

One Day National Conference on

**FAMILIES IN TRANSITION: THE
SOCIOLOGUOF INDIAN HOUSEHOLDS IN
CONTEMPORARY TIMES**

Editors

Dr. M. Kousalyadevi

Dr. R. Kavitha



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FROM FAMILY BONDS TO DIGITAL BONDS: STRUCTURAL TRANSITIONS IN INDIAN FAMILIES AND YOUNG ADULTS' DIGITAL ADDICTION

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Abstract

India's family system has undergone a significant transformation from traditional joint families to nuclear households due to urbanisation, educational mobility, and changing socio-economic aspirations. This structural shift has altered patterns of family interaction, supervision, and emotional support, particularly affecting children and young adults. Simultaneously, India has witnessed rapid digital expansion, with affordable smartphones and low-cost internet driving increased digital engagement among youth. While digital technologies offer opportunities for learning, communication, and social connection, excessive and unregulated usage has led to growing concerns about digital addiction and its effects on health and lifestyle.

This paper examines the relationship between structural transitions in Indian families and the rise of digital addiction among young adults. It analyses how reduced family supervision, emotional gaps, and changing daily routines contribute to compulsive digital behaviour. The paper also explores the physical, mental, and social impacts of digital addiction, including sleep disturbances, sedentary lifestyles, stress, and weakened family bonds. Further, it reviews Indian government measures and global policy influences aimed at promoting digital safety, inclusion, and responsible technology use. The study highlights the need for balanced digital engagement supported by strong family involvement, effective policy implementation, and sustained digital awareness initiatives to ensure youth well-being in a rapidly digitising society.

Keywords: Structural transition, Digital addiction, Young adults, Lifestyle

Introduction

India's family system has traditionally been rooted in the joint family model, where grandparents, parents, children, and extended relatives lived together, supporting each other emotionally and socially. Such families provided not just economic cooperation but also strong interpersonal bonds and daily communication among members. However, rapid urbanisation, increased mobility, higher education, and employment opportunities have accelerated a shift toward nuclear families a smaller unit consisting of parents and their children living independently. This transition has changed how family time, supervision, and relationships operate, especially for young adults.

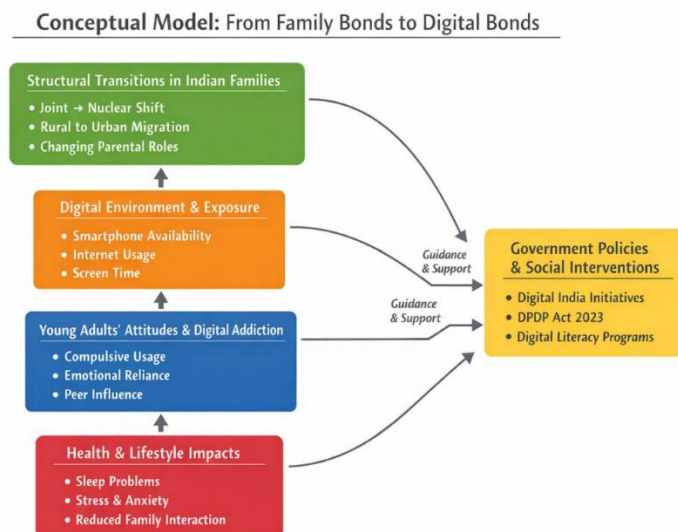
At the same time, India is experiencing an unparalleled digital expansion. Smartphones are affordable, data costs are low compared to many countries, and millions of young people use digital platforms for communication, entertainment, education, and work. But this surge in digital engagement has brought challenges too preferably digital addiction, where excessive use of social media, gaming, and online videos affects behaviour, mental health, and daily routines. Studies and surveys show many parents in India acknowledge that children and teenagers are spending multiple hours a day on screens and display signs of compulsive usage.

This paper explores how changing family structures and digital environments are reshaping young adults' attitudes toward digital use, and examines the impacts on family relationships, health, and lifestyle. It also discusses government efforts aimed at balancing digital growth with well-being.

Objectives of the Study

1. To understand structural changes in Indian families, especially the shift from joint to nuclear systems.
2. To examine attitudinal patterns of young adults toward digital addiction in the Indian context.
3. To analyse the impact of digital addiction on health and lifestyle among young adults.
4. To identify gaps in digital access and supervision related to changing family dynamics.
5. To discuss Indian government measures and policies that relate to digital well-being, internet safety, and youth development.

Conceptual Model: From Family Bonds to Digital Bonds



Structural Transitions in Indian Families

Historically, the Indian family was a joint family system, where collective living supported shared duties, caregiving, and emotional bonding. Over recent decades, economic pressures, urban work environments, and aspirations for autonomy have contributed to a rise in nuclear families smaller units that often lack extended relative support. While nuclear families offer greater independence, they can also lead to reduced supervision of young people, emotional isolation, or shifts in everyday interaction patterns.

