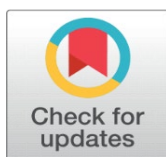
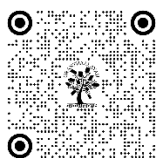


'DIGITAL MINIMALISM' - A STUDY TO FIND OUT WAYS TO MAKE THE BEST USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND MINIMISE ITS ILL-EFFECTS

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ABSTRACT

Digitalisation can be understood as the usage of digital technologies by governments, businesses and in social processes with the objective of improving them. The story of digitalisation begins with the invention of Internet, which at first was an academic research project (1969), turning into a global commercial network in the 1990s. After the invention of Internet, many advanced digital technologies have been developed and many more are continually being developed. Now we have smartphones, smartwatches, advanced computers, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IOT) and many more advanced digital technologies. Today, almost every sector has adopted digital technologies, be it media, healthcare, defence, entertainment, commerce and industry, education, or anything else. Such is the penetration of digital technologies in our daily life that the present age is called 'Digital Age'.

At present whole world is witnessing digital transformation. COVID-19 pandemic has catalysed the digitalisation of the world. Digitalisation has eased our life a lot. Now we can book our travel tickets online, we can consult doctors online; e-shopping, online education and many more things can be done digitally. But together with opportunities, digitalisation has brought with itself innumerable risks which are also to be minimised. Melvin Kranzberg considers technology to be neither good, nor bad, but also not neutral. There has been a dramatic increase in the use of internet, computers, smartphones, and other electronic devices over recent decades, and this has brought with itself not only benefits but also harms. Excessive digital use leads to health issues (both physical and mental), cyberbullying, privacy issues, cyberfrauds, cyberhacking etc.

This research paper thus explores the concept of 'Digital Minimalism', a philosophy of using digital technologies for meaningful purposes rather than for mere entertainment or idle time. The paper also tries to find out ways to minimise the ill-effects of excessive and improper usage of digital technologies. Digitalisation is not only bringing benefits to our societies but also harms, thus through this paper the researcher aims to make the users of digital technologies use them wisely so that it does not harm their daily lives rather it benefits them. For this the researcher reviewed several books, research papers, articles, news, reports, and other related literature. He also utilised survey methods to get an idea about how people use digital technologies. He shared a Google form and got 103 responses. The data and charts generated in the form were used for data analysis. At the end of this paper the researcher found that it is very easy to practice 'Digital Minimalism' and make the best use of digital technologies.

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Keywords: Digital Minimalism, Internet, Digital Technologies, Social Media, Health

1. INTRODUCTION

Digitalisation can be understood as the usage of digital technologies by governments, businesses and in social processes with the objective of improving them. International Telecommunication Union (ITU) gives a data which shows that approximately 530 crore people in the world were using the internet in 2022. Minister of State in the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Rajeev Chandrasekhar, quotes that India has more than 80 crore internet users and another 40 crore people will have access to internet in the coming days, thus internet will be accessible to 120 crore people.

The total number of social media users globally in the year 2022 was 459 crore [Number of worldwide social network users 2027 | Statista. \(2023, February 13\)](#) and for India the number of active social media users was 46.7 crore [India Social Media Statistics \(2023\)](#). A report published by [AFPRelaxnews & AFPRelaxnews. \(2022\)](#) for the month of July, 2022, tells that an internet user on an average spends 6:53 hours online per day, out of which 2:29 hours are spent on social networks worldwide. It also tells that an average of 4.5 hours a day is spent by Generation Z on social networks. According to the Stanford University scholar Roberta Katz "Generation Z is the first generation who have never known the world without the internet, value diversity and find their own unique identities." The above data shows that people's life is becoming digital at a very fast rate and is expected to increase at a faster rate.

A number of studies indicate that Junk food may increase the risk of overweight, obesity or some non-communicable diseases. The term 'Junk food' evolved in the early 1950s and was coined by Michael F. Jacobson of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, in 1972. At present, awareness about junk food, healthy diet has increased around the world. Similarly an awareness of very high level is needed in terms of usage of digital technologies, internet and consumption of online contents in the present age, which has also started to be called as 'Digital age'.

To our rescue has come the philosophy of 'Digital minimalism' which means using digital technologies for our betterment and not for harming our daily life. Just as the problem is with the food we eat and not the plate, in the same way the problem is with the contents on the digital media and not the digital media itself.

