

# Addressing Digital Addiction Among University Students: A Study of Digital Detox Techniques in Smartphone and Social Media Addiction

Üniversite Öğrencileri Arasında Dijital Bağımlılıkla Mücadele: Akıllı Telefon ve Sosyal Medya Bağımlılığında Dijital Detoks Tekniklerine İlişkin Bir Çalışma

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## ABSTRACT

While new media offers opportunities that simplify our lives, it also poses the risk of making us dependent on digital technologies. Problematic use of digital technologies can lead to digital addiction, which in turn can result in physical, mental, and social problems. The primary research problem of this study is to understand university students' awareness of and practical use of digital detox methods that they can implement on their own within the context of digital addiction. Additionally, the study aims to determine whether young people perceive personal methods like digital detox as a viable solution to this significant issue. Additionally, digital detox methods that individuals can implement based on their own willpower and resources were explored. In this study, which employed both quantitative and qualitative research techniques, the addiction levels of 141 out of 240 undergraduate students enrolled in the Radio, Television, and Cinema Department of Mersin University's Faculty of Communication for the 2021-2022 spring semester were measured through an online survey. In the second stage, focus group interviews were conducted with 23 students, categorized into three separate groups based on their addiction levels, to discuss their views on both digital addiction and digital detox practices. The interviews revealed that a majority of the students experienced withdrawal symptoms, indicative of digital addiction, and manifested this in their behavior.

**Keywords:** New Media, Digital Addiction, Types of Digital Addiction Digital Detox, Digital Detox Practices.

## ÖZ

Yeni medya sunduğu olanaklarla hayatımızı kolaylaştırmanın yanı sıra bizleri dijital teknolojilere bağımlı bireyler haline getirme tehlikesiyle de karşı karşıya bırakmaktadır. Dijital teknolojilerin sorunlu kullanımı dijital bağımlılığa, dijital bağımlılık ise fiziksel, zihinsel ve sosyal problemlere neden olabilmektedir. Bu çalışmanın temel sorunsalı dijital bağımlılık kapsamında üniversite öğrencilerinin kendi iradeleri ve imkânları dâhilinde uygulayabileceği dijital detoks yöntemleri hakkındaki farkındalıklarını ve kullanım pratiklerini anlamak ayrıca dijital detoks gibi kişisel yöntemlerin gençler tarafından bu önemli soruna dair bir çözüm yolu olarak görülüp görülmediğini ortaya koyabilmektir. Nicel ve nitel araştırma tekniklerinin bir arada kullanıldığı çalışmada ilk olarak; Mersin Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi Radyo, Televizyon ve Sinema Bölümüne 2021-2022 bahar döneminde kayıt yaptıran lisans düzeyindeki 240 öğrenciden 141'inin bağımlılık seviyeleri çevrimiçi anket ile ölçülmüştür. İkinci aşamada, bağımlılık seviyelerine göre 23 öğrenci ile 3 ayrı grup oluşturularak odak grup görüşmesi yapılmış hem dijital bağımlılık hem de dijital detoks uygulamaları konusundaki fikirleri ele alınmıştır. Yapılan görüşmeler sonucunda dijital bağımlılık konusundaki farkındalıkları incelenmiş ve deneyimledikleri dijital detoks yöntemleri ortaya konmuştur. Odak grup görüşmesi yapılan öğrencilerin büyük bölümünün dijital bağımlılık belirtileri olan yoksunlukları yaşadıkları ve bu durumu davranışlarına yansıtıkları anlaşılmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Yeni Medya, Dijital Bağımlılık, Dijital Bağımlılık Türleri, Dijital Detoks, Dijital Detoks Pratikleri.



