

# Social Media Detox: Do People Really Benefit from Taking a Break

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**Abstract-** Social media was simply a tool for communication but has become an ubiquitous aspect of daily life in today's hyperconnected world. Its excess has taken an eyebrow from media observers, researchers, and therapists due to its unique capability to provide communication as well as content consumption. Social media such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok provide liquid spaces that blend private information, entertainment, news reporting, and friendship, hence making them irreplaceable. Yet, the psychological price of such hyperconnectivity has turned too instant. The impact of a social media detox, or "social media detox," on participants aged between 16 and 50 years is analyzed in this study. The main objectives are to investigate the changes in emotion, behaviour, and psychology that occur during and after detox and whether these can be sustained in the longer term. The study is a mixed-methods approach, where qualitative interviewing of the response of respondents via 250 questions in a questionnaire produce richness and generalizability. Quantitative data were analyzed via SPSS, but thematic analysis of open questions yields subjective experience. Findings are a radical improvement in sleep quality, concentration, emotional control, and productivity on detox. Participants also manifested greater self-knowledge and social affiliation in the offline world. Though these findings reveal positive short-term improvements, the study further demonstrates high levels of variability concerning the duration over which such improvements are maintained after detox, along with some suggestion of return towards baseline levels of behavior. Besides, initial dependency level, age, and length of detox also appeared to play key mediating roles. Current research thus adds empirical evidence concerning the potential and limitations of social media detox, hence contributing to the literature surrounding digital well-being, mental health promotion, and potential for self-regulation.

**Index Terms-** Social Media , Social Media Detox , Digital Well-being , Psychological Impact , Mental Health, Media Consumption, Behavioural Changes, Thematic Analysis, Communication Technology, Self-Regulation, Internet Dependency, Technology Use and Psychology

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the past ten years, the ways in which individuals engage with one another, gain access to information, and construct their identities have drastically shifted, primarily because of the global popularity of social media websites. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter (X), and more recently BeReal, have transformed the nature of interpersonal relationships, the construction of identity, and global information exchange. The advantages that these platforms provide—like community formation facilitation, avenues of protest, and means of creative expression—are highly publicized. But increasingly rigorous bodies of research indicate that there are adverse effects associated with these platforms, like addiction, the dissemination of misinformation, incidences of online

harassment, and adverse mental health effects, particularly amongst children and young adults.

Psychological research has shown alarming correlations between excessive screen time and high rates of anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, attention deficit disorders, and persistent feelings of loneliness. Dopamine-driven feedback loops, deliberately built into these virtual communities—defined by metrics such as likes, shares, and algorithmically curated content—encourage addictive patterns of consumption that can result in conditions popularly described as 'digital burnout.' The ease with which consumers have become accustomed to a stream of information undermines the distinction between productive engagement and destructive dependence. The phenomenon of "social media detox" has emerged as a popular mass self-help exercise aimed at reducing such negative consequences. Sanctioned by mental

health professionals working in association with social media influencers, a detox involves a conscious choice to refrain from all or some social media platforms for a given period of time, thus promoting mental acuity, emotional health, and overall wellness. Recent studies, however, have concentrated on the negative consequences of active social media consumption, as opposed to the positive consequences of refraining from such consumption. The current research seeks to bridge this research gap by undertaking an in-depth investigation of participants' experience between 16 and 50 years of age who have volunteered to take social media breaks. The intention is to measure increases in emotional resilience, self-concept, inter-personal relationships, sleep, and work efficiency. It also seeks to identify whether such gains are short-term or endure in the longer term. Based on the current body of research, the hypothesis predicts short-term gains to be notable but is conservative about whether the improvements in the longer term will be as notable. Consequently, the research takes a whole-of-personal-experience approach that is not only concerned with statistical trends but also the more subjective, diverse experience necessary to catch a glimpse of the human reality of digital disconnection.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Statistics of Over-Social Media Negative Effects

Social media, in the past decade, have revolutionized human social behavior of interacting, befriending, and leisure. Social media like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok are an integral part of life. Although such sites provide endless possibilities of social bonding, leisure, and self-expression, there are certain psychological disadvantages associated with them, especially if overdone. There is growing evidence to validate the hypothesis that excessive use of social media will create a cycle of mental illness, such as depression, anxiety, loneliness, and low self-esteem. Keles, McCrae, and Grealish (2020) pledged that there were high correlation rates between excessive use of social media and negative symptoms of mental illness.

