

Digital Detox to Mitigate Excessive Device Usage Among Generation Z

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Abstract

High-intensity device usage has become an integral aspect of daily life for Generation Z. While digital technology facilitates learning and communication, it simultaneously presents challenges such as mental fatigue, diminished social interaction quality, and difficulties in filtering digital information. This community service initiative aimed to enhance participants' awareness of healthier digital habits through psychoeducation focused on 'Digital Detox.' The program was conducted via a webinar that integrated thematic presentations, interactive discussions, and participant reflections on their digital behaviors. Evaluation was performed through qualitative interviews with five randomly selected participants to assess their knowledge before and after the intervention. The findings indicated that participants found the material highly relevant to their experiences as active internet and smartphone users. Furthermore, they gained significant insights into the adverse effects of excessive device use and acquired practical strategies for wiser digital management. This initiative contributes to improving digital literacy and supporting the mental well-being of Generation Z through a practical, educational framework.

Keywords: Digital Detox, Generation Z, Mental Health

1 INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has changed almost every aspect of human life, including how we learn, communicate, and spend our free time. Many Gen Zers consider gadgets and social media to be part of their daily routine. This is because Gen Z grew up as digital natives who are constantly connected to the internet and smartphones [1]. Smartphones are considered a second body for Gen Z, because social interaction is no longer done in person; social media platforms have become the main means of communication connecting Gen Z with other people they can meet not only in their neighbourhood but all over the world. Although it provides many conveniences, uncontrolled use of technology can have negative effects, such as anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, and decreased productivity [2]. It also gives rise to feelings of anxiety, low self-esteem, and even prolonged mental fatigue [3].

This phenomenon of excessive gadget use is not only related to screen time. Even unconsciously, strong attachment to social media can create a dependency that disrupts a person's personal, emotional, and social balance [4]. Excessive exposure to information and online interactions actually exacerbates stress and

interferes with the ability to focus, rest, and engage in healthy social relationships [5]. Many studies show that 'digital dependence' can worsen psychological well-being if not managed properly by individuals and educational environments [6]. Gen Z is the highest user of social media at 84% compared to other generations [7]. It is noted that Instagram is also dominated by Gen Z. Pressure from the virtual world feels more dominant than real-world relationships, so many people are taking a break from digital exposure as a way of caring for themselves and building healthier connections with their surroundings.

An approach that is gaining attention in maintaining psychological balance in the digital age is digital detox, which is a conscious process of reducing or refraining from using digital devices for a certain period of time. Digital detox is an effort to reduce or temporarily stop the use of digital devices and social media, with the aim of restoring mental health and quality of life [8]. Intervention studies show that digital detox can contribute to a reduction in symptoms of anxiety and depression in young adults, as well as improve overall quality of life [9]. In addition, many social media users report improvements in sleep quality, concentration, productivity, and interpersonal relationships after taking a break from social media [6].



Here, it is important for individuals to respond by taking a break from social media, but the length of time may vary from person to person.

Digital detox has been growing rapidly in recent years, as a natural response to the crisis experienced by Generation Z. One example is in the learning environment, where smartphone use can seriously disrupt concentration and make it difficult to focus on learning material due to frequent distractions from notifications and various applications [10]. Typical smartphone usage patterns include checking one's phone upon waking up, checking notifications every few minutes, feeling the need to always be connected and updated with the latest information/news, using multiple applications simultaneously, and experiencing anxiety when unable to access one's device or internet connection [8]. Therefore, we see the need for restrictions or breaks in gadget use. Not only does it improve mental health, but digital detox can also improve sleep quality due to reduced exposure to blue light from screens, increased productivity and focus on important tasks, and strengthened interpersonal relationships, as there is more time for direct interaction [11].

Although this concept has been discussed, the implementation of digital detox programmes is still relatively rare among Gen Z. Many still do not understand practical strategies for managing screen time, nor do they know how digital detox can improve their life balance. Technology, which should be used to make life easier, can instead create constant distractions that hinder learning and cause dependence, thereby affecting individual achievement and productivity [8].

