



Digital Burnout and Attention Collapse: A Review of Cross-Cultural Psychological Synthesis

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Abstract: Digital hyperconnectivity has restructured human attention in ways that existing psychological frameworks only partially explain. This review adopts a comparative integrative design, synthesising Kaplan's Attention Restoration Theory (ART) with Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) — specifically the *Trigunas*, *Chitta* (mind-stuff), *Prana* (vital energy), and *Tejas* (mental fire) — using a functional equivalence method to align constructs across both traditions. A three-phase model of cognitive collapse is proposed. Phase I describes *Rajasic* hyper-arousal, wherein algorithmic variable reward schedules sustain dopamine activation and trap the *Chitta* in *Vikshepa* (mental scattering). Phase II identifies the depletion point, where chronic context switching exhausts *Tejas* and destroys *Sattvic* clarity, manifesting as compulsive doomscrolling and paralyzed executive inhibition. Phase III represents *Tamasic* inertia — a defensive neurological shutdown producing social indifference, reconceptualised not as moral failure but as resource failure, arising from the metabolic unaffordability of empathy in a depleted system. Abstinence-based digital detox is found to be structurally insufficient, as it removes the external stimulus without resolving internal *Vrittis* (mental fluctuations). Sustainable recovery requires a dual-channel protocol combining passive nature exposure to restore directed attention with active *Pratyahara* (sensory gating) and *Dhyana* (meditation) to replenish *Prana*. The review argues that the erosion of civic duty in digital populations is a direct consequence of attentional collapse, resolvable only through restoration of the attentional instrument itself.

Keywords: Digital Burnout, Attention Restoration Theory, *Trigunas*, *Pratyahara*, Directed Attention Fatigue, *Chitta*, Cognitive Load, Social Indifference, Indian Knowledge Systems, Hyperconnectivity

1. Introduction

This section examines the structural failure of human attention in the digital age. It delineates the physiological progression from hyperconnectivity to cognitive collapse, establishing the theoretical basis for a cross-cultural synthesis of Western and Indian psychological models.

1.1 The Digital Paradox

The contemporary era operates within an economy of limitless information. However, this abundance creates a lack of attention (Simon, 1971). Digital interfaces demand continuous cognitive processing. This demand frequently exceeds natural human capacity. The modern individual exists in a state of continuous partial attention (Stone, 2007). In this state, the mind

remains eternally alert to incoming stimuli but fails to engage deeply with any single object. This fragmentation results in a specific psychological condition.

This condition is digital burnout. It requires distinct classification from traditional occupational burnout. Occupational burnout typically stems from specific workplace stressors or organizational dissatisfaction (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). In contrast, digital burnout arises from the medium itself. It is a pervasive state of exhaustion caused by the management of always on connectivity. The brain must constantly filter notifications, pop-ups, and algorithmic feeds. This filtering process creates a high cumulative physiological strain. The user experiences depletion even without performing physical activities. Recent studies indicate that this form of burnout is distinct. It involves emotional strain and cognitive overload driven specifically by screen-mediated interactions (Sharma et al., 2025).

A critical symptom of this exhaustion is social indifference. This term describes a reduced capacity for emotional responsiveness to societal issues. Critics often label this apathy as a moral failure. However, recent evidence suggests a physiological origin. Empathy is a resource intensive cognitive process (Cameron et al., 2019). It requires significant executive function. When digital noise fatigues the brain, the mind conserves energy. It shuts down high-effort processes like empathy. Therefore, indifference often signals cognitive depletion rather than a lack of compassion. The user enters a state of shock to survive the onslaught of data.

1.2 Objectives

Current literature often lacks a unified framework to address this crisis. Western cognitive science provides functional models of resource depletion. Attention Restoration Theory (ART) is a leading framework in this domain (Kaplan, 1995). It explains how directed attention degrades with overuse. However, ART primarily views attention as a mechanical

resource. It focuses less on the experiential or consciousness-based aspects of the mind.