## Introduction

With the rise of new media, Van Dijk (2016), who defines the 21st century as the age of networks and depicts these networks as the nervous system of our society, emphasizes that some values are at risk as a result of the intense use of new media. In this context, inequality arising from access to and use of new media is highlighted, stating that certain segments of society benefit more intensively from the opportunities of technology. Thus, existing social injustices deepen, and social equality is endangered. Consequently, democracy is also stated to be at risk, as technology can be controlled from the top, not granting the limited freedom to new media users as believed. While impression diversity increases for users through new media, the lack of contextual presentation of this diversity turns information richness into an information overload. Another risk pointed out by Van Dijk constitutes the main theme of this study. With the development and intensive use of communication technologies, the quantity and quality of social relationships have also transformed. On one hand, new media seems to increase the opportunity for communication and interaction. However, on the other hand, “some individuals may opt for communication solely through computers and phones, preferring to communicate only with their chosen social circles, thus reducing the chances of social relationships.” (Van Dijk, 2016:15).

Digitalization, while offering new opportunities to facilitate our lives, expedite work processes, and enhance socialization, also leads to various risks and problems. In the era of new media, the intensive use of devices such as computers, smartphones, tablets, internet-based applications, digital games, social media platforms, and similar digital practices can result in the emergence of social, physical, and psychological issues. Researchers determine the boundary of technology addiction by assessing whether individuals use such devices and applications to an extent that it affects their attention and disrupts their tasks. What matters is not how much time one spends online but rather the extent to which their daily life is interrupted

and their productivity is affected. Digital addiction impacts individuals' communication quality, mental well-being, and social lives. For instance, internet addiction, considered a subtype of digital addiction, is defined by the American Psychological Association (2024) as “a behavioral pattern characterized by excessive or compulsive online and offline computer use, resulting in distress and impairment.”

In order to address the problems stemming from the excessive or uncontrolled use of new media devices and associated applications, new methods are being explored. One such method employed to prevent digital addiction and minimize its adverse effects is digital detox. Digital detox, also referred to as digital minimalism (Newport, 2019; Aylsworth&Castro, 2024), is generally defined as a practice of setting boundaries and purging that is deemed necessary for individuals' physical and mental well-being, communication skills and productivity (Gaafar, 2021). The goal of digital detox is to help individuals develop the habit of controlling their media consumption and behaviors, thereby serving as an effective strategy against digital addictions (Syvertsen, 2020).

This study aims to understand university students' levels of digital addiction, their basic approaches to this concept, and their awareness of digital detox methods offered as a solution to digital addiction. The main research problem is to determine how aware students are of digital detox methods they can apply independently and to what extent they use these methods in practice. Additionally, the study examines whether young people view personal methods like digital detox as a viable solution to this significant issue. The research is limited to undergraduate students from the Radio, Television, and Cinema Department at Mersin University's Faculty of Communication, chosen using purposive sampling. The selection is based on these students' engagement with courses related to new media and digital technologies.

Initially, the study employs a quantitative research method, using a survey technique. A control group

of 57 randomly selected individuals was first given an online survey to test the reliability and comprehensibility of the scale items. Subsequently, the digital addiction levels of 141 students were measured using 18 items from Esenyel's (2017) study. In the second phase, after analyzing the data, a focus group study was conducted to assess awareness of digital detox and digital addiction. The focus group discussions highlighted smartphone and social media addiction, and students were asked whether they used digital detox methods against such addictions and if they considered these methods effective in combating digital addiction.

### **Digital Addiction in the Era of New Media**

Addiction, in its most general sense, is when an individual becomes excessively attached to any action, object, environment, or person, believing they cannot function without it, feeling distressed in its absence, and struggling to control it. Addiction is a condition that can have detrimental psychological, physiological, and economic consequences for individuals (Arklan et al., 2020). With the advancement of digital technologies, computers, the internet, smartphones, tablets, and other digital devices have become integral parts of our lives. However, concurrently, the extensive use of new media has led to various forms of addiction.

Kuss and Griffiths (2020) examined therapists' perspectives to categorize the factors that could pose risks for digital addiction into individual, situational, and structural categories. Individual factors include elements such as age, gender, and individual profile. For example, early exposure can lead to social and developmental adversities in children and young adolescents, thereby reinforcing digital addiction. Those who typically experience digital addiction issues are described as "individuals who are socially undernourished, both in terms of family and social context, and have a sense of loneliness and lack of belonging." Situational risk factors are grouped as neglect, student life, and triggers. Failure to receive the attention and care children and adolescents need, forming connections more with online

devices than with family, and these devices being seen as caregivers contribute significantly, as do desires to escape from problematic family or work environments among adults. During the transition to a more independent lifestyle away from family for university students, experiencing negative events, painful emotions, and vulnerable situations trigger digital addiction. Structural factors stem from the compulsory nature of online applications due to the structural characteristics of the internet (Kuss&Griffiths, 2020).

