From 'Dieting' to 'Digital Dieting': A Study to Find Out Ways to Being Truly Healthy in a Digital World

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Abstract: Invention of Internet paved way for digitalisation. Internet started its journey in the year 1969 as an educational research project, but was available for the common people all around the world in the 1990s. 21st century is witnessing a number of digital innovations and there are many more to come. Today we have digital technologies like smartphones, advanced laptops, Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT) and many others with us. It is because of the abundance of digital technologies that it is said that we are living in a 'digital era'.

Digital technologies have brought comforts in our lives. We book our travel tickets online, perform e-commerce, get diagnosed by doctors online, learn and teach digitally and perform other online activities. But together with benefits/opportunities, digital innovations have brought with itself several demerits/challenges like physical and mental health issues, privacy issues, cyberbullying, cyber frauds, cyber hacking etc.

In the present times those who care about their health think only of consuming healthy food and dieting. They only think of healthy diet for their stomach. But most of the people ignore their mental health. They do not think of a healthy diet for their minds, which are the central processing units (CPUs) of their computers (bodies). That is why they watch comedy shows, movies, reels, news, YouTube videos, spend time on Facebook, WhatsApp, read news on a

regular basis, just to entertain, inform and educate themselves. But in order to inform, educate and entertain themselves they are disturbing their own lives. The producer of such contents, in the name of entertainment, information and education, are making our daily lives problematic.

This research paper has thus tried to find and suggest ways to practice digital dieting. To fulfill this objective researcher has utilised descriptive research method. He reviewed several reports, research papers, news articles, features and many more documents related to the topic. After reviewing these documents he found that it is very necessary to practice digital dieting in one's life and there are several ways to do this which will make people truly healthy.

Keywords: Digital Dieting, Illicit, Inappropriate, Content, Creator

Introduction

21st century has seen a number of digital innovations. Internet started its journey in the year 1969 as an educational research project, but was available for the common people all around the world in the 1990s. With its invention and globalisation, the rate of digital innovations has increased manifold. Now we have smartphones, tablets, smartwatches, ebooks, social media, Internet of Things (IoT), cloud computing, Over the Top (OTT) platforms, Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR) and many more digital innovations. These technologies have eased our life a lot. Using internet and digital technologies we can book travel tickets, order food, read ebooks, watch movies, webseries; chat with far-off friends through text, video-calls; perform monetary transactions and various other activities are also performed.

Governments and non-government organisations, education, businesses, space, health, travel, media and entertainment industry and many other sectors have gone digital. According to a report by the World Advertising Research Center, the daily global online content consumption - through smartphones, televisions, computers, tablets, and social media - more than doubled in 2020. Covid-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst in the process of digitalisation.

According to a data by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), about 5.3 billion people, which is two-third of the world's population were using internet in the year 2022. Union Minister of State for Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), Rajeev Chandrasekhar said that India will be the largest digitally connected country in the world with 1.2 billion internet users (Economic Times, July 8, 2023). In the year 2022, 4.59 billion people were using social media (statista.com), and Indian active social media users numbered to 467 million (theglobalstatistics.com). A report by the website **www.forbesindia.com** for the month of July, 2022 mentions that an internet user on an average spends 6 hours, 53 minutes online per day out of which 2 hours and 29 minutes are spent on social networks worldwide. It also mentions that an average of 4.5 hours a day is spent by Generation Z on social networks (Kumar & Nath, 2024).

Digitalisation has not only brought with itself benefits. It also has harmful effects on people and society. In this context Melvin Kranzberg says that technology is neither good, nor bad, nor is it neutral. To make us use digital technologies in such a way so as to minimise its ill-effects and maximise benefits has come the philosophy of 'Digital dieting'. Most of the people using digital technologies do not use it as per their true need. They use it just for time pass, entertainment, unnecessary knowledge and information. It is possible that there are people among these who know about 'Dieting' but do not know about 'Digital dieting' or very few know about it. Also if people know about it, they do not practice it in their daily lives.

As present age is called the 'Digital Age' time has come to practice 'Digital dieting' which means consuming online contents (texts, images, videos etc.) which are not illicit, criminal, violent, sexual and useless. 'Dieting' means restricting or limiting the consumption of pleasurable foods and drinks. But if we eat green vegetables, fish, meat, milk, egg, fruits and other healthy items and feed our brain garbage contents available online then how can we be truly healthy. Just as there exists junk food, similarly there exist junk contents on internet which should never be consumed. We cannot be truly healthy if we consume garbage contents on a daily basis. Our brain which is the Central processing unit (CPU) of our bodies should be kept healthy to be truly

healthy which can be done by consuming healthy and useful contents and not garbage contents. The more our world is developing, going digital, the more workload common people have upon them. Now we have to utilize our senses while we are online with the same rigour as the amount of illicit contents available online. We cannot surrender before online/digital demon. This paper has thus tried to highlight the negative impacts of consuming illicit/inappropriate contents available online and also suggests ways to practice 'Digital dieting'.