Conversely, Indian psychology offers a phenomenological perspective. Ancient texts analyse the *Chitta* (mind-stuff) and its fluctuations. They describe states of mental scattering known as *Vikshepa*. These frameworks map how vital energy, or *Prana*, flows through the cognitive system. They argue that external distractions are not merely annoyances. They are disturbances that fragment the self. Despite their relevance, these Eastern frameworks remain underutilized in digital media studies.

This review synthesises these distinct epistemologies. It integrates the functional analysis of ART with the metaphysical depth of Indian psychology. The objective is to construct a comprehensive architecture of attention. This review examines how digital stimuli fragment the mind. It parallels the Western concept of cognitive load with the Indian concept of Rajasic agitation. It further equates severe burnout with the state of *Tamasic* inertia. By bridging these traditions, the review provides new insights. It moves beyond simple digital detox strategies. It aims to offer sustainable models for mental hygiene in a hyper-connected world.

2. Theoretical Foundations

This section contrasts two distinct epistemological frameworks to explain the mechanism of digital burnout. It analyses the Western cognitive model of resource depletion and compares it with the Eastern metaphysical model of mental fluctuation (*Vikshepa*), establishing a functional equivalence between Directed Attention Fatigue and *Tamasic* inertia.

2.1 Western Perspective: The Resource Model

The dominant framework for understanding cognitive fatigue in environmental psychology is Attention Restoration Theory (ART). Proposed by Kaplan (1989, 1995), this theory suggests that human attention is not a single entity. It consists of two distinct mechanisms: directed attention and involuntary attention.

Directed attention is a top-down cognitive process. It is voluntary, goal-oriented, and requires significant effort. This mechanism allows an individual to focus on a specific task while inhibiting competing distractions. For example, reading a dense academic text on a screen requires directed attention. It trusts heavily on the brain's repressive control mechanisms (Koivisto & Grassini, 2025).

Because it requires effort, directed attention is a finite resource. It degrades with sustained use, leading to a state known as Directed Attention Fatigue (DAF).

In contrast, involuntary attention is a bottom-up process. It is effortless and stimulus-driven. Kaplan referred to this as fascination. Sudden noises, bright colors, or moving images trigger this mechanism automatically. It does not require inhibitory control. In a natural environment, this soft fascination allows the directed attention system to rest and recover (Berto, 2014).

However, the digital environment corrupts this restorative cycle. Modern interfaces are engineered to trigger involuntary attention aggressively. Notifications, flashing banners, and auto-playing videos act as hard fascination. They capture attention but do not allow the mind to rest. Instead, they force the user to constantly reengage directed attention to filter out the noise.

This rapid switching between bottom-up capture and top-down inhibition depletes cognitive resources rapidly. Recent research suggests that this switch cost is the primary driver of digital burnout (Ohly et al., 2024). The user is not merely tired from work; they are exhausted from the metabolic cost of resisting digital intrusion.

2.2 Eastern Perspective: The Fluctuating Mind

Indian psychology offers a phenomenological rather than purely functional account of this exhaustion. The primary framework is derived from Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. Here, the mind is not viewed merely as brain function but

as *Antahkarana* (the inner instrument). The central component of this instrument is *Chitta* (mind-stuff).

Chitta is the storehouse of all memories, impressions, and habits. It is described as a field of consciousness that is constantly modified by sensory inputs. These modifications are called *Vrittis* (whirlpools or ripples). In the digital context, every email, like, or news alert acts as a stone thrown into the lake of the mind. It creates a *Vritti*, a ripple that disturbs the surface. When these ripples are continuous, the mind enters a state of *Vikshepa* (scattering).

Vikshepa is the reverse of *Ekagrata* (one pointed focus). In this state, the mind is tossed between various sensory objects. It cannot rest on a single point. This tossing is not just a loss of focus; it is a loss of vital energy. Indian psychology suggests that attention is fueled by *Prana* (vital life force) and *Tejas* (mental fire or radiance). *Tejas* provides the illumination for digestion, both of food and of information (Frawley, 2010).