New media platforms have also become a massive industry. The primary goal of these large companies is to create habits in users to market more products or services successfully. The time users spend on these platforms and their experiences are crucial sources of data. Many products/services are designed to create habits to remain competitive in the market. Nowadays, companies aim not only to reach users but also to ensure that users continuously prefer their products or services out of loyalty because their economic value relies on the habits they cultivate (Eyal&Hoover, 2015).

Pettman (2021) employs the term "the new opium of the masses" when elucidating the cause of digital addiction. According to him, individuals attempt to cope with unresolved or challenging aspects of their lives by diverting their attention, particularly on social media platforms. Communication tools and entertainment technologies possess both boundless and constrained structures. Each user follows their own trajectory, with diverse options available in the cyber realm. However, in the realm of new communication technologies, users are restricted to paths determined solely by the legal entities that own and control the technology.

### **Types of Digital Addiction**

In this study, digital addiction types such as internet addiction, gaming addiction, social media addiction, and smartphone addiction have been addressed. These types were chosen because the literature predominantly focuses on them. Other types such as online shopping addiction, online

**Table 1**

*Types and Characteristics of Digital Addiction (Compiled from existing studies such as Courtwright, 2021; Kuss&Griffiths, 2020; Lemmens et al., 2009, Lee et al., 2014)*

Types of Digital Addiction	General Characteristics
<b>Internet Addiction</b>	Excessive time spent on the Internet regardless of the type of content consumed
<b>Social Media Addiction</b>	The constant need to stay connected to social media platforms, which may manifest as continuous content sharing and tracking likes, as well as merely observing profiles without engaging in any sharing
<b>Digital Game Addiction</b>	Playing video games or online games on mobile phones or computers, as well as watching gamers' videos, which may progress to the extent of immersing oneself in the gaming world to the point of disconnecting from daily life and losing touch with reality.
<b>Smartphone Addiction</b>	The constant engagement with smartphones at all times and in all places. Spending time with available applications or previously downloaded content even in situations where there is no internet connection.

gambling addiction, pornography addiction, and messaging addiction have not been included in the research.

Internet usage can lead to problems such as excessive use, loss of control over time, prioritizing internet usage as the center of one's life, and feeling emotionally distressed when without internet access. Courtwright (2021) suggests that internet addiction, much like food and gambling addiction, initially begins as a means to alleviate boredom but gradually escalates to a point where it harms both the individual and their surroundings.

Griffiths (1999) suggests that individuals are not addicted to the internet itself, but rather to the online platforms they access through it, portraying the internet as a kind of "enabler" that takes them where they want to go. The widespread use of digital communication tools, especially among younger generations and children, poses a threat of addiction. Digital addiction, particularly during childhood and adolescence—critical stages of personal and psychological development—significantly impacts the lives and development of users in these age groups (Ektiricioğlu et al., 2020). Specifically, university students tend to allocate more time to the internet due to factors such as loneliness, poor time management, and being away from family and friends (Kandell, 1998).

Especially prevalent among children and adolescents, excessive use of digital games is

considered a behavioral addiction that may lead to physical or psychological issues (Lemmens et al., 2009). The "Report on the Digital Gaming Habits of Middle and High School Students in Turkey," conducted under the auspices of the Information Technologies and Communication Authority's Safe Internet Center presents significant data on students' gaming habits (Bayzan et al., 2024). According to the report, the combined percentage of students classified as highly risky or moderately risky in terms of digital game addiction is approximately 35%. Even on weekdays when attending school, over 65% of students engage in digital gaming for 0-3 hours, with this percentage increasing further on weekends.

