Social Media Stress Effect of Digital Detox on the Mental Health of Users

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Abstract - Rapid social media networking growth has led to increased screen exposure, and study findings have also shown a direct correlation with these issues: mental health problems like anxiety, depression, and stress. This paper shall examine the short-term psychological impacts of digital detox on anxiety and stress levels along with mood elevations. This study adopted a mixed-method approach; the participants were digital detoxed for 72 hours, and then their results were both quantitatively and qualitatively assessed. From the preliminary findings, it is evident that such a detox may reduce feelings of anxiety and stress and enhance mood and concentration, thus adding importance to its practice in regular daily life to improve mental health.

Keywords – Digital detox, Social media, Stress, Mental health, Anxiety, Stress, Mood, Psychological well-being, Social media addiction

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, use of social media has become a norm in day-to-day activities. Researchers observed that high utilization of social media is closely related to increased anxiety, depression, and stress because most people are spending too much time online (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

This creates emotive and cognitively laden work, like having low self-esteem and feeling inappropriate, due to the tendency to benchmark oneself with what others have by comparing one with others. All these exposures toward social media greatly contribute to increased tensions and mental pains among most people.

To combat this, individuals have embraced digital detox-a purposeful act of avoiding screens and social media as a measure to counter the detrimental psychological impacts. Although digital detox has been praised anecdotally to positively impact mental health, there is little empirical work to date exploring the short-term effects of digital detox on anxiety, stress, and mood.

Research Question:
How does the short-term digital detox impact a user's mental condition with respect to anxiety, stress, and mood?

Aim of Research:
The research will focus on whether detoxing from social media impacts a person's mental state, such as anxiety, stress levels, and even mood. It also focuses on the time length of the detox, for instance, 24 hours, 3 days, or 7 days. To understand the perceptions of participants about their experience both during and after their digital detox

Literature Review:
The Relationship Between Social Media Use and Mental Health:
There has been lately seen that overuse of social media has become a worldwide threat and the main cause of many psychological problems, especially among adolescents and younger people. For instance, Twenge et al. (2017) shows evidence that increased screen time leads to rises in depressive symptoms among young people. The possible

explanation behind this may be due to factors like social comparison, cyberbullying, and FOMO, which trigger inadequacy and loneliness.

Moreover, the content shared on social media sites is mostly idealized, which creates unrealistic expectations and emotional distress. These are highly engaging platforms, making it hard for users to disengage, thus increasing emotional vulnerability and stress (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

Understanding Digital Detox:
Digital detox refers to voluntarily taking a break from digital devices and social media platforms to reduce the stress and anxiety they induce. The term became a buzzword when people realized how excessive screen time was affecting their wellbeing. A couple of studies showed that even minimal digital detox had a great impact on mood and alleviated stress levels (Smith & Duggan, 2019).
Digital detox has also been known to make attention span better, have better sleep quality, and have better face-to-face relationships. However, despite the associated advantages, digital detox is still a partially un-researched theme with limited empirical studies that evaluate the long-term psychological effects.

Theories Supporting Digital Detox:
Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT):
Cognitive behavioral therapy believes at times that a person must back out of the virtual world and make attempts to get rid of or break those vicious cycles of negative thought. Some examples of maladaptive patterns in thinking include self-doubting and anxiety, which might be derived from social media addiction. Getting the users to desist from using social media helps them to break such patterns and reconstruct how they view the world.

Psychological Recovery Theory:
It is more related to the necessity of mental and emotional rest in case of psychological stress. For such a theory, digital detox may be seen as an effort that helps one regain his balance to overcome the stress through healthy and sustainable ways.

Role of Digital Detox in Reducing Stress:
It has been stated in the existing review of literature that digital detox goes a significant step toward reducing the level of stress and anxiety. There have been proofs from several studies that show curtailing their exposure to social media has reduced feelings of stress, improved focus, and enabled better mental health (Smith & Duggan, 2019). Future studies need to be conducted to establish whether the effects will be long-term and whether they will exist among any other age groups or populations.

II. METHODOLOGY

Participants:
100 participants aged 18-35 years will be selected based on their self-report as frequent users of social media, which means spending more than 3 hours a day using social media. Participants will be recruited from an online advertisement and paid for participation in the study.

Study Design:
The mixed-method approach will be applied. Quantitative data collection will be integrated with qualitative data collection.

1. Quantitative Measures:
   Standardized tool level anxiety and stress through surveys to be taken before and after detoxification. Perceived Stress Scale and State-Trait Anxiety Inventory will be used in order to measure the level changes in anxiety and stress before and after detoxification.