When a user engages in doom-scrolling, they are subjecting the *Chitta* to thousands of rapid fire *Vrittis*. Each image requires a micro-dose of *Tejas* to process. The digital interface forces the mind into a hyper-active, *Rajasic* state. Over time, the *Tejas* burns out. The *Prana* becomes depleted. The mind can no longer sustain the agitation. To protect itself, the *Chitta* sinks into *Tamas* (inertia). This mirrors the Western concept of burnout. The user feels heavy, dull, and psychologically disconnected. They are not relaxing; they have simply run out of the energy required to feel or focus (Gusain, 2024).

2.3 Comparative Taxonomy (Synthesis)

While the terminologies differ, the functional mechanisms described by ART and Indian Psychology are remarkably consistent. Both systems identify a finite resource, a specific mechanism of distraction, and a resulting state of collapse. Table 1 synthesises these concepts to provide a unified vocabulary for the subsequent analysis.

Table 1: Comparative Dynamics of Attention: Cognitive Science vs. Indian Psychology

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Western Cognitive Science (ART)</i>	<i>Indian Psychology (IKS)</i>	<i>Functional Description</i>
Cognitive Resource	Directed Attention (Executive Control)	<i>Tejas</i> / <i>Prana</i> (Mental Energy)	The finite fuel required for focus, inhibition, and decision-making.
The Distraction	Bottom-up Stimuli / Exogenous Orienting	<i>Vikshepa</i> (Mental Scattering)	Involuntary redirection of focus caused by external, salient triggers.
The Filter	Inhibitory Control	<i>Pratyahara</i> (Sense Withdrawal)	The psychological mechanism used to open irrelevant data; highly energy-expensive.
The Collapse	Directed Attention Fatigue (DAF)	<i>Tamas</i> (Inertia/Darkness)	The defensive state of inability to process further information; manifests as apathy.
Restoration	Soft Fascination	<i>Dhyana</i> (Meditative Flow)	A state where attention is engaged without effort, allowing the resource to replenish.

Note: Table 1 demonstrates that Inhibitory Control and *Pratyahara* perform the same function: gating sensory input. In the digital era, the failure of this gating mechanism leads to the depletion of the cognitive resource (*Tejas*), resulting in the collapse of the system into *Tamas*.

3. Methodology

This section describes the methodological approach governing the synthesis presented in this review. It explains the rationale for selecting a comparative integrative framework, the criteria applied in sourcing literature, and the analytical logic used to construct functional equivalences across two epistemological traditions.

3.1 Research Design

This paper adopts a comparative integrative review design. This approach is appropriate when the objective is not to test a hypothesis empirically but to construct a new theoretical synthesis from existing bodies of knowledge (Torraco, 2005). The rationale for this design is grounded in the nature of the research problem. Digital burnout is a phenomenon that current empirical literature addresses primarily through

Western cognitive frameworks. These frameworks are rigorous but epistemologically limited. They measure attention as a mechanical resource without adequately accounting for the qualitative dimensions of consciousness. Indian psychological frameworks, by contrast, offer a detailed phenomenological account of mental fluctuation, energy depletion, and recovery. Neither tradition alone provides a complete explanatory model. A comparative integrative approach therefore enables the construction of a unified architecture that neither tradition could produce in isolation.

The design follows the logic of functional equivalence analysis. Rather than seeking direct translations between Western and Indian constructs, the review identifies shared functional mechanisms across both systems.

For example, Directed Attention Fatigue (Kaplan, 1995) and *Tamasic* inertia (Patañjali, 2012) are not identical constructs. However, they describe the same phenomenological state through different conceptual vocabularies. This method of alignment is epistemologically rigorous. It avoids the reductive error of collapsing one tradition into the other, while establishing a synthetic vocabulary that advances understanding beyond what either tradition alone can offer.

3.2 Literature Selection and Source Criteria

Literature was selected from two distinct source pools, reflecting the dual epistemological scope of the review. The Western empirical pool comprised peer-reviewed journal articles, empirical studies, and systematic reviews indexed in recognised databases. The primary search terms included digital burnout, attention restoration theory, directed attention fatigue, cognitive load, context switching, empathy fatigue, and digital detox. Priority was given to publications from 2003 onwards to capture the evolution of research since the emergence of smartphone and social media ecology. Foundational theoretical works published before this period, such as Kaplan (1995) and Simon (1971), were included on the basis of their canonical status within their respective fields.

The Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) pool comprised primary classical texts and their contemporary scholarly interpretations. The *Yoga Sutras* of Patañjali (translated by Bryant, 2012), Frawley's (2010) Ayurvedic synthesis, and Gusain's (2024) analysis of *Chitta* in yogic psychology were selected as primary IKS sources. The criterion for inclusion was conceptual relevance to cognitive attention, mental energy, sensory regulation, or consciousness states. Sources with well-established academic provenance were preferred. Grey literature was excluded from both pools. Only sources with verifiable DOIs or established publication credentials were included in the final reference list.

3.3 Analytical Framework and Scope

The analysis proceeded through three sequential stages. In the first stage, each tradition was surveyed independently. Western constructs—including Directed Attention Fatigue, inhibitory control, switch costs, and the variable reward schedule—were mapped against their empirical evidence base. Indian constructs—including the *Trigunas*, *Chitta*, *Vrittis*, *Pratyahara*, and *Dhyana*—were examined through their textual and contemporary scholarly sources.

In the second stage, cross-tradition pairs were identified on the basis of shared functional descriptions. The criterion for pairing was not etymological or cultural similarity but operational equivalence: does the construct perform the same cognitive or experiential function within its own system? This stage produced the comparative taxonomy presented in Table 1 of Section 2.3, which maps five functional dimensions across both traditions.

In the third stage, the functional pairs were integrated into a sequential process model of cognitive collapse. This model maps the trajectory from hyper-arousal to inertia across three phases, as described in Section 4. The scope of this review is theoretical and conceptual. It does not generate primary data. Its contribution lies in the construction of an integrative framework that offers both explanatory depth and practical applicability for intervention design. The review is therefore positioned within the tradition of theory-building scholarship in psychology (MacInnis, 2011), rather than within empirical or meta-analytic traditions.

4. The Psychology of Collapse: A Process Model

This section delineates the trajectory of digital burnout. It proposes a three-phase model mapping the user's descent from hyper engagement to cognitive inertia, synthesising the Western concept of executive function

depletion with the Indian framework of the *Trigunas* (Three Modes of Nature).

4.1 Phase I: Hyper-Arousal (The *Rajasic* State)

The cycle of burnout begins not with fatigue, but with intense activation. The digital environment is engineered to seize attention. Algorithmic platforms utilise specific behavioural techniques to maintain user engagement. The most potent of these is the Variable Reward Schedule (Skinner, 1957; Lembke, 2021).

In this mechanism, the outcome of an action is unpredictable. A user swipes a screen (the action) but does not know what content will appear (the reward). This uncertainty triggers a dopamine release. It mimics the neural feedback loop of gambling. The brain remains in a state of high alert. It constantly anticipates the next stimulus.

In Indian psychology, this state is classified as *Rajas*. *Rajas* represents the energy of passion, activity, and agitation. It is the force that creates motion (Gusain, 2024). A user in the *Rajasic* state is highly engaged. They feel productive and connected. They constantly check notifications, refresh feeds, and respond to messages. However, this activity is deceptive.

Western neuroscience confirms that this state is metabolically expensive. The brain's reward system, specifically the mesolimbic dopamine pathway, requires significant energy to function (Volkow et al., 2017). Each notification acts as an exogenous trigger. It forces the attentional system to orient itself toward the new stimulus. This continuous orienting response burns through the user's *Prana* (vital energy).

The user is not focusing; they are reacting. The mind is active but scattered (*Vikshepa*). The *Chitta* (mind-stuff) is filled with thousands of fleeting ripples. While the user feels wired, they are essentially borrowing energy from their future reserves. The *Rajasic* mind cannot rest. It

mistakes agitation for vitality. This phase creates the conditions for the subsequent crash.