The increasingly widespread use of social media platforms by billions of people worldwide and their integration into daily life can lead to social media addiction. According to Kuss and Griffiths (2011:3429), social media addiction exhibits similar symptoms to other addictions: Attention-seeking behavior (constantly engaging with social media sites), mood changes (mood altering when accessing social media sites), tolerance (increasing usage over time), withdrawal symptoms (experiencing unpleasant physical and emotional symptoms when unable to access social media sites), conflict (conflict with oneself or others due to engagement with social media sites), relapse (the recurrence of addiction when abstaining from social media sites for a period and then returning).

The main cause identified for smartphone addiction is mobility, which has emerged with the development of mobile communication technology. Smartphones have not only eliminated time and space constraints but also brought about individual and societal impacts. As stated by Lee et al. (2014), smartphones, being an indispensable part of daily life, have the potential to lead to behavioral addiction by creating a constant urge to check. Kim et al. (2018) coined the term “smombie” for individuals who walk, drive, or go about their daily tasks without lifting their heads from their smartphones. This term, meaning “smartphone zombies,” highlights how “smombies” pose a risk to themselves and others, potentially causing numerous accidents in daily life.

Digital addiction leads to various problems, including physical, psychological, and societal issues. Physical problems arise from prolonged computer or phone use. In such cases, the body remains inactive in the same position for long periods, resulting in headaches, neck and back pain, numbness in the legs, tingling, weakness, a sensation of pins and needles, and discomfort in the muscles and skeletal system, known as carpal tunnel syndrome.

Psychological problems arising from digital addiction manifest in various forms, akin to other addictions. However, in the era of new media, new types of psychological disorders are being identified. The most prevalent among these are the fear of being without the internet (netlessphobia), the fear of being without a smartphone (nomophobia), and the fear of missing out on developments (FoMO). Another issue stemming from digital addiction is societal problems. With digitization, individuals and consequently societies have become increasingly reliant on digital communication and devices, often involuntarily. As a result of digital addiction, individuals can disconnect from real life and weaken the social relationships they establish with others. Digitization has shifted from being a choice to becoming a culture in contemporary society. The concept of “digital obesity” coined

with digitization succinctly captures the situation resulting from digital addictions. Excessive consumption of digital devices and platforms transforms individuals into “digital obese” individuals, compelling them to grapple with numerous problems due to problematic usage (Bayrak&Cihan, 2021).

### **Digital Detox and Digital Detox Activities**

Digital detox is also referred to by terms such as “digital break,” “disconnecting,” “unplugging,” “digital cleansing,” and “digital minimalism.” Digital detox involves distancing oneself from digital devices and focusing on physical life, distinguishing itself from therapies used to treat various addictions (Radtke et al., 2021).

According to Syvertsen (2020), digital detox is a method that encompasses various activities and mindsets applied with gradual reductions in different time frames, such as a day, a week, or a month, along with lifestyle changes. Also described as “detoxing from digital platforms” in some sources, digital detox involves individual or group practices that individuals voluntarily engage in, aiming to abstain from digital devices for specified periods or regulate the use of digital platforms (Pınarbaşı and Astam, 2020:6-10). In recent years, with people becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the uncontrolled time spent on digital platforms, the practice of digital detox or digital diet has become more widespread (Albayrak, 2020:255).

Miksch and Schulz (2018) conducted a study through semi-structured interviews with users currently practicing digital detox to investigate participants’ motivations for engaging in digital detox practices. It emerged that participants undertook digital detox to maintain control over their social, professional, and personal lives, enhance their performance, promote well-being, stay present, and maintain relationships. The digital detox practices identified included setting barriers, establishing rules, creating awareness, and engaging in offline activities and events. Zahariades (2018) notes the positive aspects of

digital detox, such as increased productivity, stronger relationships, reduced stress, improved sleep, longer attention spans, greater self-discipline and creativity, enhanced interpersonal relationships, and improved memory.

Basu (2019) conducted a study with 70 participants employed in various organizations, administering post-digital detox tests and individual performance assessments to them. Upon analyzing the collected data, it was observed that digital detox significantly contributed to work performance and workplace interaction. Schmuck (2020) attempted to determine whether digital detox actually works by applying multiple group analyses with 500 participants aged between 18 and 35. The study found that 41.7% of the participants resorted to digital detox methods, and these methods were effective against constant social media use and smartphone addiction.