The invention of the printing press, radio, TV, internet, and various other digital technologies has prompted apocalyptic fears. Melvin Kranzberg considers technology to be neither good, nor bad, but also not neutral. This means that we can minimise or eliminate the side effects of using digital technologies by being a conscious digital user and using these technologies for genuine reasons. We should not use digital technologies just because we have access to them or because they have been invented. [Burr & Floridi \(2020\)](#)

Safer Internet Day is an initiative of the European Union Safe Borders project started in 2004. On this day people are made aware regarding safe use of internet.

Just as the Neolithic revolution and Industrial revolution had a deep impact in people's lives, the digital transformation has also a high impact on humanity (e.g. Harari, 2018). This has changed people's way of working, consuming, communicating, and learning about the world. They now have a digital life and a digital identity. According to Marshall McLuhan, technologies are developed by human beings to become powerful and speed up their lives. But this race is also bringing side-effects with itself.

2. AIM

Digitalisation is not only bringing benefits to our societies but also harms, thus through this paper the researcher aims to make the users of digital technologies use them wisely so that it does not harm their daily lives rather it benefits them.

3. OBJECTIVES

- To get a detailed knowledge about the philosophy of 'Digital minimalism' and also make the readers of this paper aware about the same.
- To get an idea about how people use digital technologies in their daily lives.
- To know about the ill-effects of excessive and improper use of digital technologies and how to minimise both its usage and ill-effects.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What is Digital minimalism? How can one minimise usage of digital technologies and also its ill-effects?
- How do people use digital technologies in their daily lives?

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

Addiction

Psychologists define addiction as a condition in which a person continuously consumes a substance or performs a behaviour which pleases him, despite its detrimental consequences.

The term 'Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD)' was introduced in the mental health domain in the year 1995. It was coined by U.S psychiatrist Dr. Ivan Goldberg to describe pathological and obsessive computer use among mainstream digital users.

Digital minimalism

21st century is the century of digital innovations. Innovations in the area of digital technologies is taking place at a very fast rate. Side by side these innovations, new concepts like Digital detox, Digital dieting, Digital minimalism, Digital declutter, Digital colonization etc. have also evolved to counter the ill-effects of usage of digital technologies.

According to [Newport \(2019\)](#), 'Digital minimalism' is a philosophy of technology use wherein a person devotes his online time to such activities which are truly helpful for him and happily ignore other things.

Digital minimalists follow this philosophy, and they constantly do cost-benefit analyses. They use a technology till the point where there is no diversion/distraction [Newport \(2019\)](#), Pg. 32. These innovations are used by Digital minimalist not for distraction but to make their lives better.

The Amish (community) started settling in America in the mid-eighteenth century and they try not to adopt any tools introduced after this period. In other words they are an example of Digital Minimalist [Newport \(2019\)](#), Pg. 46.

Newport (2019) in his book also talks about the philosophy of techno-maximalism which means maximum use of technology as it leads to more connections, more information, and more options.

Childhood, adolescence, and digital technologies

Childhood and adolescence are important developmental phases in one's life. In these stages of life, rapid maturing of various brain structures and neurosystems take place. This impacts cognitive functioning, emotion regulation, motivation, and societal behaviour (Paus, Keshavan, and Giedd, 2008). Adolescence phase is a crucial period of development having opportunities for development as well as risks like mental issues Fuhrmann et al. (2015).

According to George & Odgers (2015), now since most of the children use digital technologies, the question is not about their usage of digital technologies. But the question is why do they use, how do they use and what are its effects.

There have been individual research studies in the past two decades which find that increased use of digital technologies among children leads to various mental issues like depression Kim et al. (2010) or addiction Young (1996), to physical health issues like obesity Sisson et al. (2010), 142. However, there are other studies which dispute these claims and tells that digital technologies are beneficial for children Livingstone et al. (2011).

Studies in support/against use of digital technologies

Now, even when we are with our families, we are not really with them as we continuously keep looking at our smartphones, laptops for messages, updates, or work Sullivan (2016). We live in a virtual world leaving the real world. We may add a number of people to our online contacts, but the pleasure, experience, we get being offline with people is very different from these virtual interactions.

The "Goldilocks" hypothesis favours the balanced use of technology so as to have a positive effect on children's mental health Przybylski & Weinstein (2017). Online life has both risks and rewards. On the one hand children get opportunities for self-expression, learning and making friends, while on the other hand spending time online exposes them to risks like harmful content and cyberbullying Livingstone et al. (2011).