4.2 Phase II: The Depletion Point (Transition)

The second phase marks the transition from engagement to exhaustion. The primary driver of this shift is multitasking. Contemporary users rarely engage with a single stream of content. They toggle between emails, social media, and work tasks.

Cognitive science establishes that the human brain cannot effectively multitask. Instead, it performs context switching. The brain must shut down the rules for one task and load the rules for another. This process incurs a switch cost (Monsell, 2003). Recent research on digital workers indicates that frequent context switching significantly increases cognitive load (Ohly et al., 2024).

The switch cost is the drain on the system. In Indian psychological terms, this rapid switching depletes *Tejas*. *Tejas* is the subtle mental fire responsible for digestion and clarity (Frawley, 2010). Just as digestive fire processes food, mental fire processes information. When the input speed exceeds the processing capacity, the *Tejas* burns out. The mind loses its luminosity.

The user now experiences a loss of *Sattva*. *Sattva* is the quality of balance, clarity, and light. Without *Sattva*, the user loses the ability to discriminate (*Viveka*). They can no longer distinguish between useful information and noise. The user enters a zombie mode.

This state reveals behaviorally as doomscrolling (Sharma et al., 2025). The user continues to scroll, but they are no longer processing the content. The eyes see, but the mind does not register. The behaviour becomes compulsive rather than voluntary. The user wants to stop but lacks the executive control to inhibit the impulse. This represents the failure of the gating mechanism (*Pratyahara*). The will is paralyzed. The cognitive reserve is empty, yet the motor loop continues.

4.3 Phase III: Total Inertia (The *Tamasic* State)

The final phase is the complete collapse of the attentional system. The user enters a state of digital burnout. This is distinct from mere tiredness. Sleep does not easily resolve it, as the mind remains hyper-stimulated yet exhausted.

In Indian psychology, this state is *Tamas*. *Tamas* represents darkness, inertia, heaviness, and delusion. It is the lowest energy state. A *Tamasic* mind is characterised by a lack of perception and a resistance to activity (Gusain, 2024).

In this phase, the brain enters a conservation mode. The prefrontal cortex, responsible for high-order decision-making and empathy, reduces its activity to save energy. This physiological shutdown explains the phenomenon of social indifference. Empathy is a high-cost cognitive function. It requires the Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between the duration of digital exposure and the quality of mental energy.

brain to simulate the emotional state of another person (Cameron et al., 2019). A depleted brain cannot afford this empathy toll.

Therefore, when a *Tamasic* user encounters distressing news (war, famine, or injustice) they feel nothing. This apathy is not necessarily a moral failing. It is a resource failure. The capacity to care has been eroded by the earlier Rajasic over-consumption.

The user in Phase III experiences emotional shock. They may feel a foggy head, a symptom of Kapha (earth/water element) aggravation in the mind. Paradoxically, the user may continue to consume digital media. However, they do so solely to distract themselves from the discomfort of their own exhaustion. This creates a negative feedback loop. The cure (rest) is avoided because the mind is too agitated to settle, yet too tired to focus. This is the *Tamasic* loop of digital burnout.

