

STAY sane, STAY connected

For too many of us, scrolling is no longer a habit but a reflex. Wake up. Scroll. Study. Scroll. Eat. Scroll. Sleep? Maybe after one more reel. But beneath the surface of this digital routine lies a psychological phenomenon with deep, often ignored consequences: online information overload.

What is information overload, really?

Information overload occurs when the brain is exposed to more content than it can meaningfully process. In the digital age, this isn't a rare experience - it's a daily one. From news alerts to academic deadlines, memes to political debates, our screens never stop talking. And we never stop listening.

The irony? While the internet was built to inform and connect, it's now often disorienting and isolating. Algorithms keep us hooked, not informed. Notifications fragment our focus. Endless scrolling dulls our sense of time, and in some cases, even self.

A Research Dive into Digital Overload

In our study, *Scroll, Stress, Repeat*, we explored how this constant digital stimulation impacts the emotional and mental wellbeing of teenagers, especially in India. We used both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, and what we found wasn't just concerning, but deeply personal.

Out of 250 surveyed adolescents, nearly 65% reported daily emotional exhaustion linked directly to screen time. Among interviewees, common phrases echoed across age and background:

“

I feel tired all the time, even when I've done nothing.

”

“

There's so much happening online and I feel like I'm always missing something.

”

The data painted a stark picture: information overload isn't just a cognitive issue. It's emotional. It's social. And it's everywhere.

The Hidden Costs of Constant Scrolling

There's growing evidence linking digital overexposure to higher anxiety, reduced attention spans, and disrupted sleep cycles. Psychologists describe it as “mental clutter” - when the brain's ability to prioritize and reflect gets short-circuited by endless updates. And the impacts aren't evenly felt. Our findings showed that students preparing for high-stakes exams (like Boards or the IB)

were more likely to experience burnout from academic notifications, performance comparison, and study-related content on platforms like YouTube and Instagram. Online learning, while necessary during the pandemic, has only intensified this issue. Educational content merges with entertainment, and the line between work and rest blurs entirely.

A Crisis of Attention and Emotion

One of the more unsettling discoveries was how emotional processing is being affected. With constant exposure to global tragedies, political conflicts, and peer success stories, many students feel overwhelmed yet emotionally numb. One participant said:

“*There’s so much bad news, I don’t even react anymore. I just scroll past.*”

This kind of emotional fatigue isn’t laziness or apathy, but a survival mechanism. But over time, it can lead to detachment, loss of empathy, and even depression.

So, what can we do about it?

Digital overload might feel inevitable, but our research suggests there are ways to interrupt the cycle. Here’s what we propose:

Digital Hygiene Education:

Schools must teach not just how to use tech, but how to disengage healthily. Just as we’re taught nutrition for the body, we need nutrition for the mind.

Peer-Led Mental Health Spaces:

Students trust other students. Creating informal “digital detox” clubs or awareness groups might have more impact than top-down rules.

Scheduled Screen Breaks:

Like the “Happiness Curriculum” in Delhi’s government schools, regular non-digital periods can help students reconnect with themselves and others.

Policy Integration:

Ministries of Education should consider SEL (Social Emotional Learning) with a digital focus. Being smart online isn’t just about safety—it’s about sanity.

Scrolling isn’t inherently bad. In fact, it connects us to causes, stories, people. But when the scroll becomes automatic—when it replaces reflection, rest, or real conversation—it becomes a threat

We are not machines. We’re not designed to consume infinite information. And in the race to stay updated, we risk losing what makes us human: the ability to pause, to feel, and to think.

“*I just want a minute where nothing is trying to get my attention.*”

