DECODING
DIGITAL
MINIMALISM

EXPERTS WEIGH IN ON THE BENEFITS OF TONING DOWN THE NOISE OF TECHNOLOGY IN OUR LIVES
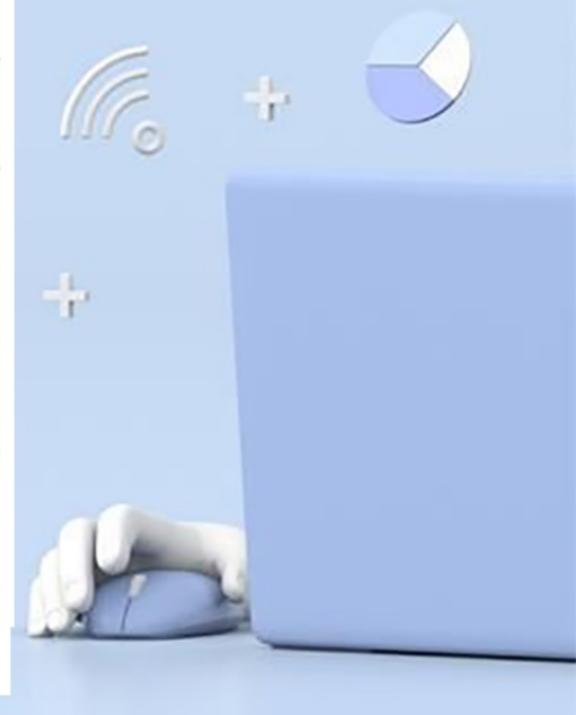
BY RASHMI GOPAL RAO

"Clutter is not just the stuff on your floor; it's anything that stands between you and the life you want to be living" - Peter Walsh

Mention the words 'minimalism' and 'decluttering' and it is sure to conjure up images of the famous KonMari method of tidying up, categorising and retaining physical items based on the simple question "does it spark joy?". But did you know that in today's times, where our lives are increasingly dependent and dominated by technology, clutter means much more than just the unending piles of clothes and drawers filled with junk? Well, the clutter weighing down on most people's lives and minds is something that we constantly carry in our hands, pockets and bags. The urge to clear unread mails during dinner time or check notifications on your phone while waiting for the elevator or scroll through the latest posts on Instagram amidst typing a work-related email, just seems so irresistible. It is a constant source of distraction and an unpleasant state of busyness leading to decreased productivity and a lack of focus. Juggling between apps, devices and platforms while dealing with all the information overload can just get totally overwhelming. Hence, it is no surprise that the concept of digital minimalism has become more relevant than ever before.

Balance and not elimination

There is no denying the fact that technology has influenced every part of our lives in this day and age. "Digital devices and online platforms are increasingly in charge of our social interactions, career endeavours, leisure activities and personal interests. Even though technology offers a multitude of benefits, the over use of it can be detrimental to our physical, mental and emotional well-being. Overusing screens, being online all the time, and being constantly distracted by technology can cause anxiety, stress, and a sense of being cut off from reality," says Dr. Malini Saba, psychologist, founder and chairman, Anannke Foundation. Psychological issues like ADHD, FOMO and insomnia have become extremely common. "There are rising cases of children experiencing behavioural issues like being aggressive, violent abusive, hyperactive and showing a general lack of interest in day-to-

day activities," says Sahiba Sethi, counselling psychologist and founder, Ummeed Healing.

Thus, it has become imperative to balance our online and offline lives and in order to regain control of our time and life, digital minimalism is the way forward. "It entails using digital tools and platforms with purpose and discretion by finding a balance that allows us to use technology mindfully while still avoiding its total elimination," adds Dr. Saba. By limiting screen time, decluttering digital spaces, and prioritising offline experiences, people can keep themselves at bay from the problems that are being caused by excessive use of technology. "It basically involves a lifestyle change and finding a balanced approach to technology.

Advantages of a Digitally Minimalistic Life
- Strengthened mental health
- Stronger interpersonal relationships
- Improved self-Awareness and focus
- Increased productivity
- Better work-life balance

It is all about how we can limit our technology use so that it does not prove to be detrimental for ourselves and hamper our efficiency," says Ashutosh Kumar Jha, chief strategy officer, Artemis Medicare Services Ltd.

A philosophy that focuses on a more conscious approach to using technology, digital minimalism encourages less screen time and limits distractions without fully cutting oneself off from it. "It is based on three fundamental ideas: understanding the high cost of digital clutter, simplifying digital interactions for increased effectiveness, and enjoying the benefits of technology by using it intentionally to add value to your activities," says Gagandeep Kaur, a communications consultant who has been leading a digitally minimalistic lifestyle for the last three years.

Adopt a sustainable approach
It is key to note that practising digital minimalism is much more than following transient trends like the short-term social media detoxes. It is a long-term commitment which requires a fundamental

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change in digital habits rather than a temporary break from it. Like with all resolutions, start with baby steps. At first, critically examine your existing digital routine and determine areas where you can make reductions or enhancements. Consider, for example, cutting back on mindless scrolling, uninstalling unnecessary apps, turning off unwanted notifications and unsubscribing from emails that are not important. Set boundaries, have time limits and ensure that you follow them consistently. Allocating clear timebands for specific activities like checking work mails after hours, online shopping, social media etc. helps maintain balance. "Having a smartphone and an internet connection does not imply that you are available 24/7," says Abhijita Kulshrestha, Life Coach.

Keep in mind that digital minimalism prioritises meaningful relationships and content consumption rather than total ab-

stention. Hence it is critical to prioritise quality over quantity to improve your online experiences while minimising digital clutter. "A solution that has worked for me is to make apps difficult to access. For example, do not have apps like FB, X and others on your phone. Keep it on a laptop or even better a desktop where it is a little less convenient to just open and start browsing. Use existing apps that track usage and remind you of the same," says IT professional Lakshmi Srinivasan.

An important aspect of digital cleansing is to routinely delete emails, files, pictures and videos that are no longer needed. "Embracing digital simplicity is also essential for avoiding the potential risks of data breaches and privacy invasion. As we share more personal information online, it is critical to limit our digital footprint and safeguard sensitive information from being misused," says Varad Kaushik.

Avoid getting trapped in the information black hole. "With the increased use of AI, facts and fiction go hand in hand. Having discipline and being fundamentally aware of this stops you from mindlessly consuming and sharing information leading to reduced time on social media," says Radha Rao, a semi-retired IT professional who adds that technology and digital information can be a win-win if used in the right way.

As with everything else, one size does not fit all. Depending on your individual goals, circumstances and needs, you would need to build a strategy that suits you. Be flexible and ready to adapt to ensure that it works for you. There is no one right way, as sustainable digital minimalism is an ongoing journey of finding equilibrium in a tech-driven world. **W**

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