Figure 1: The Trajectory of Attention Collapse

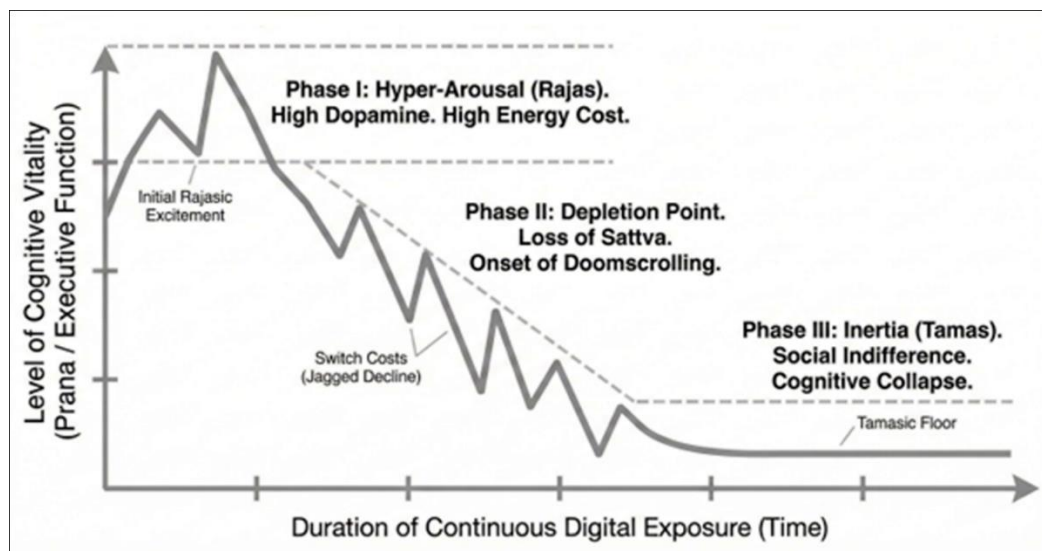


Figure 1 illustrates the synthesis of Western time. The vertical axis represents available and Indian psychological frameworks. It maps cognitive vitality (*Prana*). The trajectory begins the physiological degradation of attention over with Phase I. This shows a dopamine-fueled spike of Rajasic hyper-arousal. Phase II follows with a sharp decline.

This marks the metabolic depletion of *Tejas* caused by multitasking switch costs. The curve ends at Phase III, known as the *Tamasic* Floor. This is not a zero point but a low energy baseline. It represents a state of social indifference. Here, the user lacks the resources for active empathy or ethical processing. This

model derives from the frameworks of Kaplan (1995) and Patanjali (2012).

5. Emotional Consequences: The Erosion of Duty

This section examines the downstream effects of attentional collapse on social behaviour. It argues that the social indifference observed in heavy digital users is not a character fault or a moral failing. Instead, it is a structural inevitability caused by the depletion of cognitive resources required for empathy. When the architecture of attention collapses, the architecture of civic responsibility crushes with it.

5.1 The Cognitive Cost of Empathy

Empathy is frequently misunderstood as an automatic emotional reflex, a passive feeling that occurs spontaneously. However, cognitive neuroscience establishes that empathy is a high order executive function. It is resource-intensive. It requires the brain to suppress its own egocentric perspective and simulate the emotional reality of another being. Cameron et al. (2019) demonstrated that individuals often avoid empathetic engagement because of its cognitive costs. When given a choice between an empathetic response and a detached response, the brain often prefers to avoid the metabolic effort required to process the suffering of others.

In the context of digital burnout, this cost becomes prohibitive. As established in Section 3, a user in the late stages of burnout suffers from Directed Attention Fatigue (DAF). Their executive control functions are depleted. Recent studies indicate a strong correlation between digital burnout and deficits in executive functioning (EF) among young adults (Upadhyay & Tripathy, 2025). The prefrontal cortex, which governs these high-level processes, operates on a finite supply of glucose and neurotransmitters. When EF is low, the brain prioritises survival functions and sheds non-essential load. Tragically, in a state of

survival mode, empathy is treated as non-essential data.

This results in a phenomenon termed Compassion Fatigue, which has expanded beyond clinical settings into the general digital population. Users are exposed to a relentless stream of traumatic imagery (war, disaster, political polarization, and social injustice) sprinkled with trivial entertainment. This fragmentation forces the brain to constantly switch between high-arousal negative valence and low-arousal positive valence. The anterior cingulate cortex (ACC), responsible for emotional regulation and conflict monitoring, becomes overwhelmed.

To protect homeostasis, the system creates a psychological distance. The user scrolls past a tragedy not because they do not care, but because they do not have the metabolic energy to care. This state is described in recent literature as an emotional recession (Freedman et al, 2025). Just as an economic recession restricts the flow of capital, an emotional recession restricts the flow of prosocial behaviour. The capacity for collaboration, collective resilience, and noble goals is eroded. The user becomes cognitively seized, able to perceive the information of suffering but physiologically blocked from processing the meaning of it.