Displacement hypothesis suggests that the ill-effects of technology are directly proportional to its usage Neuman (1988). However, there are recent evidence which suggest that the displacement hypothesis may not be accurate today, as recent technological advancements offer several opportunities to children Przybylski & Weinstein (2017). It can also not be objectively determined how much is too much for a given individual. There are people who spend a considerable part of their time being online because it is their hobby. This may not be a problem for these people but it might be a problem for the people around them Cover (2006), Charlton & Danforth (2007), Kardefelt-Winther (2014).

Solitude

Blaise Pascal wrote in the late 17th century that all problems of humanity is because of their inability to quietly sit alone in a room. Benjamin Franklin also acknowledged solitude as a refreshment to a busy mind.

Newport (2019) explains how ipod, then iPhone and the modern internet-connected smartphones have banished the remaining slivers of solitude among

people as solitude deprivation, a state where people rarely live alone with their own thoughts and free from input from other minds.

Over the past two decades, the idea that more connectivity is better than less, has been sold so much that now people fear living alone [Newport \(2019\)](#), 82.

Just as highly processed foods in the mid-twentieth century led to a global health crisis, digital communication tools - a sort of social fast food - are bringing problems with them [Newport \(2019\)](#), 104.

Ways and benefits of Digital minimalism

Going into nature is the best way to digital detoxing. Blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension and the level of 'stress hormones' like cortisol, all decrease faster in natural environment. Green environments reduce depression, anger and aggressiveness and ADHD symptoms in children also reduce when they play in green environments [Kumar \(2016\)](#), 61. You should develop a full-fledged philosophy of technology use within you. This will help you to use these tools for your benefit and not for loss [Newport \(2019\)](#), 10. You don't need to spend less time online, but you have to use it as per your genuine need [Nilekani & Bhojwani \(2022\)](#).

Face-to-face conversation, association with nature, makes us human. If these things are missing from our lives then we would not be a real human [Sullivan \(2016\)](#).

International policy frameworks

The Council of Europe (CoE) and the European Union (EU) have developed policy frameworks to protect children online. Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is the other regional body which is active in this space [How's Life in the Digital Age? Opportunities and Risks of the Digital Transformation for People's Well-being. \(2019\)](#), Pg. 197).

Child Online Protection Initiative (COP) has been launched by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). A number of reports on the safety of children online has been prepared by the UNICEF office of Research-Innocenti. It has also launched the Global Kids Online Research Initiative in partnership with the London School of Economics and Political Science and EU Kids online [How's Life in the Digital Age? Opportunities and Risks of the Digital Transformation for People's Well-being. \(2019\)](#), 197.

The Insafe and INHOPE networks respond to reports of risk through hotlines and helplines [Digitalisation. \(n.d.\)](#).

6. RESEARCH GAP

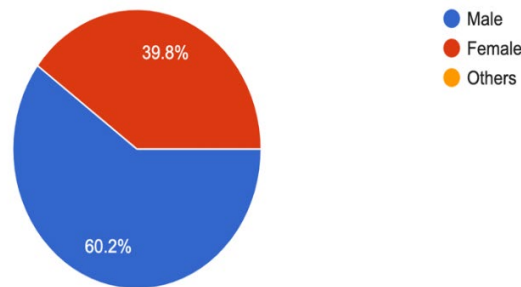
Government of India in the year 2015 launched the **Digital India** programme. After that and with the arrival of COVID-19 in India, its digital transformation is taking place at a very fast speed. So researches should be continuously done so as to make the users (especially common man) of digital technologies more benefits oriented, rather than using them purposelessly. In developed countries this type of researches are done in plenty. But in developing countries like India, where Digital revolution is a comparatively very new phenomenon, continuous researches is needed so as to reap the benefits of digital innovations. [Jalal \(2020\)](#)

7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper utilised mixed method of research. Both primary and secondary data were used. Secondary data were collected by reviewing various books, news articles, reports, research papers etc. Primary data were collected using survey method. A questionnaire was developed in Google forms and circulated randomly (Simple Random Sampling) among fellow scholars, seniors and junior students of the University (Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Lucknow). Some responses were from youths of other universities, which could not be named as the Google form had no such question. In total there were 103 respondents. Although the researcher tried to maximize the number of responses but could not do because the response rate was very low. The summary of the responses was available in the Google form. Also, it had charts prepared on its own on the basis of responses received. These charts were analysed to come to a conclusion.

