulnerable.

Not all is bad and social media can also be helpful. Given the democratic nature of social media, anyone can create content and it is not just reserved for models and celebrities. This allows us to look at people on social media that look like us which can provide representation of various body types and not promote unrealistic body standards.

The rise in the body positivity movement on social media is extremely helpful as it encourages acceptance of the self and all body sizes and types (Manning & Mulgrew, 2022). The greater love and appreciation of the self promotes the dismantling of existing rigid dimensions of beauty. Body-positive content includes filter-free photos, no editing, and acceptance of the human body with blemishes, wrinkles, cellulite, body hair, etc. Studies have shown that looking at and engaging with body-positive content can lead to greater body satisfaction (Manning & Mulgrew, 2022). Therefore, the kind of content consumed is instrumental in determining its effects on body image and mental health.

The harmful consequences of social media can be countered through more judicious and conscious usage. Reducing social media usage can help improve people's attitudes towards their appearance (Thai et al., 2023).



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Actively following and engaging with more body-positive content can also be helpful. Another important step is embracing the self and one's self-perceived flaws while working on self-love and acceptance through gratitude journals, practicing mindfulness, etc (Cleveland Clinic, 2023). In case things get too serious, professional help can be sought. Social media undoubtedly is an extremely important part of our lives and we cannot look away from it so using it with care is extremely important to avoid facing its adverse consequences.

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### The Psychological Effects of Information Overload & ways to Combat Them

By Pratiti Banerjee

In today's digital age, we're constantly bombarded with vast amounts of information from various sources such as social media, news outlets, emails, and online platforms. While access to information is undoubtedly beneficial, the phenomenon of information overload can have significant psychological effects on individuals.

#### Understanding Information Overload

Information overload occurs when the amount of information available exceeds an individual's capacity to process it effectively. This overload can lead to feelings of overwhelm, stress, and cognitive fatigue. In a world where information is readily accessible 24/7, individuals may struggle to filter out irrelevant information, leading to difficulty in decision-making, decreased productivity, and a sense of mental clutter.

#### Psychological Effects of Information Overload:

1. Stress and Anxiety: Excessive exposure to information can trigger stress and anxiety responses in individuals. The constant influx of news updates, emails, and notifications can create a sense of urgency and overwhelm, leading to heightened levels of cortisol, the stress hormone.

2. Cognitive Overload: Information overload can overwhelm cognitive resources, leading to cognitive overload. When individuals are bombarded with too much information, their ability to process and retain it diminishes, resulting in decreased concentration, memory lapses, and mental fatigue.

3. Decision Paralysis: When faced with an abundance of choices and information, individuals may experience decision paralysis. The fear of making the wrong decision or missing out on relevant information can lead to indecision and procrastination, hindering productivity and progress.

4. Reduced Creativity: Information overload can stifle creativity and innovation. When the mind is constantly inundated with information, there's less room for divergent thinking and creative problem-solving. Creativity thrives in an environment of mental space and freedom, which can be compromised by information overload.

5. Impaired Attention: Excessive exposure to digital media and information can impair attentional control. Constant multitasking and switching between tasks can lead to attentional deficits, decreased focus, and difficulty sustaining attention on meaningful tasks.

6. Social Comparison and FOMO: Social media platforms contribute to information overload by inundating users with updates from their social networks. This can lead to social comparison and fear of missing out (FOMO), as individuals compare their lives to curated representations on social media, leading to feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction.

#### Strategies to Combat Information Overload:

1. Set Information Boundaries: Establish clear boundaries around your consumption of information. Limit the time spent on social media, news websites, and other sources of information. Designate specific times of the day for checking emails and updates, and avoid constant exposure to digital media.

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2. Practice Mindfulness: Cultivate mindfulness practices to enhance awareness of your thoughts, emotions, and information consumption habits. Mindfulness techniques such as meditation, deep breathing, and mindful listening can help reduce stress and increase mental clarity amidst information overload.