5.2 Dharma and Civic Engagement

Indian psychology frames this failure not merely as a biological deficit, but as a spiritual crisis of *Dharma* (duty). In this framework, *Dharma* is not religious dogma; it is the cosmic order that sustains society and the individual. It is the cohesive force that holds the community together. A critical subset of this is *Samanya Dharma*, the universal duties applicable to all humans regardless of caste or creed, such as nonviolence (*Ahimsa*), truthfulness (*Satya*), and compassion (*Daya*).

The performance of *Dharma* is not automatic. It requires a specific quality of mind: *Sattva* (clarity, balance, and luminosity). A

Sattvic mind possesses the light required to see the interconnectedness of life. It has the stability to act for the benefit of others even when it is difficult. However, the trajectory of digital burnout described in this review moves the user away from *Sattva*.

Initially, the digital environment pushes the user into *Rajas* (passion/agitation). The user is active, perhaps posting outrage or sharing news, but this activity is often reactive and ego-driven rather than duty-driven. As the burnout deepens, the user collapses into *Tamas* (inertia/darkness).

A digital user trapped in the *Tamasic* state is structurally incapable of Dharma. *Tamas* is defined by two primary powers: *Avarana* (veiling) and *Vikshepa* (distorting). The *Tamasic* mind is wrapped in a cocoon of self-preservation. It is characterised by *Moha* (delusion) and *Alasya* (lethargy). In this state, the intellect is clouded. The user cannot extend their awareness beyond their own immediate discomfort or need for dopamine.

Therefore, the social indifference seen in the digital age is a form of *Adharma* (failure of duty) driven by *Avidya* (ignorance/disconnection). The user is not acting out of hatred. They are acting out of incapacity. The always-on culture paradoxically creates a society of checked-out citizens. The exhaustion of the *Antahkarana* (inner instrument) severs the connection between the individual and the collective.

This has profound implications for democratic participation. Civic engagement requires *Prana*. It requires the ability to listen, to debate, and to act. A *Tamasic* population may consume political content, but they consume it as entertainment or noise, not as a call to duty. They become spectators of their own society. The erosion of duty is, therefore, a direct consequence of the erosion of attention. Restoring the capacity for *Samanya Dharma* requires more than moral exhortation; it requires the physiological and spiritual restoration of the attentional instrument itself.

6. Coping and Recovery: Restoration Strategies

This section critiques the efficacy of abstinence-based digital detox models. It proposes an integrated recovery framework combining the Western environmental intervention of Soft Fascination with the Indian psychological practice of Sensory Gating (*Pratyahara*) to restore cognitive and emotional vitality.

6.1 Critique of Digital Detox

The popular response to digital burnout is the digital detox. This approach advocates for complete, temporary abstinence from technology. However, recent systematic reviews suggest that this method is often ineffective for long-term recovery (Tariq, 2025; Radtke et al., 2025). The limitation of this strategy lies in its failure to address the underlying neurocognitive adaptations caused by chronic overuse.

The failure of simple abstinence is rooted in the persistence of mental habits. Indian psychology classifies these habits as *Vrittis*. Even when the external device is removed, the internal compulsion to check for updates remains active. The mind continues to vibrate in a *Rajasic* mode, anticipating a reward that is not there. This phenomenon, known as phantom vibration syndrome, indicates that the neural pathways associated with digital stimuli remain hypersensitized.

Furthermore, forced abstinence often creates abstinence violation effects. When the user returns to the digital environment after a period of restriction, they often binge-consume content to compensate for the deprivation. This cycle mirrors the yo-yo effect seen in dietary fasting. Therefore, sustainable recovery requires regulating the internal interaction with stimuli, rather than merely temporarily removing the external object. A structural change in how attention is deployed is necessary.

6.2 Pratyahara as Gating

A more robust solution is found in the concept of *Pratyahara*. Traditionally translated as withdrawal of the senses, modern interpretations reframe it as Sensory Gating or conscious curation (Utermoehl, 2024). It is not the cessation of perception, but the reclamation of the cognitive switch.