Why the Shift Happened

- **Urbanisation & Employment:** Young adults move to cities for jobs, leading to smaller family units.
- **Educational Mobility:** Students relocate for higher education, no longer living with extended family.
- **Individual Autonomy:** Modern lifestyles prioritise independence and personal comfort.
- **Economic Factors:** Cost of living and housing patterns influence family structures.

This structural change matters because family support, routine interaction, and supervision – once provided by a joint family become less constant in nuclear settings. As a result, children and young adults may rely more on digital platforms for connection, entertainment, and emotional engagement.

Digital Addiction among Young Adults in India

Digital addiction refers to compulsive and excessive engagement with screens especially smartphones, social media, gaming, or video platforms that interferes with daily responsibilities, health, and social life.

Indian research finds that:

- A significant proportion of young people engage with digital media for hours every day.
- Many urban Indian parents acknowledge that their children show addictive patterns to videos, gaming, and social networking, often exceeding several hours of use per day.

Prevalence and Behavioural Patterns

In a survey covering adolescents across India, most participants used digital technology. A substantial number showed signs of smartphone and gaming addiction, and these patterns were linked to factors including family environment, school pressure, and peer influence. For example, compulsive digital usage was associated with disrupted routines and reduced outdoor activities.

Factors Linking Family Transitions to Digital Addiction

1. Reduced Supervision

In nuclear families, especially where parents work long hours, young adults may receive less direct supervision or emotional support, leaving them more time and opportunity to engage with devices and platforms.

2. Emotional Coping

Without extended family interaction, digital platforms may become a source of emotional comfort or belonging, especially when physical social interaction is limited.

3. Routine Displacement

Technology can easily fill time that was once used for family conversations, shared meals, or community participation further distancing individuals from direct family bonds.

4. Urban-Rural Convergence

Urban and rural youth have different digital experiences. While urban teens may have high-speed internet and extensive platform access, rural youth may experience delayed digital exposure but rapidly catch up due to affordable smartphones. Both groups face risks when digital use outpaces supervision or balanced lifestyle patterns.

Health and Lifestyle Impacts

Physical Health

- **Sleep disturbance:** Excessive screen time at night hampers sleep cycles.
- **Sedentary lifestyle:** Long hours on devices can reduce physical activity, increasing risk for obesity and posture-related issues.

Mental Health

- **Stress, anxiety, and mood changes:** Overuse of social media and gaming is associated with anxiety, irritability, and low self-esteem.
- **Behavioural shifts:** Families report impatience, withdrawal from social interactions, and increased emotional volatility in digitally addicted youth.

Social & Family Life

- **Weakening of family interaction:** Excessive digital engagement can reduce meaningful face-to-face communication, which once played a key role in family cohesion.
- **Reduced engagement in traditional activities:** Time spent on screens replaces shared cultural, recreational, and educational family activities.

Government Response and Policies

India recognises the need for digital inclusion and digital safety. Several national and sectoral policies aim to balance digital growth with safety and well-being for youth:

1. Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Rules, 2025

Under this framework, parental consent is made mandatory for individuals under 18 to join major digital platforms a measure designed to protect minors' data and ensure responsible access. However, enforcement and age verification present challenges.

2. Digital Literacy Initiatives

Government programmes under the larger Digital India mission aim to expand digital skills and responsible usage among citizens, including youth. These programmes focus on equipping individuals with knowledge to engage with technology productively, and to understand risks like cyberbullying, misinformation, and addiction.

3. Digital Safety Awareness

Public discussions and awareness drives on digital safety strengthen awareness about online risks. Government and civil society collaborations call for increased literacy on safe internet use, emphasising balanced usage to protect mental health and personal safety. Related initiatives underline the need for digital security training as India advances its digital ecosystem.

4. Global Commitments with Indian Context

India participates in global efforts such as UNESCO and UNICEF-supported digital inclusion frameworks that stress equitable access and safety for young learners and users. Though not a direct government scheme, such international commitments influence domestic policy discourse on digital equity and youth well-being.

Discussion

The transition from extended to nuclear families has brought many socio-economic gains, but it also poses new challenges for the socialisation of young adults. As family time decreases, digital engagement often increases. This engagement, while beneficial in many ways, exposes youth to addictive patterns that can impact sleep, health, social skills, and emotional well-being.

Strong family bonds historically offered both supervision and emotional anchoring; as those structures change, digital bonds are increasingly filling emotional and social spaces. Without balanced parental guidance and policy frameworks that protect young users, digital environments may foster compulsive use rather than constructive engagement.

Government interventions such as protective data rules and digital literacy efforts signal awareness of these issues, but effective implementation, community participation, and integration with family-level strategies is important for real impact.

Conclusion

India's shift from joint to nuclear family structures intersects with a rapidly evolving digital landscape. Young adults a key demographic with deep digital engagement – face both opportunities and challenges from this shift. Digital addiction is not merely a personal issue but a social outcome shaped by family dynamics, supervision patterns, and broader socio-digital change.

Balanced digital policies, proactive parental engagement, and programmes that promote healthy digital behaviour can help ensure that technology enriches – rather than erodes – both individual lifestyles and family relationships.

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