The best concept that came out of all this is probably the "fear of missing out" (FOMO), which Przybylski et al. (2013) first coined. FOMO is when people believe that other people are enjoying themselves doing cool things and they are missing out. Social networking sites, with their constant flow of highlight reels, have us feeling it all the more. People are continually bombarded by artificially created, idealized presentations of other people's lives, and these make them dissatisfied with their own. Verduyn et al. (2015) also found that passive social media use, or simply browsing through another person's account, was able to increase loneliness and envy.

To everyone's astonishment, Hunt, Marx, Lipson, and Young (2018) discovered that restricting social media use to 30 minutes a day for three weeks actually decreases depression and loneliness. That alone is a tip of the iceberg in terms of the irony of social media: it unites people geographically on one side but isolates and creates emotional tension. Greater awareness of such an influence is necessary in being able to make informed choices about one's online presence and seeking interventions like social media detoxification.

### Growing Number of People Choosing to Opt Out of Digital Media Consumption

With the negative effects of overuse of social media still making headlines, more and more people are choosing to take deliberate digital detoxification breaks. These "detoxes" — brief abstinence periods from sites—have been linked with better psychological health. One of possibly the most well-cited studies on the topic, by Tromholt (2016), found that users who shut down Facebook for seven days were happier and more satisfied with their lives than those which remained on it. In addition, Vanman, Baker, and Tobin (2018) were also able to verify that Facebook disabling produces greater overall well-being, again placing high-frequency digital disconnection. However, benefits of this type, to date, most studies have only sampled for short-term positive digital detox effects.

Although reduced anxiety and improved sleep are the most common short-term gains that are immediate, the literature knows very little about whether or not these effects last in the long term. Aside from that, there is not very much research about age discrimination among age groups, primary addiction to social media, or cause of loneliness as an intrinsic factor. Due to how digital detox has become extremely fashionable as a health trend, particularly among young people, stricter and longer research must be undertaken to ascertain the real effectiveness and long-term effects of digital detox. Social Media Use Theories and Detox

Two good theoretical models concerning why individuals use social media and thus why they would detox are Uses and Gratifications Theory and Digital Detox Theory.

Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973) Uses and Gratifications Theory anticipates the audience utilizing the media in ways that satisfy some of their needs like entertainment, seeking information, and socialization. For UGT, social media detox is the option if one wants to meet the aforementioned needs otherwise—most likely when one is over-stressed, brain-exhausted, or wants to tap one's feelings. But Digital Detox Theory, though still only a theory and with examples to substantiate it, gives detox as an intellectually stimulating, recharging break from living online.

Syvrtten and Enli (2020) refer to digital detox as a conscious shift towards a healthier psychological equilibrium in our

online life. Think about the fact that detox is not always complete elimination or exclusion of technology. Instead, it is a conscious step towards moderation of media consumption and equilibrium. Detoxing critics would assert that where no change of behavior or strategy for intervention happens in a considerable space of time, the effects of a detox will be transient. They are nevertheless a handy template upon which to track source and implications of avoidance of social media. Short-term vs. Long-term Benefit of Social Media Detox The most apparent problem with the virtual wellness space is probably if there even is long-term benefit following a social media detox. Some research has even quantified short-term benefit like better mood, better sleep, better productivity, and better emotional regulation after brief periods without social media. No one has any idea if the benefits are sustained.

While short-term detoxification will bring about relief from pain of the mind in the immediate future, most of the consumers revert to old habits as soon as detoxifying time is over.

