PYSCHE 165 JOURNAL
LPPM Universitas Putra Indonesia YPTK Padang
Lubuk Begalung Highway, Padang, Zip Code: 25221, Sumatera Barat, Indonesia
Volume: 18, Issue: 4, Page: 293 - 300, Desember 30th, 2025, e-ISSN: 2502-8766
Available online at website: https://jpsy165.org/ojs/index.php/jpsy165/index

The Role of Screen Time, Digital Interaction, and Social Support in Adolescent Psychological Well-Being

Rahma Zikra, Psychology UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta
Layyinah, Psychology UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta

Abstract

This study examines the relationship between gadget use and adolescent psychological well-being through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). The review focuses on four main aspects: screen time duration, quality of digital interaction, the protective roles of social support and digital literacy, and the differential impacts of social media and video games on adolescent psychological well-being. Sixteen scholarly articles that met the inclusion criteria were retrieved from the Scopus database and synthesized using the PRISMA protocol to ensure methodological rigor, transparency, and replicability. The findings indicate that screen time has a non-linear relationship with psychological well-being. Excessive and uncontrolled use is associated with increased risks of anxiety, depression, and reduced life satisfaction. In contrast, moderate use accompanied by meaningful digital engagement contributes positively to self-regulation, emotional resilience, and social connectedness. Protective factors—particularly family support, peer relationships, and digital literacy—function as mediators and moderators that strengthen positive outcomes while mitigating the risks of gadget use. Furthermore, social media use is more closely related to identity formation and social validation, whereas video games are associated with cognitive engagement and recreational coping. This review proposes an integrative conceptual model that positions digital interaction as both a risk pathway and an opportunity for psychological growth, depending on contextual conditions and the presence of protective factors.

Keywords
psychological well-being, adolescence, screen time, digital interaction, social support, digital literacy

1. Introduction

The development of digital technology over the past two decades has significantly transformed adolescents' social, emotional, and academic lives. Adolescence is a transitional developmental stage characterized by heightened sensitivity to external influences, including gadget use and digital interaction. Today, gadgets have become an integral part of adolescents' daily routines, supporting learning activities, entertainment, and communication with peers (Di Cesare et al., 2024).

However, the increasing intensity of gadget use also raises concerns regarding its potential impact on adolescent psychological well-being (PWB). Prior evidence indicates that excessive and uncontrolled gadget use may increase psychological risks such as anxiety, depressive symptoms, and decreased quality of social relationships (Nguyen et al., 2025). In contrast, other findings highlight potential benefits of digital engagement, including broader access to information, online social support, and opportunities for identity exploration in digital environments (Fumagalli et al., 2024). This ambivalence suggests that the relationship between gadget use and psychological well-being is not linear, but depends on the context and patterns of digital engagement.

Despite growing attention, existing studies remain fragmented and often focus on a single dimension of gadget use. Many studies emphasize screen time duration without considering the quality of digital experiences, while others examine social media impacts without integrating protective mechanisms that may buffer negative outcomes or strengthen positive effects (Viejo et al., 2018). This limitation is particularly relevant in Indonesia, where collectivist cultural values, family dynamics, and peer norms may shape adolescents' digital behaviors and their psychological consequences in distinctive ways.

Although numerous studies have examined the relationship between gadget use and adolescent psychological well-being, the findings remain fragmented and inconclusive. Most previous research has focused on screen time duration as a single predictor, while giving limited attention to the quality of digital experiences and the role of

Submitted: 15-10-2025 | Revised: 10-11-2025 | Accepted: 10-12-2025 | Published: 30-12-2025

protective factors such as social support and digital literacy. Moreover, studies that integrate these dimensions within a single conceptual framework are still scarce, particularly in collectivist cultural contexts such as Indonesia. Therefore, a systematic synthesis that simultaneously examines duration, quality of digital interaction, and protective factors is needed to clarify the conditions under which gadget use becomes either beneficial or detrimental to adolescent psychological well-being.

To address these gaps, this review advances an integrative perspective by positioning adolescent psychological well-being as an outcome of three core components: (a) intensity or patterns of gadget use (duration, frequency, and type of activity), (b) quality of digital experience (valence of content, positive/negative experiences, and motives), and (c) protective factors (family and peer support, as well as digital literacy). Recent synthesis indicates that motives and the quality of digital engagement often determine psychological outcomes more strongly than duration alone, while umbrella reviews confirm heterogeneity of effects across contexts and emphasize the importance of moderators (Marciano & Viswanath, 2023; Siongers & Spruyt, 2024; Valkenburg et al., 2022).

Therefore, this study aims to systematically synthesize empirical findings through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to answer three research questions: (1) What is the relationship between screen time duration and the quality of digital experiences with adolescents' psychological well-being? (2) What protective factors, particularly social support and digital literacy, act as moderators or mediators in this relationship? (3) How do the impacts of social media and video games differ in shaping adolescent psychological well-being, especially in the Indonesian cultural context? By addressing these questions, this review contributes to strengthening theoretical understanding of adolescent well-being in the digital era and offers practical implications for culturally responsive interventions involving families, schools, and adolescent support systems.

2. Methods

This research uses a design *Systematic Literature Review* (SLR) to thoroughly examine the relationship between the use of gadgets and *psychological well-being* in early adolescence. The selection of SLR design is based on the need to synthesize the results of previous research that are diverse and fragmented, so that a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon being studied can be obtained (Di Cesare et al., 2024). The review process is carried out systematically by following the guidelines *Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses* (PRISMA 2020) which allows each stage of article selection, exclusion, and inclusion to be tracked and replicated by other researchers (Nguyen et al., 2025).