In Turkey, although studies on digital addiction are more prevalent, there is a growing number of studies focusing directly on the concept of digital detox and examining the results of the digital detox experience using various research methods and techniques. One such study was conducted by Uluçay and Kobak (2020). This research aimed to explore the digital detox behaviors of young adults aged 19-45 and identify the reasons behind these behaviors. According to the research findings, methods such as deleting apps, muting all notifications, and exercising control over sharing are commonly observed digital detox behaviors. In the study conducted through semi-structured interviews, participants were also asked about the factors leading them to practice digital detox. It was revealed that reasons such as the negative impact of social media on interpersonal communication, security concerns, and issues with focus drove individuals towards digital detox. On the other hand, Albayrak (2020) examined the results of 15 participants, all university students, who practiced digital detox by abstaining from social media for one week. While participants gained positive awareness in terms of productivity, family communication, and attention

during the one-week “cleansing” period, there was no decrease in social media usage due to reasons such as curiosity about social media activities and avoidance of loneliness.

In the study by Pınarbaşı and Astam (2020), 12 voluntary participants were provided with a 3-day digital detox experience, aiming to analyze the digital detox experiences of Generation X, Y, and Z. Although participants had different approaches to this experience, similar views were expressed regarding the internet becoming a kind of necessity for sustaining daily life after digital detox, and social media being preferred due to curiosity. Another study, which examined the use of digital technology and applications by young people through the Nomophobia, Internet Addiction, and Fear of Missing Out Scale, indicated that the desire to be constantly online and communicate in the virtual environment could have negative effects on professional success. The importance of digital detox in overcoming digital addictions was highlighted in the research findings (Yıldız et al., 2020).

## RESEARCH

### Methodology

The primary objective of this study is to assess the digital addiction levels of university students and to explore their awareness and experiences regarding digital detox practices. The research was conducted in two consecutive stages, employing two different research methods: the first quantitative and the second qualitative. In the first stage, quantitative data were collected through a survey to determine internet addiction levels. The study population was defined as undergraduate students from the Radio, Television, and Cinema Department at Mersin University’s Faculty of Communication, using purposive sampling. This method, also known as criterion sampling, emerged from the tradition of qualitative research methods. The choice of this population is based on the students’ engagement with courses related to new media and digital technologies.



The problem statement guiding the focus of this study, within the context of awareness about digital detox practices, is defined as “What is the level of awareness and the methods experienced in digital detox applied against digital addiction?” To address this problem, the following questions were considered:

- ▶ What are the levels of digital addiction among undergraduate students in the Radio, Television, and Cinema Department of Mersin University’s Faculty of Communication?
- ▶ How do undergraduate students in the Radio, Television, and Cinema Department of Mersin University’s Faculty of Communication perceive and experience digital detox?

### Assessment of the Survey

The quantitative data of the research was obtained through a survey form. Frequency and t-tests were applied to analyze the survey data. The survey, which aimed to determine the digital addiction levels of the participants, was conducted online

via Google Forms. The study used 18 items from Esenyel’s (2017) research. The response options for the test were “Always (5), Very Often (4), Often (3), Sometimes (2), Rarely (1), and Never (0).” Addiction levels were determined by calculating the average scores from the 18 items. Higher scores indicated a higher rate of internet addiction. Participants with scores between 0-1.66 were classified as “non-risk users,” 1.67-3.33 as “at-risk users,” and 3.34-5 as “addicted users.”

To test the reliability and clarity of the scale items, a control group of 57 randomly selected individuals was given the survey online before administering it to the main sample. After the pilot study, the internal consistency coefficient Cronbach’s alpha was found to be 0.90, indicating high reliability and clarity of the survey items. The survey was then completed by 159 people, and after reviewing the survey data, 141 participants’ data were deemed appropriate, and the reliability analysis was repeated.