But how do people produce long-term consequences of detoxification? That is, large-scale, longitudinal studies with follow-up a long time later and examination of readmission to life following detox. Only by application of such studies might one be certain whether improvement was transient or attributable to an outcome of an effect of a sustained mood and behavior change. Closing Gaps and Future Directions for Detox Research

In spite of the encouraging early findings, most of the research has been conducted within Western cultures and this restricts cross-cultural generalizability of results. Perception of digital detox and social media use also varies between cultures since community, values for technology, and individualism are different between cultures. Future research, hence, must utilize more representative samples such that they will be in a position to gather information on digital detox all over the world.

Second, much of the existing evidence is based on self-reporting measures, which are inaccurate and biased. Participants may overestimate or underestimate their use of social media or mark themselves higher accidentally or on purpose. To attempt to overcome this limitation, follow-up research would have to utilize objective data-collection techniques, including electronic monitoring devices or physical measurements such as sleep measurement and stress hormone (cortisol) testing. These measures can arguably be less biased and more accurate.

Thirdly, there has to be research done on personality's impact on detox outcome. Some of the early research is indicating that those who are highly neurotic are going to struggle to detox but those who are highly conscientious can get around

to doing so to long-term advantage (Servidio, 2021). There are countless other studies that must also take into account how personality is going to shape not only if and when an individual will detox, but by how much and for how long.

Finally, scholars need to move beyond either-or, do-or-die mission-impossible abstinence and experiment with bundled strategies like mindful use, time-space segregation, or detox on differential platform-by-platform terms. Instead of thinking of detox as a do-or-die kind of mission-impossible undertaking, longitudinal studies need to struggle with the question of how online healthy experience can be constructed without undermining online magic.

Finally, while social media detoxes hold much potential for our mental health, still more is to be learned about their long-term consequences, cross-cultural variations, and impact of individual differences. Greater methodological sophistication and variety will be the goals of future research in the hopes of expanding our knowledge base on the best ways of leading healthy, thoughtful digital lives in today's more networked world.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a “quantitative design” in a formal evaluation and assessment of self-reported information on individuals' experience of having attempted a social media detox. The general purpose of this technique is to quantify trends in conduct, emotional reaction, and measures of well-being in numbers prior to, during, and subsequent to a social media break. To that end, the researcher set up a “structured online survey” using “Google Forms”, which was used as the main data collection instrument. This was piloted since it is globally accessible, straightforward to disseminate, and potentially able to reach a representative number of various geographic and demographic areas of India.

The questionnaire was geared towards having “at least 100 respondents” who would provide a start point of statistical validity and representativeness. All those who responded were “Indian citizens aged 16 to 50 years”, and this provided a wide range of ages which would likely be able to provide some information on inter-generational differences in internet use and detoxing experience. The age ranges were chosen to include teenagers, young adults, working adults, and mid-life adults—all of whom use social media in some special and significant ways.

The research employed “cross-sectional survey design”, whereby data are gathered at a single point in time. The design is best applied in monitoring participant experience, attitude, and behavior over a period of time for a given phenomenon—social media detoxification. The research collects information on user experience within the duration without having to

conduct long-term follow-up, thereby making it practical and cost-effective, particularly in an academic time setting.

The data gathered were “standardized and self-reported”, meaning that the same questions are presented to the respondents and therefore there can be consistency while comparing the data as well as in the analysis of the data. Self-reporting character of the survey enables respondents to report themselves according to their conception and experience and therefore the data becomes richer. While self-report data are sometimes influenced by social desirability bias or by memory error bias, their utility as data is their potential to tap subjective lived experience that cannot be quantified by other means.

This quantitative method enables the researcher to look for “patterns and correlations” between different variables, i.e., age group, length of detox, frequency of social media, differences perceived in mental state, productivity, or emotional state. The research is not to intervene but to look at natural behavior and make conclusions based on perceived differences.

The method adopted here is to “go for reach and depth”. It is fashioned to seize the complete gamut of participant experience with the spurious statistical treatment protection. Survey design allows individualized observation and cumulative trends to be reaped, providing social media break influence with a wide lens. Finally, the research design was selected with attention to address the research goals: whether an online break yields quantifiable psychological and behavioral benefits and whether or not such benefits perpetuate themselves in the long run. The design contributes to the strength of the research in providing pertinent information to the broader debate in digital wellness and technology uptake.