Based on these conditions, it is necessary to conduct Community Service (PkM) activities related to design to provide education and direct experience to Gen Z regarding digital detox practices. This activity not only aims to increase their understanding of the impact of excessive gadget use but also equips them with concrete strategies to manage technology use in a healthier way. Psychoeducation is considered suitable for PkM activities because it is applicable, easy for the general public to understand, and can be tailored to the needs of partners [12]. Thus, it is hoped that this Community Service (PkM) programme can support the improvement of the mental well-being of Gen Z who use the internet wisely by paying attention to the balance between the virtual world and the real world. This will enable Generation Z to utilise technology appropriately without compromising their mental well-being.

2 METHODS

This Community Service (PkM) activity was designed in the form of a thematic seminar on mental health entitled 'Digital Detox'. This title was chosen because Generation Z is a generation that is never

separated from the internet and social media in their daily routines, which has a negative impact due to excessive exposure to gadgets. The method used in this PkM activity is psychoeducation, which aims to provide individuals or groups with an understanding, knowledge and skills related to certain psychological conditions and how to overcome them. Psychoeducation is a systematic process to help individuals understand the relationship between thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. This activity is carried out to equip individuals with practical strategies to improve their psychological well-being [13].

2.1 Subject of Community Service (PkM)

This activity was conducted online by utilising technological advances so that it could reach a wider audience. The subject of this PkM activity was the general public of Generation Z. There were 85 participants, most of whom were students aged between 19 and 26 years old.

2.2 Implementation Procedures

1. Preparation Stage
At this stage, the event committee holds coordination meetings to ensure that the event runs smoothly, discussing matters such as the schedule, technical implementation, speakers, and psychoeducational materials to be provided. In addition, they prepare the facilities and infrastructure needed during the online psychoeducational event, such as internet connection, devices or platforms to be used (with the Zoom application), and other technical preparations.
2. Information Provision (Education) Stage
At this stage, the resource person provides knowledge to participants so that they obtain information related to mental health, especially in handling it by using digital detox in the digital era. The information is conveyed in language that is easily understood by participants. The main objective at this stage is the cognitive understanding of participants.
3. Discussion Stage
The purpose of the discussion stage is to provide space for participants to ask questions and relate the material presented by the speaker to their personal experiences. Through discussion, participants will gain more knowledge and better understand how to apply digital detox, which they may practise. This stage is important for increasing participants' awareness and active involvement.

4. Evaluation Stage

The evaluation phase measured the program's effectiveness by assessing participant understanding and the benefits they received. Five randomly selected participants were interviewed to discuss the material's relevance and its application in daily life. The interviews focused on five key areas: (1) their initial knowledge of the topic; (2) their experiences with excessive device use; (3) previous attempts to manage their gadget habits; and (4) new insights gained from the session. Finally, the evaluation gathered feedback for future webinars and documented the immediate impact of the program on the participants.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This PkM activity, entitled 'Digital Detox: Controlled or Controlling Digital?', was held on 29 November 2026. The aim of this activity was to educate the general public, especially Generation Z, about the importance of limiting smartphone and internet usage. The first session provided to participants covered material on Generation Z's close relationship with the digital world and technology, including the advantages and disadvantages experienced by this generation. Issues that arise include brain rot, hoaxes, cyberbullying, social media addiction, cybercrime, stress, anxiety, depression, FoMO, doomscrolling, and others that cause mental health problems among Generation Z. According to the World Happiness Report in 2024, research concluded that Gen Z has a lower level of happiness compared to previous generations [14]. In addition, Gen Z is considered more vulnerable to mental health disorders. Uncontrolled smartphone use can hinder cognitive and emotional development [15]. One of the main factors contributing to these mental health issues is inappropriate or excessive use of social media.