In a state of burnout, the user's attention is captured automatically by bottom-up stimuli, such as notifications or flashing interfaces. *Pratyahara* training involves strengthening top-down inhibitory control. This transforms the user from a passive recipient of data to an active gatekeeper who determines which stimuli enter the conscious field. This practice relies on the faculty of *Viveka* (discrimination), allowing the user to distinguish between necessary information and sensory noise.

Practical application involves selective intake. Just as one avoids toxic food to protect physical health, one must avoid toxic information to protect *Tejas* (mental energy). This requires a conscious evaluation of digital inputs. The user asks: "Does this input increase *Sattva* (clarity) or *Rajas* (agitation)?" By filtering inputs at the source, the user prevents the depletion of executive resources before it occurs. This establishes *Pratyahara* as a preventative strategy rather than merely a curative one.

6.3 Nature and Dhyana

Once the gating mechanism is established, the depleted resources must be replenished. Attention Restoration Theory (ART) identifies Soft Fascination as the primary mechanism for this. Environments such as forests or seashores capture attention without effort (Kaplan, 1995). They allow the directed attention system to rest and recover its inhibitory capacity.

Recent studies confirm that brief nature-based interventions significantly reduce depressive reflection and stress (Owens et al., 2024). However, Indian psychology adds a deeper layer: *Dhyana* (meditation). While nature heals the *Rajasic* agitation through

passive exposure, *Dhyana* restores the *Prana* through active internal alignment.

The synthesis of these two creates a powerful protocol. Nature provides the external container for rest, while meditation provides the internal mechanism for recharging. When a user engages in *Dhyana* within a natural setting, they synchronize their internal rhythm with the external environment. This dissolves the *Tamasic* inertia that characterizes deep burnout. The mind moves from a state of collapse to a state of flow. Empathy and social responsibility naturally reemerge when the cognitive toll is lifted, and the vital energy is restored to a functional baseline.

7. Conclusion

This review synthesises divergent epistemologies to construct a comprehensive model of digital burnout. The analysis demonstrates that the phenomenon is not merely a consequence of poor time management or lack of willpower. It is a structural collapse of the attentional mechanism itself. The alignment of Western Attention Restoration Theory (ART) with the Indian *Triguna* framework reveals a distinct physiological trajectory. The user begins in a state of *Rajasic* hyper-arousal, fueled by the variable reward schedules embedded in modern platform design. This unsustainable outflow of *Prana* inevitably precipitates a collapse into *Tamasic* inertia.

The consequences of this collapse extend significantly beyond individual mental health. They manifest collectively as social indifference and civic apathy. A cognitive system depleted of energy cannot afford the high metabolic cost of empathy or ethical reasoning. Therefore, the restoration of attention is a fundamental prerequisite for the restoration of civic duty. Furthermore, the critique of the popular digital detox highlights the insufficiency of simple abstinence. Behavioural restriction alone does not resolve the internal mental fluctuations (*Vrittis*) that

drive compulsive usage, often leading to relapse.

7.1 Recommendations

The synthesis of ART and Indian psychology demands a multi-layered approach to digital burnout. Individuals must shift from temporary detox to *Pratyahara* (conscious gating). They should actively filter Rajasic stimuli. Recovery requires combining passive nature exposure with active *Dhyana*. Educational institutions must integrate Attentional Literacy. Students need training to recognise physiological states of agitation and inertia. Policymakers and designers must prioritise ethical algorithms. These systems should reduce metabolic costs. Dark patterns like variable reward loops must be minimized. Ultimately, user *Prana* must be valued over engagement metrics.

7.2 Concluding Thought

Sustainable digital engagement requires a paradigm shift from reactive consumption to intentional guardianship of the mind. Future research must continue to explore the physiological correlates of these ancient psychological states. The ultimate objective is to cultivate *Sakshi Bhav* (Witness Consciousness). In this state, the user observes digital stimuli without mechanically reacting to them, thereby preserving *Tejas* (mental fire) and maintaining the *Sattvic* balance required for ethical decision making. The digital age demands a new cognitive hygiene. Without it, the human mind risks becoming a passive node in an algorithmic network, rather than the active, conscious master of its own destiny.

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