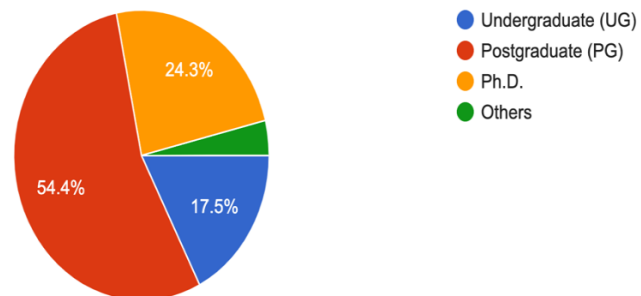
8. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Gender
103 responses



There were 103 respondents in total out of which 39.8% were females and 60.2% males.

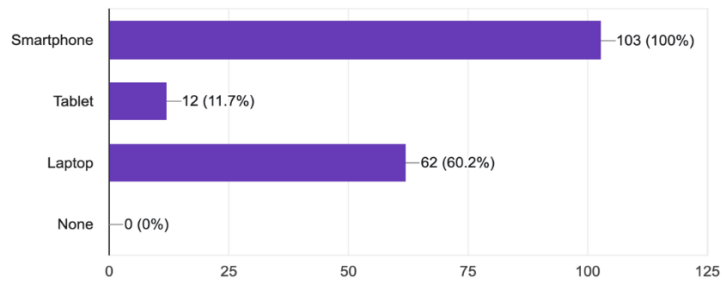
Qualification
103 responses



17.5% of the total respondents were Undergraduate (UG) students, 54.4% were Postgraduate (PG) students and 24.3% were Ph.D. scholars, remaining 3.8% were from 'others' category.

1. Out of the following digital devices which one do you possess ? (You can select more than one)

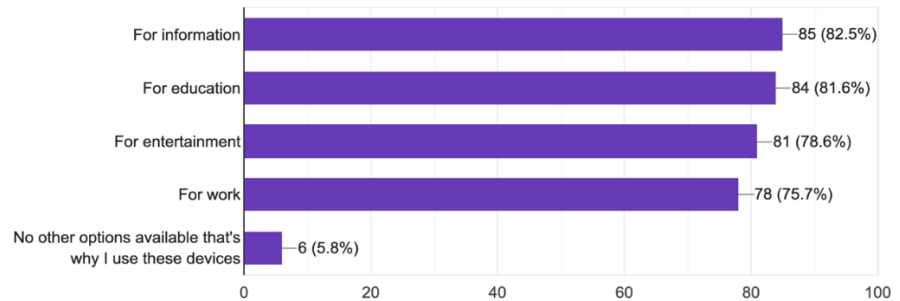
103 responses



All the respondents (103) had smartphones, 12 possessed tablet, 62 had laptop. There were no respondents who did not possess any of the above mentioned digital devices.

3. Why do you use these devices? (You can select more than one)

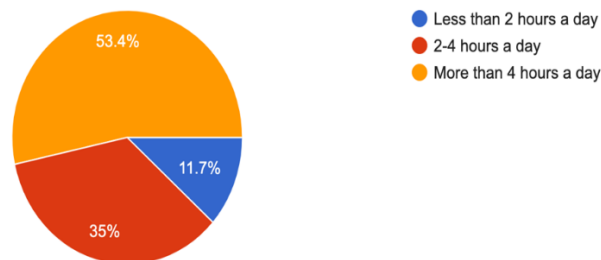
103 responses



82.5% of total respondents used the devices to get information, 81.6% used them for education, 78.6% used these devices for entertainment, 75.7% used these devices for work, 5.8% i.e 6 respondents said that they use these devices because they have no other options.

4. How long do you use internet on these devices?

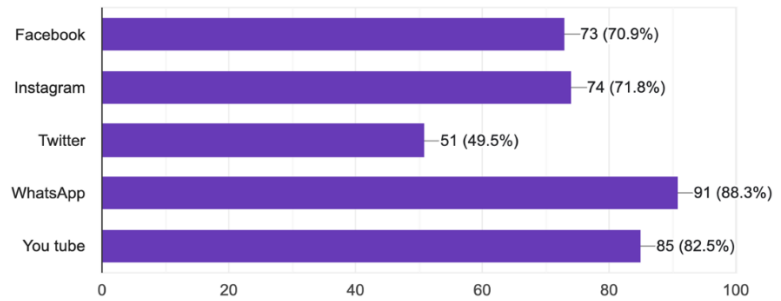
103 responses



53.4% of the total respondents used internet on the devices more than 4 hours a day, 35% used internet between 2-4 hours a day, 11.7% used internet for less than 2 hours a day. Although the responses regarding the time devoted to social media platforms out of the total time spent on internet, had some unclear responses, yet it was found that respondents on an average devoted 4 hours everyday to social media platforms.