3. Prioritize and Filter Information: Develop effective strategies for prioritizing and filtering information. Focus on consuming information that is relevant to your goals, interests, and values, and filter out distractions and noise. Utilize tools such as email filters, news aggregators, and content curation platforms to streamline your information intake.

4. Manage Digital Devices: Take proactive measures to manage your digital devices and reduce distractions. Turn off non-essential notifications, declutter your digital workspace, and implement screen time limits to prevent excessive usage. Consider using productivity tools and apps that promote focus and concentration.

5. Practice Single-Tasking: Embrace the practice of single-tasking over multitasking. Focus your attention on one task at a time, avoiding the temptation to switch between multiple tasks simultaneously. This can enhance productivity, improve concentration, and reduce cognitive overload.

6. Engage in Digital Detox: Regularly disconnect from digital devices and engage in digital detox activities. Spend time in nature, pursue hobbies and interests offline, and prioritize face-to-face interactions with family and friends. Digital detoxes provide an opportunity to recharge, reflect, and recalibrate amidst the noise of information overload.

7. Seek Information Variety: Instead of passively consuming information, seek variety and diversity in your sources of information. Explore different perspectives, genres, and formats to stimulate curiosity and creativity. Engage in lifelong learning through books, podcasts, documentaries, and educational resources that inspire and inform.

8. Practice Information Triage: Develop skills in

information triage to efficiently process and prioritize incoming information. Quickly assess the relevance and credibility of information, and discard or delegate non-essential tasks and updates. Adopt a proactive approach to information management, focusing on quality over quantity.

9. Promote Digital Literacy: Educate yourself and others about the importance of digital literacy and critical thinking skills. Equip yourself with the knowledge and tools necessary to navigate the digital landscape effectively, discern credible information from misinformation, and protect your mental well-being amidst information overload.

10. Cultivate Resilience: Build resilience to cope with the challenges of information overload. Develop adaptive coping strategies such as positive reframing, seeking social support, and practicing self-care. Cultivate a growth mindset that embraces challenges as opportunities for learning and growth, rather than sources of stress and overwhelm.

### Conclusion

Information overload presents significant psychological challenges in today's digital age, impacting individuals' well-being, productivity, and mental clarity. By understanding the psychological effects of information overload and implementing effective strategies to combat them, individuals can reclaim control over their information consumption habits and cultivate a balanced relationship with digital media. Through mindfulness, prioritization, digital detox, and resilience-building, individuals can navigate the complexities of the information age with greater clarity, focus, and well-being.

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## Lost in the Digital Abyss

By Mariyam

In this world, we are all a little lost some spiritually, some technologically, and some quite literally.

The 21st Century is referred to as the Age of Information Technology or the Silicon Age, there have been unprecedented technological innovations.

When this technological era started, the entire world was predicting what else could be

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invented and how our lives could be made easier and better. But as several technological advancements have been made, the world is now starting to see its adverse effects, especially on our mental health.

The invention of social media has been the biggest contributor to the decline of our mental health. As apps like Instagram, WhatsApp, X, etc. have been developed, our lives have become intertwined with the 'reel' world and disconnected from the real world. Social media was invented so that communication can be made easier for people all around the world where we could post about our lives among our friends, family, and even the world. But this led people to post extravagant and unrealistic lifestyles which set unreal standards, people started exaggerating their lives and showed the world their lavish lifestyles which may or may not be true. Thus, social media has become a fake world where people show off materialistic wealth.

In the world of social media, some people catfish others to scam them. These people either hack existing accounts of users or create fake ones with fake or stolen images. The statistic "One in five internet users say they have been the victim of a catfish" indicates that approximately 20% of individuals who use the internet have experienced being deceived by someone pretending to be another person online, known as being "catfished." Having your identity or pictures stolen is another situation that leads to a tremendous amount of stress among social media users.