**Table 2**  
Item Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Does spending too much time on the internet cause your grades or school assignments to suffer?	1,78	1,493	141
Is your academic performance and productivity negatively affected by your time spent on the internet?	1,59	1,425	141
Do you neglect your daily tasks because you spend too much time on the internet?	1,72	1,451	141
Do people in your life complain about the amount of time you spend on the internet?	1,21	1,312	141
Do you prefer spending more time on the internet over going out with your friends?	1,23	1,578	141
How often do you choose the excitement of the internet over the closeness of your friends?	1,02	1,349	141
Do you ever get angry, shout, or lash out at someone when they interrupt you while you're on the internet?	1,01	1,396	141
Do you find yourself thinking about the internet or daydreaming about being online while doing your daily tasks?	1,08	1,464	141
Do you feel irritable, moody, or upset when you are not on the internet? Does this feeling go away when you go online?	1,17	1,389	141
Do you ever feel that life without the internet would be boring, empty, or depressing?	1,74	1,623	141
Do you find yourself using the internet as a way to escape from worries or problems in your life?	2,17	1,563	141
Do you find yourself imagining or longing to go back online?	1,02	1,370	141
Do you check the internet first before doing necessary tasks?	2,31	1,536	141
Do you ever stay up late on the internet, causing you to lose sleep?	2,26	1,629	141
Do you find yourself saying "just a few more minutes" when you're on the internet?	2,13	1,657	141
Have you ever tried to reduce the amount of time you spend on the internet?	2,02	1,523	141
Do you ever try to hide the amount of time you spend on the internet from others?	,64	1,316	141
Do you find yourself feeling defensive or staying silent when someone asks you what you've been doing on the internet?	,77	1,333	141

Among the 141 participants, 61 were women and 80 were men. The participants included 43 first-year students, 37 second-year students, 21 third-year students, and 40 fourth-year students. According to the survey data, 93 participants (66%) had an average score between 0-1.66, indicating they are “non-risk users.” 43 participants (30%) had an average score between 1.67-3.33, classifying them as “at-risk users,” and 5 participants (4%) had an average score between 3.34-5, categorizing them as “addicted users.”

### **Assessment of the Focus Group Discussion**

In the second stage of the research, after analyzing the data, a focus group study was conducted to identify awareness of digital detox and digital addiction. According to Yıldırım and Şimşek (2021:156), the objective of a focus group discussion is for a group of participants selected by the researcher to express their views, experiences, and feelings on a particular topic. It is emphasized that creating different groups is crucial for making the discussions functional and obtaining qualitative data (Krueger and Casey, 2015:23). In this context, three different groups, each consisting of a total of 15 people, were formed for the focus group discussion. The first and second group were composed of 8 individuals and the last group consisted of 7 people. The aim was to elucidate students’ experiences related to technology addiction and digital detox practices using a semi-structured interview technique.

In the focus group discussions, participants were initially asked how soon after waking up they checked their phones. A participant from the 1st group described starting their day by reaching for their phone right next to them ‘just before opening my eyes. I am preparing myself to open my eyes,’ without even getting out of bed. A participant from the 2nd group stated that they opened their phone ‘within a maximum of ten seconds’ after waking up. A participant from the 3rd group said, ‘I pick it up right after waking up. Then I put it down and go back to sleep, and when I wake up again, I pick it up once more.’ The frequency of such responses in the focus group discussions revealed

that, for the majority of participants, looking at their smartphone immediately after waking up holds significant importance in their lives.

### **Neither Without a Phone Nor Without the Internet**

When focus group participants were asked how they felt when they didn’t have their phones with them, two participants mentioned that they didn’t care, and one participant said they felt secure. However, out of the 20 participants in the discussion, many expressed feelings of stress, restlessness, unavailability, inaccessibility, inadequacy, panic, fear, and a sense of being incomplete when they were without their phones.