Objectives

- To find out the demerits of excessive and improper use of digital technologies.
- To find and suggest ways to practice 'Digital dieting' in the present 'Digital age' so as to keep oneself truly healthy.

Research methodology

The researcher employed exploratory and descriptive method of research. He gathered second hand data by reviewing various reports, articles, research papers and various other materials related to the topic. This paper has focussed on consumption of illicit/inappropriate contents in text, images, videos or other formats available online.

Literature review

Digitalisation/Digital Revolution- According to Harari (2018), Digital revolution has been described many a times as the third revolutionary moment in mankind's history, after the Neolithic revolution and the Industrial revolution. In a relatively small number of years it has changed people's way of working, consuming, communicating and learning about the world. Now people have a digital life and a digital identity (Kumar & Nath, 2024).

A survey found that as a response to COVID-19, the adoption of digital technologies have speeded up by many years, and these changes are here to stay for a long time (McKinsey & Company, 2020). COVID-19 turned digitalisation into a "must have" thing from "nice to have". Various organizations adopted digitalisation to keep their operations running (Deloitte, 2020).

World has gained a lot from digitalisation and digital living. But the side-effects of digitalisation should also be revealed so as to make the best out of digital technologies (Hassani et al., 2021).

Wave of contents available online which are vulgar, criminal, sexual, violent or illicit in other ways

OTT platforms and webseries have revolutionized our way of consuming entertainment. OTT platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney+, Sony Liv etc. have become very popular due to their convenience and diverse offerings. A data from the **Statista** shows that the number of OTT video users has increased to 3.5 billion in 2023 from 2.4 billion in 2018. It is expected that this number will reach 4.2 billion in 2027. The Nielsen report tells that over 80% of adults aged 18-34 start their search for video content on streaming platforms which signifies a significant shift away from traditional TV viewing.

In his study on impact of webseries and streaming content on Indian youth, Dhiman and Malik (2022) found that youth watched online content because of the story, theme, dialogue, sex scenes or abusive language used in the content. It was also found that out of the total respondents, 62.40% agreed that the webseries are changing the language and behaviour of the youth.

Ajay amitabh suman (2021) in his blog on Times of India refers to a saying, "What a man sees, he thinks. What he thinks, he talks. What he talks, he does and what he does, he becomes." Here he writes that teenagers today have easy access to violent and sexual contents available online on OTT platforms. These contents are seen by teenagers without any restriction which has led to distortion of young minds with feelings of sex and violence. He views that Indian government should formulate some laws and regulations for materials streamed on OTT platforms, otherwise these will have harmful effects on the development of the character of young generation.

Nowadays comedy shows are also going vulgar and obscene. According to Sonia rakkar (Comedian), today's comedy shows are very vulgar and obscene. Another Comedian Gopi bhalla is of the view that today there is a lot of vulgarity in comedy shows and such shows should be devoid of vulgarity as even kids watch them. He says that these shows should be family friendly.

Nowadays people consume reels and short videos on You Tube, Instagram and other apps. In this relation Maryanne Pais, Head of the Department of Psychology, St. Joseph's College of Commerce, Bengaluru, says that shorter attention span videos likely affects cognitive functioning including memory, language and motor development.

Raunak jain (2023) in his article says that excessive consumption of reels is affecting people's productivity and mental well-being. It also affects one's ability to concentrate, which leads to social withdrawl and erratic mood swings.

Effects of Digital technologies in our lives

Frequent digital technology use has both negative and positive impacts on brain function and behaviour. High attention-deficit symptoms, impaired emotional and social intelligence, technology addiction, social isolation, impaired brain development and disrupted sleep are some of the harmful effects of extensive screen time and technology use. Positive impacts of digital technology use includes improved memory, multitasking skills, fluid intelligence and other cognitive abilities (Small, Gary W. et al., 2020).

Active use which establishes meaningful social connections can affect users of digital technologies positively. While passive use has likely negative effects (Dienlin & Johannes, 2022). Digital transformation has brought both opportunities and risks which do not go together. It is responsible for digital divide. Human activities have become more efficient because of digital technologies. But extreme use of these technologies may affect our mental health. So, a safe digital environment is a pre-condition to get benefitted from digital technologies (OECD, 2019).