5. Out of the following social media platforms which one do you use or have your account on it? (You can select more than one)

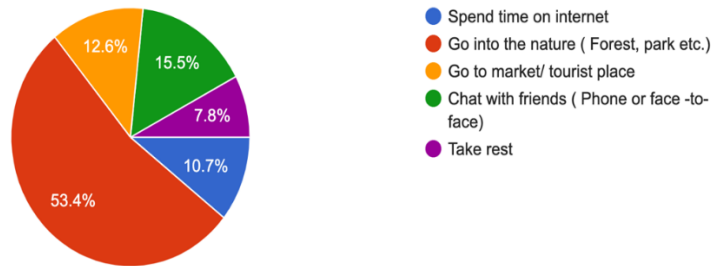
103 responses



The above chart clearly shows that 70.9% of the total respondents used or had accounts on Facebook, 71.8% used Instagram, 49.5% used Twitter, WhatsApp was used by most (88.3%) of the respondents, while YouTube was the second most (82.5%) used social media platform.

7. If you are told to choose out of the following options which one will you prefer?

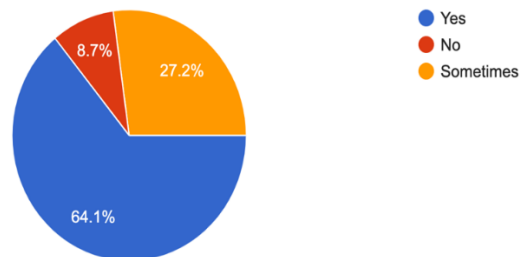
103 responses



According to Chart no. 7, 53.4% responded that they would like to go into nature (forest, park etc.), 12.6% wished to go to market/tourist place, 15.5% said that they would like to chat with friends (phone or face-to-face), 10.7% said that they would spend time on internet, rest of the respondents (7.8%) responded that they would take rest.

8. Do you get bored after being online for some time?

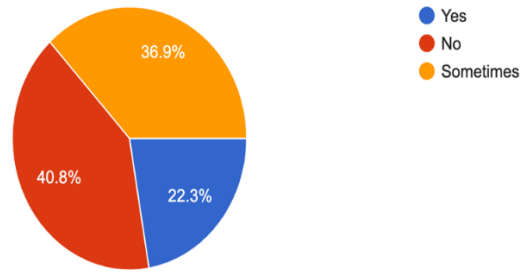
103 responses



According to Chart no. 8, 64.1% respondents said that they get bored after being online for some time, 8.7% responded that they do not get bored, while 27.2% said that they sometimes get bored after being online for some time.

9. Can you imagine your daily life without internet?

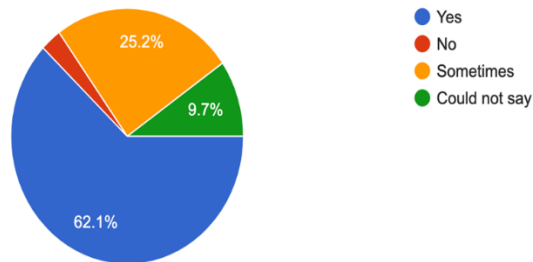
103 responses



40.8% of the total respondents said that they cannot imagine their daily lives without internet, 36.9% said that sometimes they can imagine their daily lives without internet, while 22.3% responded that they can imagine their daily lives without internet.

10. Can you differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate contents available online and consume them accordingly?

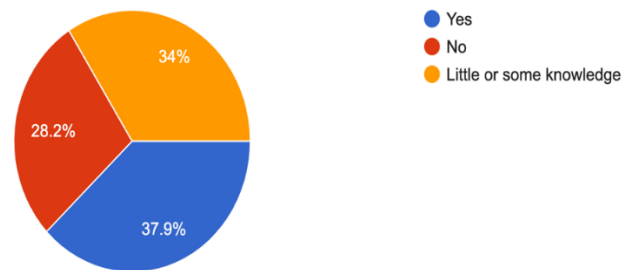
103 responses



According to Chart no. 10, 62.1% respondents said that they can differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate contents available online and consume them accordingly, 9.7% said no, 25.2% responded 'sometimes', while 3% responded 'could not say'.