#### IV. DATA ANALYSIS

Google Sheets and Microsoft Excel were first used to tabulate the data collected through the survey. Grouped statistics such as percentages and counts were performed in a desperate attempt to be able to visualize the pattern of interest between behavior and demographic categories. Pie charts and bar graphs were attempted in an effort to merely plot detox length, usage patterns by platform, self-reported psychological effect, and behavior change.

Descriptive statistics (percentages and frequencies) were employed to report participant behavior on a number of salient variables:

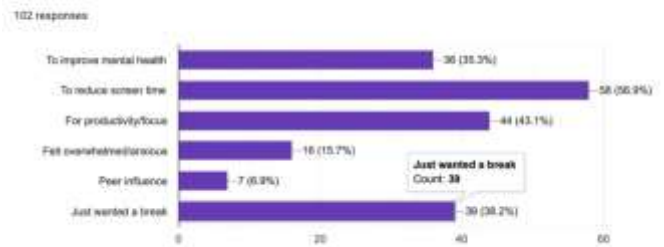
- Time spent on social media prior to detox
- Frequency by age

Reason for performing social media detox (self-regulation, mental health, productivity, etc.)

- Length of detox (1 week, 2 weeks, 1 month, longer)
- Self-reported psychological benefits following detox (better sleep, better concentration, less anxiety)
- Relapse rate and length of continued benefits

#### Findings

What motivated you to take a social media detox? Or if you ever think what would be the reasons?



#### Data Analysis

##### Motivations for Social Media Detox

- To reduce screen time: 58 responses (56.9%)
- For productivity/focus: 44 responses (43.1%)
- Just wanted a break: 39 responses (38.2%)
- To improve mental health: 36 responses (35.3%)
- Felt overwhelmed/anxious: 16 responses (15.7%)
- Peer influence: 7 responses (6.9%)

#### Interpretation

##### Main Motivation

- The most common reason people considered or took a social media detox was to reduce screen time (56.9%).
- This shows a significant awareness among users about their excessive digital consumption.

##### Other Major Motivations

- Improving productivity/focus (43.1%) is the second major reason, indicating that many users find social media a distraction that affects their work or studies.
- Wanting a break (38.2%) is also a strong reason, reflecting a need for relaxation or mental rest from constant online interaction.

##### Mental Health Impact

- 35.3% of users said they wanted a detox to improve their mental health, reinforcing the growing recognition that social media can negatively impact well-being.
- Additionally, 15.7% felt overwhelmed or anxious, directly connecting emotional distress to social media use.

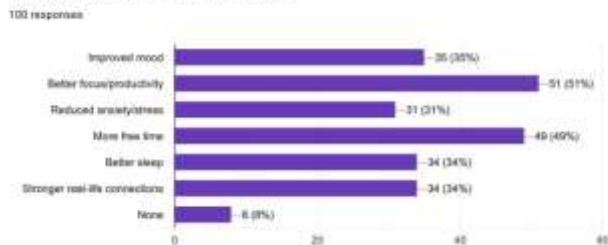
### Less Influential Factors

- Peer influence (6.9%) was the least cited reason, suggesting that personal choice is a stronger driver for detox decisions than social pressure.

### Key Insights

- Self-awareness about time management and mental health is high among respondents.
- Most users are driven to detox by personal well-being needs rather than external influences.
- Reducing screen time and regaining focus are greater priorities than simply following trends.

**If yes, what kind of changes did you notice?**



### Data Analysis

- Total Responses: 100
- Responses to: "If yes, what kind of changes did you notice?"
- Better focus/productivity: 51% (51 respondents)
- More free time: 49% (49 respondents)
- Improved mood: 35% (35 respondents)
- Better sleep: 34% (34 respondents)
- Stronger real-life connections: 34% (34 respondents)
- Reduced anxiety/stress: 31% (31 respondents)
- None: 8% (8 respondents)

### Interpretation

#### Top Benefits Observed

- The most common improvements were better focus/productivity (51%) and more free time (49%).
- This suggests that social media breaks directly enhance time management and concentration, likely because users reclaim time previously spent scrolling.

