

HEALTH

# THE MODERN GENIE

Either you control your Internet presence and social media, or you can be sure that it will control you



MINU BUDHIA

**W**hile smartphone overuse and social media have been getting a bad rap over the years, today I'm choosing to focus on the good rather than the bad or the ugly. The key thing is to use the apps for your wit, instead of getting used by them. Change why and how you use your phone and it can be a wonderful, positive experience.

A part and parcel of our daily lives, each and every one of us has a smartphone — from company CEOs to janitors, from homemakers to domestic helps, from senior citizens to schoolgoing pre-teens. If there was ever a time for "kard-dunhya-muthi-nahi", it is now.

With the smartphone interface and a majority of apps being available not just in English, but a number of Indian languages, this piece of technology is breaking socio-economic and cultural barriers every second. Now that even the most basic smartphones have decent quality cameras, good audio, and access to innumerable apps, everyone now has a chance at equal opportunities.

## THANDA MATLAB COOL COOL APPS...

• **TOGETHER FOR TOMORROW.** By allowing us to go paperless (no printing, no diaries, no sticky notes), apps can help us save the environment and battle climate change. By

using Google Drive you can share the same document with hundreds of people without wasting a single piece of paper, without printing a single word. By using Google Calendar as a diary, you can share your schedule with relevant people and keep updating it.

• **ZERO BUDGET, ZERO WASTE.** Using apps such as Swiggy Genie, BigBasket, Blinkit, Tata 1mg, and Nykaa make our lives easier by bringing the shops to us and saving our time. When you can't find something locally, or want to send a gift abroad, there's always Amazon and Flipkart.

• **LET'S MAKE MONEY SIMPLE.** Banking apps from individual banks and UPI payments (GPay, PayTM, and so on) enable cashless payments, reduce trips to the bank, and help you keep an eye on every transaction too, making you more financially responsible. **WARNING:** However, you need to be quite alert and careful while making online transactions as you can be cheated easily.

• **MUSKURATE RAHO.** Using smart CCTV's can keep your loved ones and your homes safe. By accessing the real-time or recorded visuals through apps, you can keep an eye on the support staff caring for your children or seniors at home.

• **LIGHTING UP LIVES.** Never get lost, never be late. If you're terrible at directions, there are several apps such as Google Maps that will help you reach your destination easily and on time.

• **BADI BHI, BADIYA BHI.** Whether it's grocery lists, life schedule calendars, work spreadsheets, wedding planners, or financial habit trackers, there are apps to help you manage your time, boost your productivity, and add a touch of organisation to a world of chaos. With sticky notes, highlighters, and pomodoros now on apps, there's no excuse not to be organised.

PEOPLE SPEAKING IN REGIONAL DIALECTS, NOT JUST ENGLISH OR HINDI, ARE GETTING VERIFIED BLUE TICKS! ONLINE CREATORS FROM NOT JUST THE CITY, BUT TOWNS AND VILLAGES TOO ARE SHARING THEIR SLICE OF LIFE, THEIR CULTURE, THEIR FOOD, THEIR STYLE. AND IT IS NOT ONLY THE RURAL POPULATION THAT IS FINDING ITS VOICE ON SOCIAL MEDIA. THE GLITZ AND GLAM OF INSTAGRAM IS NOT JUST FOR HIG INDIVIDUALS ANYMORE — MIGS AND LIGS ARE ALSO CREATING CONTENT AND HAVE ACCESS TO THE WHOLE WORLD ONLINE



◆ **BE MORE.** Cheap internet, free apps, and smartphone technology encourage and unleash creativity and freedom of expression. Whether digital or print, for food, fashion or products, you can produce content, advertisements, and a variety of marketing materials—all from your phone. Using Adobe Creative Cloud Apps, Snapseed, Grammarly, and more help create professional-looking results. Formal training in photography, videography, design, or even writing is no longer necessary to unleash your creativity.

◆ **ENGLISH VINGLISH.** In addition to educational apps for children, you can learn about any subject from your smartphone, academic or otherwise, that too in any language. There is a tutorial on YouTube about anything and everything. Some cool apps to check out include Sunrise, Basno, and Clue.

## The Smart Social... be cool not a fool on social media

Social media has become more than just a place to network. Giving one and all the space to showcase their hobbies and unique talents, it has become a platform for people to achieve their dreams.

