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DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON YOUTH MENTAL WELLBEING

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ABSTRACT

Digital technology has become an essential part of young people's lives, influencing how they communicate, learn, develop relationships, access information, and manage their emotional experiences. Smartphones, social media platforms, online learning environments, gaming applications, and digital mental health services provide opportunities for social connection, education, self-expression, and psychological support. However, excessive or problematic digital engagement may also contribute to sleep disturbances, anxiety, depressive symptoms, cyberbullying, social comparison, and emotional stress. Recent research emphasizes that the relationship between digital technology and youth mental wellbeing is complex and depends on individual characteristics, patterns of use, online experiences, and the nature of digital content (Sala et al., 2024; Yu et al., 2024). This article examines the influence of digital technology on youth mental wellbeing, focusing on its psychological benefits, potential risks, and implications for healthy development. A qualitative, literature-based approach is adopted to review and synthesize relevant academic research. The discussion highlights the importance of balanced technology use, digital literacy, supportive relationships, healthy sleep routines, and responsible platform design. The article concludes that digital technology should be approached as a tool whose effects depend on how, why, and under what circumstances young people use it.

KEYWORDS

Digital Technology, Youth Mental Wellbeing, Social Media, Psychological Health, Screen Time, Sleep Quality, Digital Literacy.

INTRODUCTION

Digital technology has transformed the everyday experiences of young people by creating new opportunities for communication, education, entertainment, and social participation. Smartphones, social networking platforms, online games, video-sharing applications, and digital learning systems allow youth to remain connected with friends, access educational resources, and explore personal interests. These technologies can also provide opportunities to seek information about emotional difficulties and connect with supportive communities. Nevertheless, increasing dependence on digital devices has raised concerns about their potential effects on psychological health, emotional stability, sleep, and interpersonal relationships. Sala et al. (2024) explain that the relationship between social media use and adolescent mental health involves both risks and opportunities, with outcomes influenced by individual characteristics, patterns of engagement,

and platform design. Understanding these factors is essential for evaluating the broader influence of digital technology on youth wellbeing.

Youth is an important developmental period characterized by emotional changes, identity formation, increasing independence, and the development of social relationships. During this stage, young people may be particularly sensitive to peer acceptance, social comparison, academic pressure, and changes in their social environment. Digital platforms have become an additional setting in which these experiences occur, allowing young people to communicate and receive feedback beyond their immediate physical surroundings. Positive digital interactions can provide companionship, encouragement, and a sense of belonging, whereas negative interactions may expose youth to exclusion, harassment, unrealistic expectations, and emotional pressure. Yu et al. (2024) found that social media use may be associated with sleep and mental health difficulties among young people, although the direction and strength of these relationships remain complex. Conte et al. (2025), in their systematic review of TikTok and adolescent mental health, identified concerns involving problematic use, self-esteem, body image, and exposure to mental health-related content. Inadequate sleep can affect concentration, emotional regulation, academic performance, and everyday functioning. Yu et al. (2024) reviewed evidence linking social media use with sleep and mental health among young people and highlighted concerns about excessive use, while also noting limitations in establishing causal relationships. These findings suggest that healthy digital routines should include appropriate device use before bedtime and sufficient time for rest. However, sleep difficulties can also influence technology use, meaning that the relationship may operate in both directions.Despite these concerns, digital technology can make valuable contributions to youth mental wellbeing when used appropriately. Chen et al. (2024), in a systematic review and meta-analysis of digital technology interventions, reported that technology-based approaches can support mental health promotion among children and adolescents. Such interventions include mobile applications, serious games, virtual reality, and telemedicine. These opportunities demonstrate that technology is not simply a source of psychological risk; it can also serve as a practical resource for prevention, education, and support. The benefits, however, depend on the quality, accessibility, safety, and suitability of the digital services provided.In this context, examining the influence of digital technology on youth mental wellbeing is important for families, educators, health professionals, policymakers, and technology developers. Research suggests that problematic social media use may be associated with risk factors such as negative peer experiences, emotional difficulties, and challenges in self-regulation (Pazdur et al., 2025). At the same time, digital tools can strengthen communication, facilitate learning, and improve access to mental health resources. A balanced understanding must therefore consider both the potential benefits and the possible harms of digital engagement. This article reviews existing academic evidence to explore how digital technology relates to

