

# Digital Detox Apps on the Rise

## Is India's Tech Boom Creating a Burnout Generation?

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May 2025, Volume 1, Issue 5, pp. 24–28.**

India's transition into the digital world has been impressive. With more than 850 million internet subscribers in 2023 and projections indicating the figure will exceed 900 million as of 2025, the nation has become among the world's foremost digital powerhouses. The technological boom, driven by low-cost data plans like Jio, bulk sales of smartphones, and a proliferation of Indian apps and startups across lifestyle, social networking, ed-tech, and e-commerce, has changed Indians' way of living, working, and communicating as much as anything in history. But amidst all this online revolution, a quieter crisis is emerging in front of our generation- burnout.



Let's be honest: our screen time has gone into overdrive. What started as convenience gradually turned into compulsion. The average Indian spends over 7 hours online per day these days, and that figure goes through the roof for college students and work-from-home employees. A 2022 LinkedIn survey found that more than 65% of Indian professionals experienced greater stress and mental exhaustion compared to past years. A 2023 Deloitte report went one step further, stating that over 80% of Gen Z Indian respondents had felt burned

out in the previous twelve months. These figures aren't mere data; they are a very real, very tired lived reality that's becoming mainstream.

Burnout now isn't merely physical exhaustion or eye strain — it's emotional exhaustion, short attention spans, anxiety, disrupted sleep, and a near-robotic inability to disengage. Gen Z, in particular, has matured in an always-first world where distinctions between online and offline are almost meaningless. College students scroll continuously between online courses, deadlines, and social media with no break. Corporate employees are chained to work emails long after dinner. The always-on requirement is reaching a weight that cannot be borne. In this digital onslaught, the notion of stepping away, even for a few hours, sounds outlandish. That is where digital detox apps enter the scene — an intriguing (and slightly paradoxical) technology-facilitated solution to technology overload.



These applications try to regain users a feeling of agency. Applications such as Forest gamifies the concept of going offline — plant trees that grow the longer you remain away from your phone. Leaving the app a little too soon? The tree withers. Straightforward, yet psychologically powerful. One Sec, another widely used application, includes a 10-second wait before launching social apps, enough to halt compulsive checking. Then there are inbuilt features such as Android's Digital Wellbeing and iOS Screen Time, which allow users to monitor their screen behaviour and impose strict limits.

Surprisingly, Indian developers are cashing in on this requirement too. Apps such as YourHour and StayFree provide personalized phone usage reports, daily targets, and nice shaming (yes, they'll label you as a 'phone junkie' if the numbers are too high). It may sound harsh, but to many users, this dose of reality is just what they require. These programs are particularly popular among college students and young professionals — those individuals most knowledgeable about technology, yet most bogged down.

The psychology behind it is connected to the way our brains act in response to technology. Sites such as Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter are coded to hijack dopamine — the "feel good" hormone — with never-ending scrolls, notifications, likes, and shares. It's a feedback loop that does a trick on the brain, making us crave more despite being exhausted. A 2023 study in the *Journal of Behavioral Addictions* confirmed that almost 70% of Indian youth indicated symptoms of digital addiction, from anxiety when not near devices to being unable to stop looking at social media despite harmful consequences.

For most, detox transition began with a breaking point moment. Some found they hadn't communicated with their families well in days, some were left emotionally drained after hours of comparing lives on Instagram, and some simply found their sleep patterns torn apart beyond recognition. A 21-year-old Delhi design student said she cried when her screen time reached 10 hours a day — a full-time job's worth of scrolling. That was her wake-up call, and she started using Forest. She now confidently sports a complete virtual forest. A Bangalore software engineer admitted reading emails during his wedding ceremony—something he really regrets. Such incidents are not one-offs but reflect growing realization among Indians that our attention is being hijacked — and that it's reasonable to want it back.

It's also worth considering the cultural context. India's joint family systems, where many generations reside in the same house, frequently translates to juggling attention between members of the family and digital temptations. Add to that intense academic and professional competition, and you have a powerful combination for around-the-clock connectivity and stress. Indian students, under pressure to succeed, usually end up juggling online classes,

competitive exam study, and social media, all vying for their shrinking attention span. This overwhelm is not merely due to recreational usage — it is ingrained in how we study and work these days.

It's worth mentioning here that digital detox apps are useful but not a silver bullet. They can help, interrupt behaviours, and establish healthier habits, but they can't treat underlying mental illness or cultural work culture issues. They are best as part of an overall effort — one that incorporates boundaries, offline downtime, improved sleep, and ideally, therapy. Downloading an app alone won't change your life unless you're willing to shift the underlying behaviours that resulted in burnout in the first place.

But here's why this moment is particularly fascinating: for the first time, logging off is cool. What was once considered laziness is now being repositioned as self-respect. Offline activities such as journaling, painting, reading physical books, or having solo café dates are not only becoming acceptable, but aspirational. And in some sense, anti-hustle culture is on the rise, particularly among Gen Z. There is increasingly the idea that one can't or shouldn't live life at 5x speed constantly.

This wave also gets a distinct Indian flavour. While the West gushes about digital fasts and off-the-grid escapes, India is experiencing an increase in tech-wellness fusion. Apps such as Sattva and InnerHour are fusing yoga, meditation, and mindfulness with clean UX and data analysis. Families, too, are (sometimes aggressively) resisting over-screening, and numerous colleges have implemented no-phone areas and quiet hours. The dialogue on digital health is shifting from "just log off" to a more complex, holistic mind-set based on balance.

Another significant change is occurring in rural India, where campaigns for digital literacy are now being complemented with awareness drives for healthy usage. NGOs and schools are now not only teaching people how to use technology, but also when not to. This mindful approach towards avoiding burnout is necessary as India's next billion users become netizens. If burnout has

already taken hold among urban youngsters, it's imperative that rural folks don't step into the same pitfall blind.

What can you do today? Perhaps you don't delete Instagram today — but you can begin tracking your time. You can place your phone on the table during meals. Try an app like Forest or StayFree to detox. Or even less: simply go outside phone-less for 20 minutes. The goal is not perfection. It's awareness. It's taking back even a sliver of your mental space.

Make a point to block out tech-free time in your schedule — say, 9 PM to 10 PM for unwinding screen-free. Read a book. Journal each night as a ritual. Call a buddy rather than shoot them a meme. Take a walk with no music or podcast. These little habits, as corny as they might sound, give your brain room to breathe in ways algorithms just can't.

In a time when your attention is currency, to log off — even for a moment — is an act of rebellion. So here's your permission slip, just in case you needed it: It is okay to silence your phone. It is okay to rest. It is okay to miss a meme or two. You are more than your notifications.

Breathe. Log off. The internet will wait.