Another huge problem that people are dealing with on social media is cyberbullying and harassment. Previously, bullying was confined to online platforms, but now bullies can harass you at any time. India tops the global list for online bullying, with over one-third of its children experiencing harassment on the internet. According to NCRB data, the number of cybercrimes grew by 63.48% from 2018 to 2019. The effects of bullying have serious and lasting impacts on our mental health and wellbeing. Bullying can cause feelings of rejection, isolation, and low self-esteem, and several individuals develop depression and anxiety as a result.

In certain instances, it may escalate into Acute Stress Disorder or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Research has shown that being a victim of bullying can lead to longer-term impacts including interpersonal and sexual violence, substance use, poor social functioning, and poor performance. Even witnessing bullying can impact one's well-being.

Social media doesn't just have harmful effects from its use, it also tends to be highly addictive. This addiction can disrupt many of our life's activities and it has only been promoted with the invention of short-form content such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts. People with a social media addiction can't seem to focus on anything else. All they can think about is scrolling through the tremendous amount of content available to consume online. Numerous studies have demonstrated a link between extensive social media usage, particularly platforms like Facebook, and increased mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, and depression, along with a deterioration in long-term well-being (Eraslan-Capan, 2015; Hong, Huang, Lin & Chiu, 2014; Malik & Khan, 2015; Marino et al., 2017; Pantic, 2014; Shakya & Christakis, 2017; Toker & Baturay, 2016). Research focusing on social media addiction predominantly addresses Facebook addiction (e.g., Andreassen, Torsheim, Brunborg, & Pallesen, 2012; Hong et al., 2014; Koc & Gulyagci, 2013). Furthermore, evidence suggests that social media addiction, especially Facebook addiction, adversely affects academic performance (Huang, 2014; Nida, 2018).

On average, individuals spend two hours and 27 minutes daily on social media. It is estimated that 210 million people globally suffer from social media addiction. More than half of drivers acknowledge using social media while driving. Excessive social media usage among children and teenagers can alter their brain development. Thus, strategies should be followed to curb this addiction before it causes too much harm. We could deal with this addiction in several ways:

We could delete the apps that we spend unnecessary amounts of time on. We could also stay away from our phones as much as possible. This is especially helpful if you can't even see our phone. As the saying goes out of sight, out of mind. We could also enable the 'focus mode' that's available on our phones nowadays. It's basically a 'Do not disturb' sign but instead of your room, it's your phone.

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We could also find hobbies outside of social media that we find interesting or challenging. Such hobbies can be great as they are an escape from social media and also a way for us to engage ourselves, relax and it gives us a sense of accomplishment.

There are several apps available that lock your phone for a certain amount of time to prevent you from using your phone too much.

But all these strategies are useless if you don't have self-control. One of the best ways that we could deal with social media addiction is by practicing self-control. Self-control is frequently described as a mechanism that facilitates the reactive suppression of harmful impulses (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998; Tangney et al., 2004). Recent theories of self-control challenge this perspective, suggesting instead that self-control can involve proactively selecting or altering situations to diminish unwanted impulses (Duckworth, 2011; Duckworth, Gendler, & Gross, 2016; Duckworth & Kern, 2011; Duckworth, Milkman, & Laibson, 2018; Duckworth, White, Matteucci, Shearer, & Gross, 2016; Fujita, 2011; Galla & Duckworth, 2015).

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### Addressing Digital Malaise in the Youth and Fostering Digital Well-being

By **Vartika Arora**

It is a well-known fact that the advent of smartphones and social media platforms turned out to be life altering events in human history.

It is a well-known fact that the advent of smartphones and social media platforms turned out to be life altering events in human history. Seemingly indispensable to the facilitation of our fast-paced lives, it has proved to be a double edged sword over time. In a world where children pick up a smartphone alongside a book, pencil, crayon or a toy, there is an evident and pressing need to prioritise both digital literacy and well-being. Recently, I met a very young child who is yet to grasp the concept of reading and writing in any language but knows how to voice search for videos on YouTube!