Filtering information in the digital world has also become very difficult, especially with the prevalence of hoaxes and AI, which make it difficult to distinguish whether information is true or false. Hoaxes and false information spread more quickly and widely on social media, triggered by emotions, sensationalism and digital platform algorithms. In addition, there are other factors such as low digital literacy and critical thinking skills, which make Gen Z more likely to simply accept, share or believe information without first checking or verifying it. This causes the digital space to become chaotic, which can lead to misunderstandings, social polarisation and undermine trust in reliable or credible sources of information. This situation causes Gen Z to experience information confusion, which can influence how they think, make decisions, and behave socially in their daily lives.

Not only that, but social and cultural issues also have an impact on Generation Z due to excessive use of social media and the internet. The intensity of the digital space tends to shift Generation Z's social patterns from face-to-face interaction to digital-based communication. This condition will reduce the quality of social relationships, weaken empathy, and reduce interpersonal communication skills in everyday life [16]. Many of them also engage in social isolation, where the use of the internet makes people 'engrossed' in their own world or drifting in the virtual world. In addition, excessive exposure to social media contributes to the formation of an instant culture, a need for social validation, and often creates unrealistic social standards that affect how Gen Z views themselves and their surroundings [17]. From the presentation given by the speaker, many participants responded that what was conveyed by the speaker was relevant to them. Furthermore, the speakers explained that the dominance of global content in the digital space can also erode local cultural values, social customs, and traditions that were previously obtained through direct interaction with family and friends. Therefore, it is better for us as individuals to control our devices or the internet rather than being controlled by them.

The material on these various conditions made participants aware of how they had been using their devices. They assessed and reflected on whether their behaviour had been harmful to their mental health. Did they need to take a break or pause from their digital activities? Many participants experienced everything that the speakers described in relation to the negative aspects of device use.

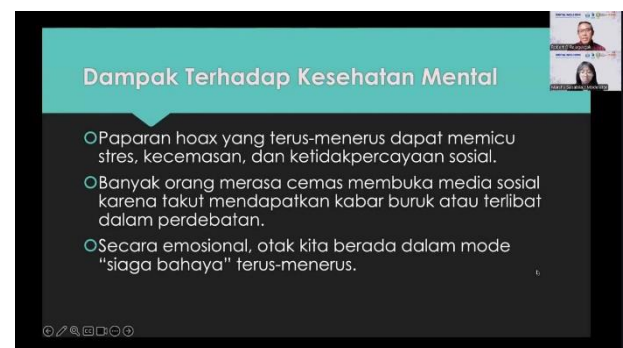


Figure 1. Session 1: Presentation on Mental Health Conditions Due to Digital Exposure

As seen in Figure 2, many participants experienced dependence on gadget use, amounting to 42% or 36 participants. They felt that it was difficult to detach themselves from their smartphones, difficult to control themselves from playing with their phones, and difficult to manage their time. The urge to play or check their phones was difficult to control, with some participants explaining that conditions at night made their dependence on gadgets even greater. The second

issue is fake news, which was received by 13% of participants, or 11 participants. As explained by the source, fake news that is rampant in the virtual world is very difficult to verify. Technological advances that are not used properly have led to the spread of fake news. Because the news is in cyberspace, it spreads very widely and quickly so that it can be accessed from all over the world. Participants feel worried and confused by the conflicting information in the digital world. They find it difficult to ascertain the truth of the information. The third most common feeling is anxiety, experienced by 12% of participants, or 10 participants. Participants who experience this feeling usually feel restless when they do not have their mobile phones with them or forget to bring them, find it difficult not to check their mobile phones and social media, and when they look at social media, they compare themselves with others who are superior to them. This causes them to feel down and less enthusiastic.