At a time when smartphones and internet is widely used by children and young people, it happens most of the time that they come across inappropriate contents accidentally or intentionally, before they reach the recommended age. These contents may be having mild bad language or extreme illegal graphic videos. News contents like war imagery also negatively impact some children or young people. Consumption of these inappropriate contents can have long lasting negative impacts on children and young people (Inappropriate or Offensive Content - Hwb, n.d.).

Various studies have found that languages and actions used in movies, serials, webseries, cartoons etc. affect every group of people, be it children, young people, adults or older people, the degree of which depends on the amount of contents consumed and the maturity level of the the audience.

How to minimise the harms of using digital technologies

We are told, from the last two decades that more connectivity is better than less. Hence we do not like being alone (Newport, 2019, Pg. 82). In his book Cal Newport quotes Blaise Pascal "All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone" and suggests that spending time alone and cut off from the digital contents and technologies, when we do not really need it, is helpful to prevent us from the harms of digital life.

Spending time in natural environment is the best way to detox. Various studies show that blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension, and the level of cortisol (stress hormone) and other stress hormones decrease faster in natural settings. Spending time in green environment help reduce depression, anger and aggressiveness and ADHD symptoms in children (Kumar, 2016, Pg. 61).

According to Professor Alison Park of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), United Kingdom, "The social sciences have a key role to play in ensuring that digital technologies work for people, society and the economy, by building our understanding of how we can use these technologies in ways that maximise the benefits and minimise their harm". In context of usage of digital technologies sociologist Ruha Benjamin says, 'remember to imagine

and craft the worlds you cannot live without just as you dismantle the ones you cannot live within'. Here she means to say that we have to learn to use digital technologies as per our genuine needs.

Features offered by various search engines like Google, such as **Parental Controls**, **Safe Search** help parents manage their children's app, devices and accounts and also help us manage explicit contents in our search results like sexual activity and graphic violence. **Firewall**, which is a network safety device to monitor incoming and outgoing network traffic and decide whether to allow or block specific traffic based on a defined set of security rules, can be used to keep away illicit/inappropriate contents.

Safer Internet Day is celebrated every year in the month of February. It is an initiative of the European Union (EU). This day aims to bring awareness about safer and better internet for all and especially children and young people. There are several other programmes which are run by various bodies to make online users digitally literate.

Findings and conclusion

The data by Statista, for the month of July 2023, shows that 64.6% of the global population were using internet and 59.9% of the world's population were using social media. This data shows us the vast reach of internet and social media. Thus it becomes very important for national governments as well as international organizations like United Nations (UN) to strictly deal with the issue of illicit/inappropriate contents on internet, as consumption of such contents is bringing negative impacts in our societies.

Today people consume fake news, crime news, knowledge from Whatsapp University (A synonym for baseless information circulated on Whatsapp), contents involving crime, sex, violence like in several OTT webseries, movies and crime shows like Crime Patrol and Savdhaan India : India Fights Back, and many more such contents. They watch these contents for entertainment and awareness, but among these people, there are people who imitate these behaviours and actions in their daily lives. Various news reports show that the culprits involved

in crimes were inspired from such contents. It is not that the people who are consuming these contents are only responsible for the negative impacts of such contents and the creators are innocent. In my view creators are the ones who are really responsible for the negative impacts on the society.

In 1962, E.M. Rogers gave a theory called 'Diffusion of Innovation (DOI)' theory, which explains how over time, an idea or product gains momentum and diffuses (spreads) through a specific population or social system. Here Rogers talks about positive ideas and products. But when we talk of consumption of illicit/inappropriate contents on a regular basis by a high percentage of global population then we should also talk of its negative impacts on people. These contents are distortions (disfigurement) of our society which diffuses (spreads) in our society and this process can also be called 'Diffusion of Distortions'.

It was found during the review of literature that spending time in natural settings, spending time alone without any digital devices and free from inputs from other minds, playing outdoor games and also indoor games like chess, carrom, ludo etc. which are not digital, help in keeping away from the excessive digital usage. Also features like **Parental Controls**, **Safe Search** and **Firewall** help in keeping away illicit/inappropriate contents. Parents should adopt these practices and teach their children the same.

Lastly it could be said that in order to deal with the negative consequences of such contents, creators of such contents should be strictly instructed to do away with such contents. The governments should strictly adhere to the rules and regulations made to deal with such contents. It should also make strong laws to deal with such digital contents.

Limitations and Recommendations

Due to limited time the Researcher reviewed only certain materials related to the topic. Also he could not conduct a survey regarding digital usage habits of people and its impact on them. If these were done than a more detailed information could have been gained. Thus the

researcher recommends that a more detailed study should be conducted by another researcher using survey method.

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