Because of my field of study, I have had the chance to interact with people from diverse backgrounds and age groups.

Specifically, I have seen that for many children and adolescents with behavioural issues, screen time is often considered as the root cause by their caregivers. They believe that their children are being sucked into a world which stifles their imagination, innocence and inquisitiveness. Their concerns, of course, are not unwarranted- an acquaintance of mine once heard a psychiatrist friend sarcastically remark that he should put up a framed picture of a smartphone in his clinic. He quipped that it could be considered the major 'source' of his income since, needless to say, many clients came to him with mental health difficulties linked to or exacerbated by excessive smartphone use.

The ill effects of inordinate screen time and social media use on overall health in general and mental health in particular (including but not limited to depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, shortened attention span, heightened boredom, memory problems, disturbed sleep, body image issues, impaired social skills and increased irritability) have been well documented over the years. There have also been studies detailing the adverse impact of increased screen time on school and college students during the COVID-19 pandemic. In my training experience too, many parents have complained that their children's 'problem behaviours', especially centering around restlessness, interpersonal problems or learning difficulties (due to lack of motivation/interest or an inability to concentrate among other reasons) began since the onset of online classes during the pandemic, which involved lack of social interaction, increased screen time, low engagement, limited hands on-learning and extracurricular activities.

The irony of collective disengagement in an increasingly connected world is not lost on most people. Loneliness is seen as a massive epidemic plaguing our 'global village'. Social media has majorly contributed to this global health threat (as declared by the World Health Organization) since it leads to dissatisfaction by fueling social comparison, creating unrealistic beauty standards, reducing in-person interaction and fostering a constant need for approval and validation.

A few days ago, I came across a song by a musician who goes by the stage name egg. Titled Sorry Haha I Fell Asleep (2019), the song's lyrics



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seem to resonate with many adolescents and young adults, highlighting their collective feelings of insecurity and attempts at impression management:

“Sorry I left you on read for the day/ I couldn't think of anything worthwhile to say/ I don't know just yet who you take me to be/ And I don't wanna spoil your impression of me/ Sorry I never quite seem like myself/ It's just the low confidence cards I've been dealt/ I'm willing to sway to any point of view/ That'll make me a bit more appealing to you/ I hate feeling so fake/ Always hiding my feelings/ For someone else's sake/ I'm just afraid that the more that I'm known/ The higher the chance that I'll end up alone.”

In my opinion, the most detrimental impact of social media platforms and instant messaging services is the reduced ability to be fully present in the moment. In the words of American social psychologist Jonathan Haidt, “The phone is an experience blocker. You spend a lot less time in the presence of other people. You're not with your friends. You're sleeping less, you're in nature less, you read fewer books, you don't have time for anything else, you have less of almost everything.” In short, we are experiencing less of life.

While the magnitude of this problem seems to be common knowledge, trying to find a balance between digital engagement and real-world experiences is often elusive for people caught in the midst of it. “Digital detox” and “JOMO (Joy of Missing Out)” are no longer just buzzwords, but the need of the hour. It might be challenging but it is definitely not impossible to set consistent boundaries—knowing when to “switch off” can be achieved with discipline. Intentional use of social media (for example, as an educational tool or connecting with friends) can lead to more mindful consumption, while limiting screen time at least an hour or two before bed can significantly improve one's quality of sleep, which in turn can have positive effects on overall functioning. Additionally, day-to-day monitoring of screen time using technology itself (screen time tracking apps) can help limit it to a specific duration and time of the day (for instance, no screens during meals). Resisting the temptation to constantly

consume ‘content’ can be achieved by disabling notifications, engaging in offline hobbies and participating in group activities with friends and family members. Lastly, parents and caregivers must enforce restricted internet and smartphone access for their children before teenage years and monitor their use of social media (as far as possible) during adolescence to foster healthy physical and socio-emotional development.