youth mental wellbeing and identifies the importance of digital literacy, responsible use, supportive environments, and further research.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the influence of digital technology on youth mental wellbeing.
2. To identify the potential psychological benefits and risks associated with digital technology use among young people.
3. To explore strategies for promoting healthy and responsible digital engagement among youth.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does digital technology influence youth mental wellbeing?
2. What psychological benefits and risks are associated with digital technology use among young people?
3. What strategies can promote healthy and responsible digital engagement among youth?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on digital technology and youth mental wellbeing has expanded as social media, smartphones, online games, and digital communication tools have become part of everyday life. Sala et al. (2024), in an umbrella review of existing literature reviews, identified both positive opportunities and potential risks associated with adolescent social media use. Their findings suggest that psychological outcomes depend on personal characteristics, the type of online activity, the content encountered, and platform design. Digital communication may strengthen social connections and provide emotional support, whereas harmful interactions or persistent social comparison may contribute to distress. This evidence indicates that the relationship between digital technology and mental wellbeing is multifaceted and cannot be explained solely by the amount of time spent online.The relationship between social media use and youth sleep and mental health has also received considerable attention. Yu et al. (2024) reviewed studies examining these connections and identified evidence linking social media use with sleep disturbances and mental health difficulties. Late-night device use, frequent notifications, and continued engagement with online content may interfere with healthy sleep routines, potentially affecting mood, attention, and emotional regulation. Nevertheless, the authors emphasized that limited longitudinal evidence makes it difficult to determine the direction of these relationships conclusively. Young people experiencing sleep difficulties or emotional distress may also use

digital devices more frequently. Therefore, research should consider the possibility of reciprocal relationships between digital habits, sleep, and psychological wellbeing.

Conte et al. (2025) examined the relationship between TikTok use and adolescent mental health through a systematic review of 20 studies involving 17,336 participants across 10 countries. Their review addressed problematic use, body image, self-esteem, and exposure to mental health-related content. Although TikTok can provide opportunities for creativity, entertainment, and peer connection, the reviewed literature also raised concerns about problematic engagement, reduced life satisfaction, and negative psychological experiences. The authors noted considerable differences in research methods and outcome measures, limiting the strength of general conclusions. Their work demonstrates the importance of studying specific digital platforms because their content formats, recommendation systems, and interaction patterns may produce different experiences for young users.Another important area of research concerns the factors that contribute to problematic social media use. Pazdur et al. (2025) reviewed longitudinal studies and identified several risk factors, including negative peer experiences, social comparison, fear of missing out, emotional difficulties, and challenges in self-regulation. These factors suggest that problematic use cannot be understood simply as a matter of personal discipline or screen time. Young people's emotional circumstances, family relationships, and social environments may influence both their technology habits and their psychological wellbeing. This perspective highlights the importance of considering the reasons behind digital engagement, including whether young people use technology for learning and communication or to cope with loneliness, stress, and negative emotions.

Research also indicates that digital technology can be used directly to support mental health promotion. Chen et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of digital interventions for children and adolescents, examining approaches such as mobile applications, virtual reality, serious games, and telemedicine. Their findings indicated that technology-based interventions can have a beneficial effect on mental health outcomes. Digital services may improve access to psychological information, provide structured activities, and help young people obtain support when traditional services are difficult to access. However, the effectiveness of such interventions depends on the quality of the programme, the needs of the intended users, and the suitability of the technology. Digital mental health tools should therefore be considered potential complements to appropriate professional and community support.Liu et al. (2024) examined the impact of social media on the mental health of children through a systematic scoping review. Their findings suggested that frequent use was associated with concerns such as lower self-esteem, depressive symptoms, and anxiety, while moderate use could facilitate social interaction and emotional expression. The review also highlighted the importance of family and school support in helping children navigate digital environments.

These findings reinforce the view that the consequences of technology use are influenced by the surrounding social context. Guidance about online privacy, age-appropriate content, cyberbullying, and responsible participation may help reduce risks, particularly among younger users who are still developing emotional and social skills.

Overall, the reviewed literature indicates that digital technology can influence youth mental wellbeing through several interconnected pathways, including social interaction, sleep, emotional regulation, peer relationships, exposure to online content, and access to mental health support. Existing studies identify potential risks associated with problematic use while also recognizing the benefits of supportive online communities and digital interventions (Chen et al., 2024; Sala et al., 2024). However, differences in study designs, age groups, platforms, and measures limit the extent to which findings can be generalized. Further research should investigate how digital experiences affect different groups of young people over time. This article draws together these themes to emphasize balanced technology use, digital literacy, and supportive environments as important elements of youth mental wellbeing.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, literature-based methodology to examine the influence of digital technology on youth mental wellbeing. It draws on published academic research concerning social media, sleep, psychological health, problematic digital engagement, and technology-based mental health interventions. Relevant literature was identified through academic search resources, including Google Scholar, using terms such as digital technology and youth mental wellbeing, adolescent mental health and social media, screen time and sleep quality, problematic social media use, and digital mental health interventions. Priority was given to peer-reviewed studies, systematic reviews, scoping reviews, and meta-analyses published between 2024 and 2025.The selected literature was examined to identify findings relevant to the research objectives and questions. Studies addressing psychological risks, potential benefits, and strategies for responsible digital engagement were grouped according to their main themes. Particular attention was given to anxiety, depressive symptoms, sleep disturbances, social support, problematic use, and digital mental health services. The evidence was compared to identify recurring patterns and differences in findings, while considering the limitations of the original studies. This approach enables a broad understanding of the topic without collecting new data directly from participants.The methodology also recognizes that associations between technology use and mental wellbeing do not automatically establish causation. Individual characteristics, family relationships, socioeconomic circumstances, peer experiences, and pre-existing emotional difficulties may influence the relationship. Therefore, the study interprets published findings cautiously and considers both the opportunities and risks of digital technology. Its conclusions