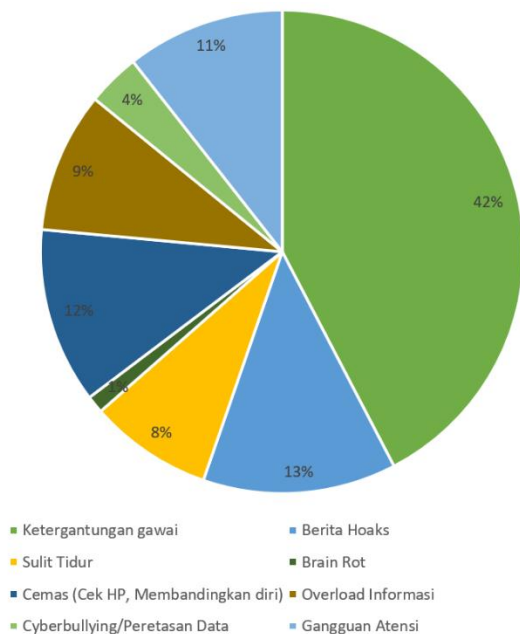


Figure 2. Participants' Conditions in Device Use

The other conditions of the participants varied greatly, such as difficulty sleeping due to frequent use of social media or mobile phones, fear of hacking or cyberbullying, information overload from the internet causing them to feel depressed, difficulty concentrating due to distractions from social media notifications or other applications, and brain rot that could damage their cognitive functions. Given these conditions, it is highly likely that gadget use is affecting the participants' mental health. If this continues, it will become a more serious problem. Therefore, measures need to be taken to address their conditions.

Next, the second session is material given to participants on digital detox as an effort to help overcome excessive gadget use. Each person may take different breaks from gadget use. The type of digital detox depends on the needs and goals of each individual. Selective digital detox can be done when participants choose to reduce or even stop using certain applications or platforms that are considered distracting or unproductive. There is also periodic digital detox, where participants set certain times of the day or week when they will not use digital devices, such as during meals, sleep, weekends or family gatherings. Then, there is partial digital detox, where detox is carried out by limiting the use of certain technologies, such as avoiding social media but still using email for work and study purposes. There is also total digital detox, which is the most extreme form of detox undertaken by individuals, where they completely avoid all digital devices and online platforms for a certain period, for example, for a full day or a week. From here, participants may analyse their needs and decide what kind of digital detox they want to do.



Figure 3. Session 2: Presentation on Digital Detox as an Effort to Reduce Gadget Use

Then there are the stages of digital detox that participants can do or prepare for. First, awareness, which is an important starting point for participants to begin digital detox. They must understand what they can change in themselves and why they should change their harmful device usage behaviour. Here, participants are invited to first identify unhealthy digital patterns that they may or may not be aware of. Then, set realistic goals, which are created to make the changes that participants make more focused and measurable according to their abilities. Don't forget to evaluate the results after you have done so. Next is to reduce distractions. Participants try to resist the urge or ignore the applications or platforms they want to reduce, such as by turning off notifications, deleting applications, deactivating them, and so on. Once they have done this, participants can switch to real activities. Participants can pursue other hobbies such as exercising, gathering with friends, reading books, gardening, or other arts. Once

participants have done all of this, they must be consistent in order to build habits in line with what has been planned so that they are healthier and more adaptive. The final step is to evaluate and reflect. If there are obstacles, reflect on which parts are difficult to do and improve and adjust them to the participants' conditions. These steps can be carried out with the direct desire of the participants and done consistently, then new habits will be formed.

With digital detox, participants can sort through and choose which applications are useful for them. With this technological advancement, humans should not be controlled by digital technology, but should be able to utilise it to help them carry out their daily activities with complete control. This control will improve individuals' quality of life and psychological well-being, as well as limit their use of gadgets.

The next session involved a live discussion between the speakers and participants. The participants' enthusiasm was evident from the many questions they asked about internet use. They were fully aware that they also experienced problems that led to mental health issues and unhealthy gadget use. Some of the questions asked by participants included: *'How can we distract*

ourselves or ignore notifications that cause distraction?', *'How can we tell if news or information is fake or not?'*, *'If our hobby is playing games, how can we start a digital detox?'*, *'How can we stay focused on our tasks without being distracted by notifications?'* and so on. From these questions, it is evident that participants are beginning to realise they need assistance in addressing the issues they are facing.

