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Integrative Perspectives on Digital Addiction: Evidence from Ayurveda and Yoga for Mental Wellbeing

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Abstract


Introduction: The rapid expansion of digital technology has significantly influenced modern lifestyles; however, excessive and unregulated use of smartphones, social media, and other digital devices has emerged as a major concern for mental health. Increasing evidence links digital addiction with stress, anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, reduced concentration, and mental fatigue, particularly among adolescents and young adults. This has created a need to explore integrative approaches for managing digital overuse and its psychological consequences.

Methods: This study is a narrative review of classical Ayurvedic texts, Yogic literature, and contemporary scientific studies on digital addiction, digital detox, and mental health. Relevant peer-reviewed articles and authoritative sources were examined to identify conceptual links and therapeutic insights.

Results: Excessive digital device use has been associated with mental fatigue, emotional imbalance, poor sleep, and reduced concentration, commonly described as digital pollution. Evidence from the reviewed literature suggests that digital detox strategies contribute to the restoration of emotional well-being. Yogic practices such as Asanas, Pranayama, Meditation, and Yoga Nidra have been reported to reduce stress, improve sleep quality, and enhance mental clarity.

Discussion: These findings demonstrate conceptual alignment with Ayurvedic principles of mental balance and mind regulation described in classical texts, supporting the relevance of integrative approaches in addressing mental health challenges related to digital addiction.

Keywords: Digital addiction, Digital detox, Ayurveda, Yoga, Mental health, Technostress

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Introduction

The digital revolution has dramatically transformed communication, work, and daily life. However, excessive use of smartphones, social media, and other digital platforms has increasingly been associated with stress, anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, cognitive strain, and emerging conditions such as digital dementia. [1,2] A substantial proportion of the global population struggles with problematic smartphone use (PSU), a prevalence further amplified by constant notifications, algorithm-driven content, fear of missing out (FOMO), and endless scrolling, which foster compulsive digital habits. [3]

These patterns also influence social relationships, often creating misunderstandings, heightened conflicts, and reduced satisfaction. [4] At the same time, the concept of digital pollution has gained attention: information overload, emotional saturation, cyberbullying, digital hoarding, and the stress of being perpetually online place a significant burden on mental health. [5] Yoga philosophy interprets these disturbances as imbalances in citta (mind-field) and disharmony of the guṇas.

According to Ayurveda, excessive, perverted, or improper utilization of time (kāla), intellect (buddhi), and sense

objects (indriyārtha) constitutes the threefold cause of both psychic and somatic disorders. [6] Unwholesome actions performed due to derangement of intellect (dhi), restraint (dhr̥ti), and memory (smṛti) are collectively described as intellectual error (prāgyaparādha). Ayurveda

conceptualizes mental well-being as a harmonious state of manas, indriya, and ātmā, [7] and explains psychological disturbances through the aggravation of rajas and tamas, errors of intellect, and overuse of the sensory organs (atiyoga of indriyas). Modern patterns of continuous screen exposure closely mirror these classical causes.

By combining digital detox practices with Yogic and Ayurvedic methods for mental regulation, a practical, holistic approach can be developed to address psychological and behavioral challenges associated with contemporary digital lifestyles. [8]

Aims and objectives

1. To evaluate the psychosocial and cognitive effects of excessive digital usage.
2. To examine the role of Yoga in managing digital pollution, promoting self-regulation, and supporting digital well-being.

Methods

This narrative review was conducted by searching electronic

databases including PubMed and Google Scholar. Keywords such as digital addiction, problematic smartphone use, digital detox, Ayurveda, Yoga, and mental health were used. Relevant peer-reviewed articles, classical Ayurvedic texts, and Yogic literature published up to 2025 were reviewed and analyzed.

Excessive and uncontrolled use of digital devices has emerged as a significant contributor to psychological and cognitive disturbances in contemporary society. Continuous exposure to screens, excessive information consumption, and constant sensory stimulation are associated with stress, anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, impaired concentration, and emotional instability. These modern manifestations closely resemble the etiological and pathological explanations of mental disorders described in classical Ayurvedic literature.

Ayurveda identifies improper utilization of time, intellect, and sensory organs as a primary cause of physical and psychological diseases. Prāgyaparādha (intellectual error), defined as impaired judgment leading to unwholesome actions, can be correlated with compulsive smartphone use, excessive social media engagement, and inability to regulate digital behavior. [9,10] Another important concept, asatmya indriyārtha sannikarāṣa, refers to unwholesome

contact between sense organs and their objects. Prolonged exposure of the eyes (cakṣu indriya) and mind (manas) to digital screens represents incompatible sensory engagement, resulting in mental fatigue, irritability, and reduced attention. Similarly, atiyoga of indriyas is evident in prolonged screen time and continuous online engagement, which overburden cognitive functions.