11. Do you know about the concept of 'Digital Minimalism' ?

103 responses



According to Chart no. 11, 37.9% responded that they know about the concept of 'Digital Minimalism', 28.2% did not know about the concept and the remaining (34%) had little or some knowledge about the concept.

9. FINDINGS

From the data analysis it was found that all the respondents (103) had smartphones. Every respondent had laptop and/or tablet beside smartphones. Most of the respondents (82.5%) used these devices to get information. Thus, we can understand how eager people are or have been made, to look for information. It was also found that 6 (5.8%) respondents used these devices because they didn't have any other options. Thus, it could be inferred that there are people who do not want to use above mentioned digital devices and do so helplessly. It was also found that 53.4% respondents used internet more than 4 hours a day.

The most important finding was that 53.4% respondents preferred going into nature (forest, park etc.), while only 10.7% preferred spending time on internet. Another important finding was that 64.1% respondents said that they get bored after being online for some time, 27.2% said that they sometimes get bored after being online for some time, while only 8.7% responded that they do not get bored. 40.8% respondents said that they cannot imagine their daily life without internet, while 22.3% (almost one-fourth) said that they can live without internet which is a good sign for our society during the time of information overload and excessive dependence on digital technologies. [Schell \(2022\)](#)

62.1% respondents said that they could differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate contents available online and consume them accordingly. This is also a good sign for our society as digital media literacy is the need of the time.

It was found that only 37.9% respondents had knowledge about the concept of 'Digital Minimalism', the remaining (approximately 62%) had no knowledge or little or some knowledge about the concept. Thus, there is a need to make people aware about the concept and hence make them use the digital technologies accordingly.

10. CONCLUSION

International Telecommunication Union (ITU) gives a data which shows that approximately 530 crore people in the world were using the internet in 2022. As the world is going more and more digital, the number of people, majorly youths, who use digital devices, internet, social media is also increasing. The data from the survey also indicates that a majority of the respondents possessed digital devices (smartphones, tablets, laptops). Most of the respondents used these devices to get information. The data also showed that WhatsApp was the most used social media platform followed by You Tube among Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp and You Tube. Youths spend a considerable part of their day playing games, watching porn, web series, using social media and other digital activities which have given rise to a number of mental and physical problems. A number of digital minimalists are of the view that we can minimise or eliminate the side-effects of using digital technologies by being a conscious digital user and using these technologies for genuine reasons. [Paus et al. \(2008\)](#)

'Solitude' which means sitting alone, doing nothing is a way to digital minimalism. Another way of Digital detoxing is going into nature. During the data analysis it was found that 53.4% chose going into nature in comparison to 10.7% respondents who preferred spending time on internet. This shows that people are now fed up with their monotonous digital life which is bringing side-effects in their lives.

The researcher during his study found that tech giants, governments force us to go digital through their policies, propaganda advertisements. They have limited

our choices of enjoying our lives and exploring our surroundings. They just want us to live in a room and keep our eyes and minds glued to our digital screens. Now we do not have playgrounds, ponds, rivers, forests etc. nearby so that we can go to these places and enjoy. Our nature and environment have been damaged by those who want only profit and as a result we are forced to spend our time being digital. Also, from the data it is clear as 64.1% respondents get bored by internet surfing after being online for some time and do so in the absence of other options.

Content creators of webseries, comedy shows etc. are now serving crime, sex, violence, cheap comedy etc., in the name of entertainment and bringing awareness, in our society. But in reality, these are also negatively affecting our society. Thus, governments and authorities should hard handedly deal with these issues.

It is the responsibility of our governments to provide options other than encouraging and supporting digitalisation because our digital lives is creating problems for us because of the abundance of illicit and inappropriate digital contents. Also, users should be digitally literate, and they should be taught how to minimise digital usage in their lives for their good.

11. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There were some very good books related to the topic of the research paper but they were available online but with pay and their hardcopies were very expensive, thus I could not purchase those books. If those books were reviewed than a more latest and advanced information would have been gathered. The other limitation of this research is that the number of respondents who filled the questionnaire was low i.e there were 103 respondents. But this number is not very small and is considerable.

The researcher wants other talented and enthusiastic researchers to write papers which compares the 'Digital life' and 'Natural life' and highlight the ill-effects of excessive use of digital technologies with solid proofs and hence make users digital literates.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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