People speaking in regional dialects, not just English or Hindi, are getting verified blue ticks! Online creators from not just the city, but towns and villages too are sharing their slice of life, their culture, their food, their style. And it is not only the rural population that is finding its voice on social media. The glitz and glam of Instagram is not just for HKI individuals anymore—MIGs and LIGs are also creating content and have access to the whole world online.

◆ **HUM SATH SATH HAIN.** Facebook has allowed us to reconnect and meet with childhood friends. Especially for parents with children who have just moved to a new city or country, video calls bring great peace of mind and reduce loneliness. Video calls were the only relationship saviours during Covid. **WARNING:** However, family time should not be replaced by too much smartphone usage. Always keep smartphones off/on silent mode during family time.

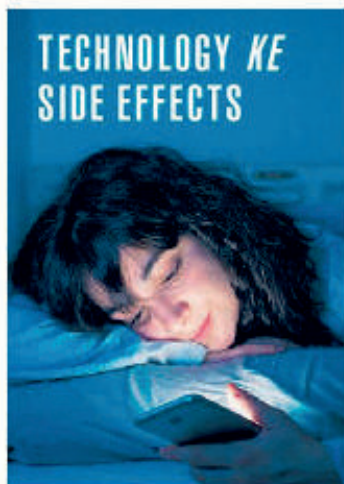
◆ **WE UNDERSTAND YOUR WORLD.** Today, a single social media app is a one-stop solution for all communication needs and apps like YouTube and Instagram provide hours and hours of content to help battle loneliness in the elderly. I know a cool grandma who went from watching cooking videos to starting her own channel where she shares new recipes weekly!

◆ **CONNECTING ASPIRATIONS.** There are so many new professions coming up—new jobs that can be done from anywhere in the world. Becoming an 'influencer' is a glamorous, on-camera job giving freedom to many.

◆ **VAADA NAHI, DAAVA!** Social media provides cost-effective, targeted, easy-to-use advertising. The ads themselves are easy to create and you get to analyse easy-to-understand reports on your ad performance.

◆ **HUM HAI NA.** News is not only easily available in real time, it can be shared at the click of a button.

◆ **LOVE, SEX, AND DHOKA.** It breaks social stigmas and stereotypes. Basics of sex education are being imparted by medical professionals and specialists who are giving people access to scientific knowledge instead of old wives tales and unrealistic pornographic content. Doctors talking about gynaecological health issues and awareness about menstruation are breaking generational barriers. Mental health



**T**he overuse of technology in general has given rise to behavioural issues in children and adults alike—difficulty with impulse control and unregulated emotions. We're accustomed to using apps to switch on the AC from the car, dim the lights, or watch the hottest web series on OTT platforms.

While the tips above can point you in the right direction, you or someone you know may be struggling with tech addiction without realising it. So when do you get professional help? When it starts interfering with your daily life.

Here are some red flags based on the Internet Addiction Test (IAT) by Dr Kimberly Young. Answer each of the questions below using the following scoring table.

- 0 - Does not apply
- 1 - Rarely
- 2 - Occasionally
- 3 - Frequently
- 4 - Often
- 5 - Always

- 1 How often do you find that you stay online longer than you intended?
- 2 How often do you neglect household chores to spend more time online?
- 3 How often do you prefer the excitement of the internet to intimacy with your partner?
- 4 How often do you become defensive or secretive when anyone asks you what you do online?
- 5 How often do you snap, yell, or act annoyed if someone bothers you while you are online?
- 6 How often does your job performance or productivity suffer because of the internet?
- 7 How often do you lose sleep due to late-night log-ins?
- 8 How often do you try to hide how long you've been online?
- 9 How often do you choose to spend more time online over going out with others?
- 10 How often do you feel depressed, moody, or nervous when you are offline, which goes away once you are back online?

The higher your total score, the greater your level of addiction.

awareness is also being shared in a light, fun way.

◆ **BADHTI KA NAAM GAADI.** It helps build resilience. Dealing with some trolling or negative comments helps to develop a positive coping mechanism as well as a thick hide. The world is not always sweet and nice, and ignoring the rubbish or standing up for yourself are both essential skills that help in real-world interactions.

◆ **POWERED BY INTELLECT, DRIVEN BY VALUES.** Gathers people to support a cause.

◆ **TOMORROW IS YOURS.** Boosts small businesses, mompreneurs and solopreneurs.

## Taming Technology

Technology is a good thing, and too much of any good thing is bound to have a negative effect on our lives. However, don't blame the smartphone or the apps here. After all, it is just a tool. And it's your job to not be a fool. The most useful thing also has side effects if done in excess.