Ayurveda further explains that faulty sensory indulgence leads to the aggravation of rajas and tamas guṇas. [11] Modern scientific literature supports these observations, reporting cognitive overload, emotional dysregulation, and disturbed sleep cycles due to excessive digital exposure. [12] Yogic practices have been shown to restore autonomic balance, reduce stress, improve emotional regulation, and enhance mental clarity, assisting individuals in breaking compulsive digital habits. [13]

Results

Excessive engagement with digital devices, particularly smartphones and social media, has been linked to mental fatigue, emotional imbalance, poor sleep, reduced attention, and impaired cognitive performance. Digital detox strategies, including scheduled screen breaks, mindfulness, and offline activities, demonstrate measurable benefits in attention restoration, emotional regulation, and sleep quality.

Yogic interventions such as āsanas, prāṇāyāma, meditation, and yoga nidrā complement detox strategies by reducing stress hormone levels, enhancing parasympathetic activity, and promoting mental clarity.

Discussion

The findings of this review highlight that digital addiction is a multifaceted psychosocial and neurocognitive phenomenon, extending beyond mere overuse of technology to include significant impacts on emotional regulation, cognition, and mental health. From an Ayurvedic perspective, these disturbances closely correspond with classical concepts such as prāgyaparādha (intellectual error), atiyoga of indriyas (overuse of sense organs), and asatmya indriyārtha sannikaraṣa (incompatible contact between sense organs and objects) [6,9]. Persistent engagement with digital devices, despite awareness of potential harm, reflects impaired judgment and diminished self-regulatory capacity. Continuous exposure to screens, notifications, and online stimuli overwhelms the mind-field (chitta), leading to irritability, distraction, and diminished capacity for sustained attention [1,3].

Aggravation of rajas and tamas explains the emotional and behavioral manifestations of digital addiction. Heightened rajas manifests as

restlessness, anxiety, impatience, hyper-reactivity, and compulsive engagement with digital content, while elevated tamas presents as mental dullness, lethargy, depressive tendencies, and reduced motivation [6,11]. These imbalances disrupt the normal functioning of manovāha srotas and contribute to the development of mānasika vyādhi, affecting both emotional resilience and cognitive processing [7]. Such patterns are further compounded by social pressures, fear of missing out (FOMO), and algorithm-driven reinforcement mechanisms prevalent on digital platforms [2,4].

Modern research reinforces these classical observations, demonstrating that excessive screen time is associated with impaired executive function, reduced working memory, sleep disturbances, and heightened stress reactivity [5,12]. Neurobiological studies suggest that persistent digital engagement may alter reward pathways, attentional networks, and autonomic balance, further entrenching compulsive behaviors [12]. These findings provide a compelling rationale for integrating traditional Ayurvedic insights with contemporary interventions.

Digital detox strategies have been shown to partially restore attention, improve sleep quality, and reduce emotional strain [5,8]. However,

behavioral patterns rooted in habitual responses and cognitive reinforcement often require more structured interventions. In this context, Yogic practices provide a powerful complementary approach. Techniques such as āsanas, prāṇāyāma, meditation, and yoga nidra enhance parasympathetic activity, improve emotional regulation, and cultivate mindfulness, self-awareness, and self-discipline [13]. Regular practice supports gradual disengagement from compulsive digital behaviors and promotes resilience against habitual overstimulation [8,13].

Integrating digital detox with Ayurvedic principles and Yogic practices offers a holistic and sustainable framework for managing digital addiction [6,7,8]. This combined approach addresses not only the behavioral and cognitive dimensions but also the physiological and psychosomatic correlates of overexposure. By restoring balance in the gunas and supporting the healthy functioning of manovāha srotas, individuals can experience long-term improvements in mental clarity, emotional stability, and overall well-being [6,7]. Such integrative strategies are particularly relevant in the modern era, where digital immersion is unavoidable, emphasizing the need for proactive mental health maintenance rather than reactive treatment [1,3].

Conclusion

Digital addiction is a significant mental health concern of the modern era, affecting cognitive, emotional, and behavioral functioning. Ayurvedic concepts provide a useful lens to understand its psychological underpinnings, while Yogic practices offer effective tools for self-regulation and mental restoration. Integrating these traditional approaches with contemporary digital detox strategies offers a holistic pathway to mental clarity, emotional balance, and sustainable digital well-being.

Limitations

This review is narrative and primarily based on literature synthesis. Limitations include the lack of large-scale clinical trials specifically evaluating integrative interventions for digital addiction, heterogeneity in definitions of digital addiction, and variations in digital detox practices across studies. Additionally, most evidence is derived from general stress and wellness research rather than directly from populations with clinically diagnosed digital addiction.

Future Scope

Future research should focus on controlled clinical trials assessing Ayurvedic and Yogic interventions for digital addiction. Standardized protocols combining digital detox, Yoga, and

Ayurvedic practices can be developed for different age groups and psychosocial contexts. Objective assessments, including cognitive, behavioral, and physiological measures, will strengthen evidence. Such studies can bridge

traditional knowledge with modern mental health approaches, supporting sustainable strategies for managing digital overuse and promoting mental well-being.

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