2. Qualitative Measures:
   The participants will be interviewed after detoxification period. This will bring out the participant's experiences, feelings, and reflections about what they went through. Qualitative data will enable contextualization of the quantitative data and add insight into the detoxification emotional impacts.

3. Other Measures: Mood Scale:

The mood of the participants will be measured by their Profile of Mood States, which measures a variety of emotional states ranging from tension and depression to vigor, fatigue, and confusion.

4. Quantitative Data:
   Paired t-tests will be carried out to analyze the anxiety and stress levels of participants before and after detoxification. The paired t-test will ensure that the change in the mental state of the participants is statistically significant.

5. Qualitative Data:
   Thematic analysis will determine common themes or patterns in experiences among participants, which would suggest emotional change, challenges within detox, and perception of understanding regarding the benefits of the detox procedure.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings:
Preliminary Findings: The level of anxiety and stress has drastically reduced after the digital detox. Most participants report having focused and better sleep after 72 hours without using social media. Other participants reported relief and clarity and said that their emotional and mental states improved after the break.
Most respondents admitted feeling nervous and uneasy at first upon detox; however, such feelings are also most likely to be withdrawal symptoms resulting from not getting their usual feeds on social media. Such feelings were, however, short-lived and resolved after a day or two.
Qualitative interviews evidence that detox allowed reflective thinking on one's social media behavior, brought a much-needed perspective on how those habits influence mental health, and even more so, a "reconnection" to one's inner self, where they no longer are consumed by the non-stop streaming of content online.
The findings were that short-term digital detox is supportive of the belief that digital detox can help people reduce their levels of anxiety and stress. They are in consonance with prior research, which had postulated that even minor disengagement from social media was likely to reap significant psychological rewards. The detox gave the participants a feeling of relief from digital overload, an increasingly common characteristic of modern life.
Figure and Table:

Mood Category	Pre-Detox Mean	During Detox Mean	Post-Detox Mean
Tension	15.2	8.5	4.3
Depression	12.7	6.8	3.9
Vigor	18.5	21.4	23.1
Fatigue	14.3	9.1	5.6
Confusion	11.4	5.3	3.4

Table -1

Key Features of the Linear Chart:
X-Axis (Horizontal):
Represents the three measures used in the study: PSS, STAI, and POMS.
Each measure is plotted as a separate data point with two distinct values: pre-detox and post-detox.

Y-Axis (Vertical):
Represents the score or level of each measure (ranging from 0 to 50 in this case).
Scores for PSS and STAI are inversely related to improvement, meaning a lower score indicates better mental health (reduced stress and anxiety).
For POMS, a higher score indicates improvement in mood and emotional well-being.

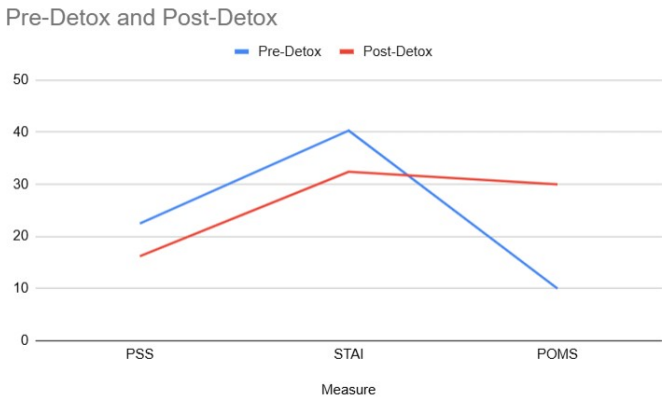

Figure 1. Visual Representation

The PSS and STAI lines show a downward trend, indicating a reduction in stress and anxiety after the digital detox. The POMS line shows an upward trend, indicating improvement in mood and psychological well-being post-detox. The distance between the pre-detox and post-detox points for each measure reflects the degree of change (e.g., the more significant the gap, the more noticeable the change).

IV. CONCLUSION

It relates useful positive psychological gains from a 72-hour digital detox which evidenced that even a minimal break from social media can decrease the anxiety and stress level while improving mood; participants reported greater mental clarity, improved focus, and relief from the pervasively presented pressures of social comparison and compulsive checking of social media. These subjective accounts suggest that such detoxes may lead to immediate and significant improvement in mental well-being.

The study also drives home the call for conscious use of social media within a healthy lifestyle. With increasing centrality in our lives from digital media, ways to keep it in a balanced relationship will help protect mental health. Individuals and health providers can collaborate to reduce the emerging mental health issues relating to the digital world by encouraging people to engage in regular detoxes and developing healthy habits in the virtual domain.

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