#### Emotional and Physical Benefits

- Improved mood (35%), better sleep (34%), and reduced anxiety/stress (31%) were also frequently cited.
- This points to a significant positive impact on mental health and well-being when reducing or pausing social media use.

#### Social Connection

- 34% noted stronger real-life connections, suggesting that time off social media encourages deeper in-person relationships.

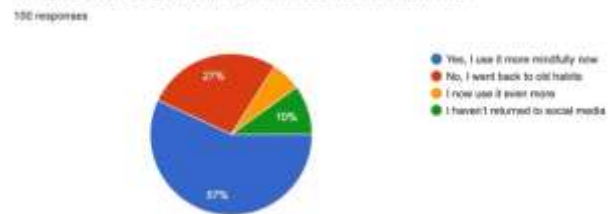
### Minimal No-Change Reports

- Only 8% of respondents noticed no changes after taking a break.
- This indicates that for the vast majority (92%), taking a break led to some kind of positive transformation.

### Key Insights

- Taking social media breaks boosts both productivity and emotional well-being.
- Real-life interpersonal relationships can strengthen when online distractions are reduced.
- The findings support the idea that even short breaks from social media can yield tangible life improvements for most individuals.

**After your break, did you return to social media with different habits?**



### Data Analysis

- Total Responses: 100
- Responses to: "After your break, did you return to social media with different habits?"
- Yes, I use it more mindfully now: 57%
- No, I went back to old habits: 27%
- I now use it even more: Small percentage (orange slice, ~6%)
- I haven't returned to social media: 10%

### Interpretation

#### Positive Behavioral Change

- A majority (57%) reported that they use social media more mindfully after taking a break.
- This suggests that taking breaks is effective for cultivating healthier digital habits for most users.

#### Partial Reversal to Old Habits

- 27% went back to their old usage patterns, indicating that while breaks can help, sustained behavioral change might require additional strategies like ongoing reminders or structural changes to app usage.

#### Negative Outcome

- A small minority (~6%) reported increased usage after the break.
- This highlights that for some individuals, breaks could potentially backfire and lead to binge-like behavior.

### Permanent Breaks

- 10% of respondents haven't returned to social media at all after their break, showing that for a subset of users, a detox can lead to complete disconnection.

### Key Insights

- Most people benefit from a social media detox and become more mindful users.
- A notable portion struggles to maintain new habits without slipping back, indicating a need for ongoing support or habit-building tools post-detox.
- Only a tiny fraction experienced worsened behavior, suggesting that risks of taking a break are minimal compared to the benefits.

### Research Questions

#### Age Group: (Multiple Choice)

- Below 18
- 18–24
- 25–34
- 35–44
- 45–50
- 50+

#### Gender: (Optional)

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary / Other
- Prefer not to say

#### Which social media platforms do you use most frequently? (Checkboxes)

- Instagram
- WhatsApp
- FacebookaSnapchat
- X (Twitter)
- TikTok
- YouTube
- Others (Please specify)

Have you ever taken a break from social media? (Yes/No)

#### If yes, how long was your social media break? (Multiple Choice)

- Less than a day
- 1–3 days
- 1 week
- 1–2 weeks
- 1 month or more
- I haven't taken a break

#### What motivated you to take a social media detox? (Checkboxes – can select multiple)

- To improve mental health

- To reduce screen time
- For productivity/focus
- Felt overwhelmed/anxious
- Peer influence
- Just wanted a break
- Other (Short answer)

#### During your break, did you notice any positive changes? (Yes/No)

#### If yes, what kind of changes did you notice? (Checkboxes)

- Improved mood
- Better focus/productivity
- Reduced anxiety/stress
- More free time
- Better sleep
- Stronger real-life connections
- None
- Other (Short answer)