Essentially, digital detox to combat dependency also requires considerable effort. However, it is not impossible. Typically, there will be a lot of anxiety, restlessness, and even physical symptoms when you start reducing your use of gadgets [8]. However, these are normal reactions or responses when starting a detox. Normally, they will subside within 3-5 days after starting the digital detox. Gen Z tends to evaluate things in a more instantaneous manner and is oriented towards direct experiences [6]. Participants will assess the benefits of their digital break based on immediate experiences such as feelings of calmness, lack of distraction, improved sleep, and increased productivity. However, the challenge is that Gen Z will find it difficult to let go of technology for too long.

Table 1. Shifts in Participants' Knowledge and Perspectives Pre- and Post-Webinar

Participant	Initial Perception (Pre-Webinar)	Reported Experience & Symptoms	Prior Coping Strategies	Post-Webinar Insights & Outcomes
P1	Perceived digital detox solely as the total cessation of digital device usage	Frequent excessive social media consumption resulting in headaches	No prior interventions were attempted	Recognized that digital detox is a gradual process rather than an absolute abstention from technology
P2	Expressed uncertainty regarding effective strategies to reduce excessive screen time	Experienced digital fatigue from social usage but faced difficulties in disengaging	Attempted to disable notifications, which proved insufficient in changing habits	Acquired systematic methods and personalized steps to manage digital consumption
P3	Acknowledge device dependency and sleep disturbances but lacked the knowledge to address them	Persistent smartphone usage, which directly contributed to insomnia	Made unsuccessful attempts to reduce usage due to low self-regulation	Attained comprehensive knowledge and actionable strategies for reducing gadget dependency
P4	Faced challenges in distinguishing factual information from misinformation (<i>hoaxes</i>)	Encountered ambiguous information due to rapid technological developments	Had not implemented any specific measures to address digital literacy gaps	Developed critical thinking skills for information verification and social media navigation
P5	Theoretically understood digital well-being as maintaining health during digital engagement	Reported social disruptions and symptoms of behavioral dependency	Felt overwhelmed and was uncertain about how to initiate behavioral changes	Learned to establish a healthier digital-life balance, leading to improved psychological well-being

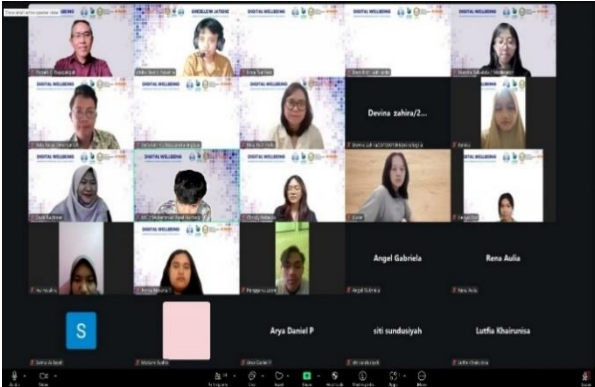


Figure 4. Photo of Online Psychoeducation Activities

A post-intervention assessment revealed that participants acquired a more nuanced understanding of digital well-being. The comparative analysis of their knowledge before and after the webinar is summarized in Table 1. Participants were able to understand the material explained by the speakers. The material provided was very relevant to their real-life experiences. The material provided during this PkM activity was very useful for participants and could be applied personally. They gained a new understanding of the impact of excessive gadget use and the importance of filtering information before accepting or sharing it with others. Furthermore, participants stated that the information conveyed in this psychoeducation session was practical and easy to apply. The steps provided were easy to follow. This PkM encouraged participants to start a digital detox to improve their mental health. Overall, this evaluation session was beneficial and on target for Gen Z participants and has the potential to have a positive and sustainable impact.

4 CONCLUSION

Participants' understanding of the conditions when using gadgets has triggered mental health issues. One possible solution is to undergo a digital detox. With proper implementation tailored to participants' needs, digital detox can help Gen Z use gadgets in a healthy manner. Gen Z can also create a healthy relationship with today's gadgets and utilise technology more effectively.

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