When I don’t have my phone with me, I feel like a primitive creature, as if I’m floating in the air like a jellyfish or an octopus. I lose all sense of purpose. It’s like I’ve left behind a parallel brain at home. It’s a wonderful object that thinks for me without me exerting any effort, connecting me to the world, and when I lose it, it has a negative impact on me.” (Participant 2 from the 1st Group)

It’s not so much about being missed, but it feels like I have a different life with my phone, and when it’s gone, I feel like I’ve lost that. It’s as if I have two lives. When I have it, it’s like I’ve regained my energy; everything is in it.” (Participant 4 from the 2nd Group)

Participants were asked how they felt when they were without internet access. 18 participants expressed feelings and behaviors consistent with withdrawal. Other participants reported feeling disconnected from life, finding their phones useless, and feeling a need to distract themselves. Participant 2 from the first group mentioned that even when offline, they planned and imagined what they would do online, saying, “I plan what I will do online; I imagine it. When the internet goes out, I think I’ll do this, I’ll do that...” Participant 4 from the second group stated that during such times, they felt relief from not receiving any notifications.



## Participants' Views on Digital Detox

13 participants (57%) stated that they had heard of the concept of digital detox, while 10 (47%) indicated that they had never heard of the term before. This data suggests that the concept of digital detox is not widely recognized among the participants. The focus group participants' knowledge about the concept of digital detox was explored. Only 2 participants from the 1st group claimed to have knowledge about digital detox, while the other participants mentioned that they were unfamiliar with the concept. The majority of participants from the 2nd group believed that digital detox means reducing screen time. Participant 7 from the 2nd group likened digital detox to diets done to eliminate toxins, while Participant 8 described what they knew about digital detox as, 'It's about reconnecting with your true self. When you pick up your phone, you forget everything; by limiting yourself, you become aware of your own personality.' Participants 1, 4, and 7 from the 3rd group expressed that they see digital detox as a form of cleansing. Participant 2 from the 3rd group articulated their views on digital detox as, 'It's about balance. I practice detox in my daily life. The reason is to eliminate toxins and to lose weight. It's similar. But the goal is not just to refrain from eating or drinking; it's about balanced nutrition.' At this point, it would not be incorrect to say that the participants' understanding of digital detox is limited. Although the concept of digital detox encompasses terms like cleansing and balancing, defining digital detox solely through these terms is a superficial approach.

When asked about their opinions on digital detox practices, only Participant 3 from the 1st group mentioned that they turn off the internet when necessary. Most participants from the 2nd group stated that they either do not use digital detox applications or do not feel the need for them. Participants from the 3rd group expressed that they find digital detox applications necessary. Participant 2 articulated this sentiment as follows:

It's necessary. The simplest example is TikTok. They are engaging in digital begging; they

have pioneered this, especially among a certain audience. You won't see it much in the hands of my parents. My father thinks it's forbidden. He doesn't buy a new phone with physical buttons; he's not curious about Facebook, so I've never seen any need for it. My mother sometimes uses it, but I haven't seen it as a necessity. We should criticize the generations; this diet can be applied to my age group, I am from Generation Z. (Participant 2 from the 3rd Group)

In my opinion, it depends on the individual because we see it according to the age group. There's a generational difference; everyone is connected to the digital world to some extent, and the level of addiction can be applied accordingly. For example, if a mother is on Facebook instead of cooking, she needs it; if we are delaying our homework, we need it. But we need to think about how to do this. Like a vacation or getting away. The timing is also clear, and when I go, if you can't reach me, some things might be neglected, causing problems. (Participant 1 from the 3rd Group)

## “Digital Detox Methods Are Not Effective”

Although digital detox applications are not used, they are considered necessary, indicating that participants potentially have the intention to use digital detox applications. The reasons participants do not use these applications seem to be the fear of facing their internet usage time or the fear of being unreachable. The majority of participants believe that digital detox methods are not effective. During the discussions, participants mentioned that even if they engage in digital detox, it would not be sustainable. According to the participants, although digital detox activities are actually very beneficial, it seems difficult to maintain consistent use due to everything being connected to the digital world in today's conditions.

The majority of participants acknowledge that digital detox can be beneficial, but they argue that such activities may not be effective or practical. According to the participants, the most significant reason for this is that people are often not aware of their digital dependence.