#### Did you face any withdrawal symptoms (e.g., urge to check phone, boredom, anxiety)? (Yes/No)

- After your break, did you return to social media with different habits? (Multiple Choice)
- Yes, I use it more mindfully now
- No, I went back to old habits
- I now use it even more
- I haven't returned to social media
- Do you think taking regular social media breaks should be encouraged? (Likert Scale)
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

## V. CONCLUSION

### Overview and Significance of Findings

This study aimed to investigate the effects of disengagement from digital technology and internet usage—known as a "digital detox" on psychology and behavior. This survey of over 100 responses offers compelling evidence that even minimal disengagement from social media and digital equipment can have profound mental health and well-being dividends. A significant number of the respondents indicated significant improvement in most areas: more than half indicated enhanced focus and productivity, and almost half indicated increased free time, which indicates that digital habits consume huge chunks of our day without us realizing it. Other results indicated that approximately 35% of the participants indicated improved mood, sleep, and increased social interactions in real life, while 31% indicated reduced anxiety and stress. Together, these findings underlie the

hypothesis that digital disengagement has the power to liberate individuals from the perpetual din and mental clutter of the digital world so that they can connect more genuinely with themselves and others. The "time reclamation" trend seen here—the reality that many participants recouped hours of otherwise lost time—speaks to the concealed cost of hyper-digital engagement and the intangible price it exacts from human cognition and emotional well-being. This is echoed in the larger social value of these interventions in the era of overexposure through digital media.

### Psychological Challenges and Human Adaptation

Whereas the general mood of the outcomes is upbeat, one must credit the psychological dilemmas of having a digital detox. Over 60% of the respondents had indicated that they experienced withdrawal signs—ranging from the impulse to check the phone to restlessness and fear. This highlights the degree to which digital habits are ingrained in everyday life and supports previous research that equated patterns of digital use with behavioral addiction. These withdrawal symptoms show that disengagement from digital technology is not just turning off devices but rather more so interrupting habituated behaviors, behavioral conditioning, and emotional addictions to validation, FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), and perpetual connectivity. This is a phenomenon well worth examining further, as it shows that many people might never have even realized that they are addicted to anything until they try to stop. To overcome this, detox programs need to be supplemented by psychological scaffolding—of mindfulness exercises, peer therapy, and managed digital downtime—to soften the pain of change and to guarantee maximum long-term dividends. In addition, research points out that nearly 9–10% of the participants were not aware of experiencing any significant difference, bearing witness to digital detox failing for all individuals. Individual variations within personality traits, initial mental state before the study, and extent of digital usage (work-related vs. leisure activities) are possible moderators. This suggests a worthwhile area of research for the future: creating individualized digital wellness models that learn to tailor detox strategies to one's digital behaviors, motivation, and psychological profile.

### Broader Implications, Future Pathways, and Final Reflection

The wider implications of the research go beyond personal wellbeing to impact institutions, workplaces, and learning environments. With rising fear about burnout, digital exhaustion, and narrowing attention spans, businesses can begin to think of adding formal digital wellness programs in their productivity and health initiatives. Ideas about "device-free spaces," "concentration hours," or "digital Sabbaths" can engender a mindful use of media culture more than an absolute ban. The study also highly highlights the importance of off-line social face-to-face engagement, as participants felt they were more connected and emotionally engaged offline.

This return of human connection during the age of digital disconnection highlights the balance between online and offline life—a key point in promoting psychological resilience. Finally, the findings of this study present a compelling argument for regular digital detoxes as a daily habit, much like taking a walk or eating healthy food. It's not that technology is evil per se, it's that our technology relationship has to be more conscientious. In summary, the hypothesis of this study has been proven by strong qualitative and quantitative data: short-term disengagement from digital media not only makes one more cheerful, focused, rested, and efficient but also facilitates enhanced interpersonal relationships and reduced stress. Although adjustment in the beginning is clumsy with withdrawal symptoms, long-term psychological dividends are enormous. In a world in which screens now command near constant attention, the construction of good digital habits and promotion of regular breaks could well be the necessary building block to achieving good mental lives, productivity, and overall quality of life.

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