represent a synthesis of existing research rather than the results of a new survey, experiment, or clinical assessment.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study uses a descriptive and thematic research design to examine existing evidence concerning digital technology and youth mental wellbeing. The descriptive component presents the main patterns identified in academic literature, while the thematic component organizes findings into key areas, including emotional health, sleep quality, social support, problematic use, and digital mental health interventions. This design is suitable for exploring a broad research topic involving different technologies, experiences, and psychological outcomes.The research design follows three stages: identifying relevant academic publications, organizing the evidence according to the research objectives, and comparing findings to develop an overall interpretation. During the first stage, relevant studies were identified through academic search resources. During the second stage, their findings were organized according to recurring themes and areas of disagreement. During the final stage, the evidence was synthesized to explain the potential benefits and risks of digital technology and identify strategies that may support healthy engagement. As the study is based on published research, it does not claim to establish causal relationships or represent the experiences of every young person.

DATA ANALYSIS

The collected literature was analyzed through qualitative thematic synthesis. Each selected publication was examined in relation to its research focus, main findings, and contribution to understanding youth mental wellbeing. The findings were organized into themes concerning psychological distress, sleep quality, social connection, problematic digital engagement, and technology-based mental health support. These themes were compared across studies to identify areas of agreement, differences in reported outcomes, and factors that may explain variations in findings.The analysis identified a recurring distinction between general technology use and problematic patterns of engagement. Research suggests that some forms of digital participation can provide social support, educational opportunities, entertainment, and access to mental health resources. In contrast, harmful online interactions, persistent social comparison, excessive engagement, and late-night device use may be associated with psychological difficulties (Pazdur et al., 2025; Yu et al., 2024). These findings suggest that the purpose, content, timing, and context of technology use are important when evaluating its relationship with wellbeing.The analysis also considered the limitations of the available evidence. Studies differ in their definitions of digital technology use, the ages of participants, the psychological outcomes measured, and the research methods employed. Some studies identify associations without

establishing whether technology use precedes or follows emotional difficulties. The findings were therefore interpreted in a balanced manner, recognizing that digital technology is one of several factors that may influence youth mental wellbeing. This approach provides a basis for identifying practical implications while avoiding unsupported claims about universal effects.

FINDINGS

The findings indicate that digital technology has both beneficial and potentially harmful relationships with youth mental wellbeing. Digital platforms can support communication, social connection, educational participation, creative expression, and access to mental health information. Technology-based interventions may also contribute to mental health promotion when they are appropriately designed and implemented (Chen et al., 2024). These benefits demonstrate that digital engagement can provide meaningful resources for young people, particularly when it encourages constructive participation and helps users access reliable information and appropriate support.The reviewed literature also identifies concerns involving problematic social media use, sleep disruption, anxiety, depressive symptoms, social comparison, and negative online experiences. These concerns are especially relevant when technology use interferes with sleep, daily responsibilities, or supportive offline relationships. Research on youth social media use suggests that psychological outcomes vary according to individual characteristics, the type of engagement, and the surrounding social environment (Sala et al., 2024; Pazdur et al., 2025). The evidence does not establish that all digital technology use harms mental health; rather, it highlights the importance of distinguishing between different patterns and purposes of use.A further finding is that supportive environments and responsible digital practices may help young people manage potential risks. Families and educators can encourage healthy sleep routines, respectful online communication, critical evaluation of digital information, and appropriate privacy practices. Digital platforms and service providers also have a role in developing safer online environments and making reliable support resources accessible. Overall, the findings emphasize the need for balanced technology use, stronger digital literacy, and further research into the long-term relationship between digital experiences and youth mental wellbeing.

CONCLUSION

Digital technology has become an important influence on youth mental wellbeing, shaping communication, social relationships, access to information, sleep habits, and opportunities for psychological support. However, problematic use, harmful online interactions, sleep disruption, and persistent social comparison may contribute to psychological difficulties for some young people. The relationship between technology and wellbeing is complex and depends on the

nature of engagement, individual circumstances, and the social environment in which technology is used.The study concludes that promoting youth mental wellbeing requires a balanced and responsible approach to digital technology. Families, educators, health professionals, and technology developers should support digital literacy, healthy sleep routines, respectful online behaviour, and access to reliable mental health resources. Young people should be encouraged to use technology purposefully while maintaining meaningful offline relationships and everyday responsibilities. Future research should employ longitudinal designs and diverse samples to better understand how different forms of digital engagement relate to psychological outcomes over time. Such efforts can help maximize the benefits of digital innovation while reducing potential risks to youth mental wellbeing.

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