The power lies within you to become its master instead of becoming its slave. Think of your smartphone as a super intelligent and manipulative digital genie that grants you unlimited wishes. But you have to be very, very specific about what you want. And if you don't rub the lamp, the genie can't make an appearance! You are in control.

Are apps on your smartphone designed to lure you into a literal, invisible digital web? Yes. Do they have 'spiders' crawling through your phone collecting your usage data which

—she lip-syncs to the silliest, funniest songs or reels to take a break from her daily life. There's another friend whose Instagram account is all about curly hair.

## Protect yourself

◆ **WHEREVER YOU GO, OUR NETWORK FOLLOWS!** In today's digital world, your privacy is no longer yours. All the terms and conditions that you click are essentially giving away most of your rights to your own information or regulating how your information can be used without your consent.

One thing we really need to be clear about to ourselves is this—any information that you share with an app, not just social media, is as good as public information. However secure and however well-renowned the app company, anyone can be hacked and all your information can be leaked. So if you don't want the world to know something publicly, don't put it on your phone.

Even if you use screenshots, screen recording disabled apps and messengers with disappearing videos, text and voice messages, please be aware that anyone can capture that information from a different device.

◆ **DIL HAI KI MAANTA NAHI.** In this aspect I do have to say that I am not for any dating or wedding apps—talking with complete strangers who are not who they say they are, getting emotionally involved, catfished, blackmailed, even stalked are all too scary realities. Romance is best left for the real world, according to me.

◆ **A POINT TO PONDER.** Children as

## ONE THING WE REALLY NEED TO BE CLEAR ABOUT TO OURSELVES IS THIS — ANY INFORMATION THAT YOU SHARE WITH AN APP, NOT JUST SOCIAL MEDIA, IS AS GOOD AS PUBLIC INFORMATION. HOWEVER SECURE AND HOWEVER WELL-RENOUNDED THE APP COMPANY, ANYONE CAN BE HACKED

neuroscientists and behavioural scientists analyse to keep you hooked? Yes. So are you completely helpless to this socially acceptable addiction? Absolutely not.

Let's take a look at some practical ways in which you can become a ringmaster of this digital circus in your pocket.

◆ **STICK TO A MAXIMUM OF TWO-THREE HOURS OF SCREEN TIME PER DAY.** Reduce doom-scrolling. Set timers to keep around bedtime and turn off all notifications.

◆ **USE A BEDTIME/ GREYSCALE MODE ON YOUR PHONE AT NIGHT.** Today's smartphones provide you with tools such as 'Bedtime Mode', which turns your screen to greyscale after a pre-set time.

◆ **SET THE HIGHEST PRIVACY SETTINGS.** Understand the privacy settings on all apps you are using and keep your social media accounts private. Also use a password that is not easily guessable and enable two-factor authentication.

◆ **DON'T SHARE YOUR REGULAR PERSONAL LIFE ON SOCIAL MEDIA.** Unless you're a lifestyle blogger, or even if you are, keep your private life private. Don't share images of your home, your parties, your vacations, your favourite hangout spots.

◆ **USE SOCIAL MEDIA FOR GOOD.** Use it to build a brand, for your business/career, for a cause, to show off a talent, practice a hobby, teach a skill, etc. You can even curate a page on any topic you are passionate about—movies, music, films and more.

Have a friend who uses reels to de-stress

young as two are exposed to their parents' smartphones. While there are many apps that use multisensory learning and target-specific skill development (rhymes, attention and memory training games), it is the parents' responsibility to not use their smartphones as a passive distraction. Just placing a screen in front of them or in their hands because you need a break will only fuel tech addiction issues in the future. Children should always be supervised by adults and internet use should be restricted to fixed timings and appropriate content.

Today, whether they are five or 16, there are many children who have shot to fame on social media. For the ones who have never seen a world without a smartphone or social media, it is a part of their daily lives—growing up while sharing their life with 600 or 600,000 doesn't faze them.

It is essential for parents to show children what is logical or illogical behaviour when they're online. Empower your child by giving them age-appropriate information and real-life examples of consequences to create healthy and balanced awareness about smartphone and social media usage.

This topic of children embracing the social media limelight as influencers is one that usually elicits polar opposite responses—people tend to look at it as a bane or a boon, something in black or white. What we need to do is comprehend and navigate the greys.

Write in to share your views!

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