I never differentiate internet addiction from other addictions. For example, I decided to quit smoking, but whenever I see people around me smoking, I struggle to quit. It truly requires willpower. Yes, people are not complaining about themselves. Some can think, 'I am not addicted.' The internet is the same. We are not aware of our own addiction, but we tell others, 'You are addicted to your phone.' Since people do not admit their addiction, the detox does not work. (Participant 1 from the 1st Group)

Digital detox activities are actually necessary, but I'm unsure about their feasibility. Since we were born into this digital age, we've inevitably become somewhat robotic. For instance, older people are not as attached to technology. However, some of them do become attached over time. For us, distancing ourselves from digital technology is more challenging. While it would undoubtedly be beneficial, I'm uncertain about how achievable it is. (Participant 2 from the 2nd Group)

## Conclusion

Digital addiction is affecting the mental and physical health of many people today. This issue has negative consequences not only for individuals but also for society. Individuals who struggle to balance being connected with being addicted can experience various health problems due to digital addiction, as well as weakened social interactions. Therefore, it is especially important for young people to be informed about methods to combat digital addiction and to incorporate these methods into their lives.

In this context, the study first used an online survey technique to determine the levels of internet addiction among students at Mersin University's Faculty of Communication. Then, participants' opinions on digital detox methods as a technique against digital addiction were sought. According to the data obtained, 66% of the survey participants were identified as users with no addiction risk, 30% were users at risk of addiction, and 4% were dependent users. After the survey, 23 students participated in focus group discussions based

on their levels of addiction. Although the survey results showed that participants' levels of internet addiction were low, the focus group discussions revealed that participants were spending significant amounts of time on the internet.

The study found that most participants checked their smartphones as soon as they woke up in the morning. This immediate connection to the digital world from the moment they open their eyes to the real world makes them digitally connected individuals. However, it can be said that this behavior could potentially lead to digital addiction over time. In focus group discussions, participants reported feeling a sense of withdrawal, a symptom of digital addiction, when they were without their phones or the internet. These statements highlight how indispensable smartphones and digital accessibility are for the participants. The discussions also revealed that most participants immediately checked notifications on their phones and frequently checked their phones even when there were no new notifications.

In the focus group discussions, it was revealed that participants often lacked sleep due to the time they spent on new media and sometimes failed to meet their work obligations as a result. It was also found that in public spaces, users engaged with their smartphones because of loneliness or a feeling of unease or boredom from being alone. Most participants stated that they did not receive complaints from their surroundings about the time they spent on digital platforms. As a method against digital addiction, the concept of digital detox was not directly defined by all participants. Only 13 focus group participants indicated they were aware of the concept of digital detox. Despite not being directly familiar with the concept, many participants were knowledgeable about digital detox techniques.

For example, most participants stated that when they had important tasks, they would temporarily use methods such as putting their phones on silent, distancing their phones from their surroundings, and turning off notifications.

Participants also mentioned that when their internet usage increased, they would socialize, take care of themselves, and spend time on hobbies and sports to distance themselves from digital addiction. Participants expressed skepticism about the sustainability of digital detox or found it very challenging, and they believed that raising awareness about digital addiction is necessary before digital detox practices can be effectively implemented today.

The essence of digital detox, which includes methods such as setting limits on digital devices and applications, controlling them, or staying away from digital technologies for a period, is a way of individual coping, self-improvement, and enjoying life, as Syvertsen (2020) stated. However, merely using digital detox methods offers a temporary and individual solution to digital addiction. This issue concerns almost the entire society and is fundamentally connected to social, cultural, political, and economic structures. Giant technology companies benefit from the time users spend on social networks with algorithm-driven structures. Therefore, individual coping methods in dealing with these structures are inherently limited. Nevertheless, educating new media users about digital detox methods as an approach against digital addiction can provide significant benefits. This is a long-term process that should begin with family and school education and is based on new media literacy. Proper digital consumption education based on new media literacy should be provided to everyone throughout their lives. People who learn about digital detox methods and awareness during this educational process can lead healthier and higher-quality lives. It is especially important to educate children and parents from an early age. Knowing how to control technology and set boundaries as a generation that lives digitally is an effective method for combating digital addiction.

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