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### From Likes to Loneliness: the Cost of Social Media Addiction

By Surabhi

Today's age is the age of social media. No one, from young children of 5 years to adults of over 60 years of age is safe from this trap. The quest for validation from as many people as possible has become synonymous with the pursuit of likes. With each double tap on our pictures on these social platforms we feel a fleeting sense of affirmation, there is a momentary boost provided to our self-esteem. But behind the curtains of the façade of digital popularity, lies a deeper truth: the more we keep chasing the likes, the further we keep drifting away from the genuine human connection.

Social media were introduced to us as a platform for social interaction which can be used to stay connected digitally but today, they have become virtual battlegrounds, where the users compete for the likes and comments in a never-ending race for validation. We very meticulously create our online profiles, filtering out the mundane moments of life and showering with a polished façade. In this relentless pursuit of perfection, it is often seen that people lose sight of their own authentic selves, trading their genuine human connection for the fleeting high of digital appreciation.

But what is the cost one has to provide for the addiction of likes?

As we keep immersing ourselves in this digital abyss, we keep increasing the distance between the world and ourselves. We spend hours and hours scrolling through the feeds, seeking validation from strangers while neglecting the relationships that truly matter. We keep checking our phone each second to see that one new like or comment while

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ignoring the person sitting right in front of us. Our obsession with likes eventually leaves us feeling empty and unfulfilled; trapped in a cycle of craving and disappointment. The study was conducted by University of Pennsylvania in 2018 (University of Pennsylvania. (2018, November 8). Social media use increases depression and loneliness, study finds.) found that limiting social media use to 30 minutes per day led to a significant reduction in loneliness and depression over a course of three weeks compared to a control group that maintained their typical usage. This shows the casual relationship between social media and feelings of loneliness and depression

Moreover, the unrealistic beauty standards perpetuated by social media for all genders only exacerbate our feelings of inadequacy. We are bombarded with images of unattainable perfection, leading to a pervasive sense of body dissatisfaction and stooping self-esteem. We keep comparing ourselves to the airbrushed images and carefully curated lifestyle, measuring our worth in likes and followers. This is supported by the study done by Vogel et al. in 2014 (Vogel, E. A., Rose, J. P., Roberts, L. R., & Eckles, K. (2014).

Social comparison, social media, and self-esteem. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 3(4), 206–222) which suggested that even the passive use of social media that would include just scrolling through feeds without interacting is also associated with negative social comparison, which can lower one's self esteem and increase the feeling of social disconnection and alienation. Moreover, in this mad race of likes and validation often collides with the darker side of online behavior: trolling. Behind the cloak of anonymity, trolls lurk in cyberspace, unleashing hatred on unsuspecting victims.

Their weapon of choice? The comment section, where their toxic rhetoric and mean attacks run rampant. Often it is seen that for a few people social media becomes battleground, where they wage war on anyone who dares to challenge their worldview or question their authority. Often these attacks are without any instigation. They would land themselves on a random person's profile and

if it or the posts they post are not up to the standards of these trolls, the mean comments start. The consequence of trolling can be devastating, leading to cyberbullying, harassment and even psychological trauma for its targets.

But perhaps the most insidious consequence of the growing addiction to social media is the erosion of genuine human connection. We have thousands of followers online showering comments on our filtered pictures, but how many people do we have contact beyond that? Our obsession with likes has left us lonelier than ever, isolated behind the screens and starved for meaningless interaction.

It is high time to break free from the digital abyss and start moving to embrace our humanity. We must resist the allure of likes and reevaluate our priorities. Instead of seeking validation from strangers online on your made-up profile, let's start investing in nurturing authentic relationships with people who really matter and who love and care for the imperfect you. But first we all must embrace imperfections and celebrate the beauty of our unfiltered selves.

It is a world conquered by likes and followers but if we start to reflect in what truly matters: the genuine human connection we might start finding our way back from this dark abyss. It is time to log off and look up, rediscover the joy of being present in the moment. Only in this way we can fight the grasp of the digital abyss and find fulfilment in the richness of real-life connection.