This research is focused on four main aspects that are the focus of the research question, namely the duration of use of gadgets (*Screen Time*), the quality of digital interactions, protective factors in the form of social support and digital literacy, as well as the difference in the impact of social media and video games on *psychological well-being* early teens. Relevant keywords, including *Adolescent Psychological Well-being*, *Youth Psychological Well-being*, *Adolescent Mental Health*, *Adolescent Emotional Well-being*and *Adolescent Social Well-being*. For the sample in this study are scientific articles obtained from databases *Scopus*, SCOPUS was selected as a primary source because it has multidisciplinary coverage and is internationally recognized for the quality of indexing articles in the fields of psychology, education, and public health, all of which are relevant to the focus of this research. In addition, Scopus allows researchers to conduct *Standardized systematic search* through the *Limiters* such as the year of publication, the level of the journal (Q1–Q2), the subject area, and the type of scientific publication, thus minimizing *Publication Bias* while improving *Replicability* Research Results (Valkenburg et al., 2022).

To minimize *publication bias*, strict screening and eligibility were carried out at the screening and *eligibility stages* based on construct suitability (duration, quality of experience, protective factors) and adolescent population. This step is transparent: the PRISMA pipeline displays a gradual reduction of the general PWB → teen PWB → teen PCB of gadget users, including duplicate removal, year filtering, and administrative exclusion records. This one-database approach in this first round was offset by the recommendation of expansion to the Web of Science/PsycINFO/PubMed on follow-up studies to test the sensitivity of the findings.

Initial search results yielded 1,490 articles, to increase relevance, the articles were then filtered into focus on PWB in adolescents, so studies of adults or other populations were excluded. Furthermore, the screening was narrowed again only to the study of adolescent PWB related to the use of gadgets or digital interactions. This process, along with duplicate removal (526), publication year filter (522), articles that have no abstract (6), and administrative exclusions such as categories *Tier Log* (185), resulting in 251 articles to be filtered. From this stage, 208 articles were excluded because they did not meet the criteria for adolescent focus, leaving 43 articles, then through the feasibility stage, 15 main studies plus 1 study from other sources were obtained, so that a total of 16 studies were included in the synthesis. This process shows that the shrinkage in the number of articles occurs logically—from general PWB → adolescent PWB

→ adolescent PWB who use gadgets. (Nguyen et al., 2025).

Thus, the subject of the study is an empirical article that directly examines the relationship between the use of gadgets and *psychological well-being* adolescents, so that the results obtained are really based on verified scientific evidence. The research instrument used was in the form of a literature synthesis worksheet compiled based on the PRISMA framework. This sheet serves to document important information from each article, including the author, year of publication, research purpose, research design, number of samples, instruments used, key findings, and relevance to the research question. With this instrument, the data extraction process can be carried out consistently so as to minimize the potential for researcher bias (Di Cesare et al., 2024).

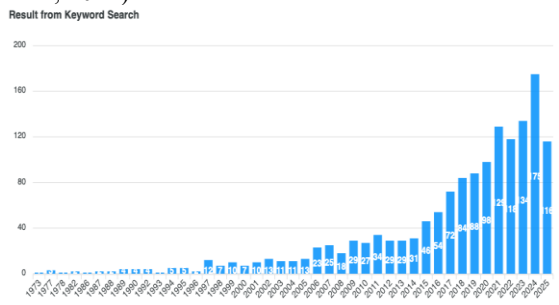

Figure 1

Figure 2

The instrument also makes it easy to classify outcomes based on research dimensions, such as impact differences *Screen Time* compared to the quality of digital interactions, as well as relevant protective factors such as social support and digital literacy. The data collection procedure is carried out through three main stages, namely identification, screening, and inclusion. The identification stage is carried out by searching for articles in the scopus database according to the keywords that have been determined. The screening stage is carried out by reading the title and abstract, as well as ensuring its fit with the focus of the research. Articles that are irrelevant or do not meet the criteria are excluded from the analysis. The final stage is inclusion, where articles that pass the criteria are further assessed through a full review (*Full text review*) to ensure that each article has empirical data relevant to the research question (Fumagalli et al., 2024). This procedure is carried out carefully so that only articles of good methodological quality and high relevance are included in the final synthesis.

The analysis method used is thematic analysis with an integrative approach. The analysis was carried out by grouping the findings from the selected articles into main themes that were in accordance with the research questions. The first theme is the relationship between the duration of use of the gadget (*Screen Time*) and the quality of digital interaction with *psychological well-being* adolescent. The second theme is protective factors, such as social support and digital literacy, which act as moderators or mediators. The third theme is the difference in the impact of social media and video games on *psychological well-being* adolescents, especially in the context of Indonesian culture. Analysis is carried out inductive and deductive, where empirical results are combined with existing conceptual frameworks to build a more complete understanding (Nguyen et al., 2025).

With this approach, this SLR research not only presents a summary of the findings, but also synthesizes patterns of relationships, contradictions, and research gaps that are still open. The advantages of this method are the transparency of the article selection process, the traceability of the analysis stages, and the potential for replication by other researchers. This is in line with academic research standards that demand scientific accountability as well as practical relevance in the development of evidence-based interventions to support *psychological well-being* Teenagers in the Digital Age (Di Cesare et al., 2024).

Figure 3

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the synthesized findings from the sixteen included studies and discusses their implications for adolescents' psychological well-being (PWB). The results are organized according to the three research questions focusing on (1) screen time duration and the quality of digital experiences, (2) protective factors (social support and digital literacy), and (3) differences between social media and video game use. A summary of study characteristics and key findings is presented in **Table 1**.

"A summary of the included studies and the synthesized key findings is presented in Table 1."

Dimensions of Analysis	Number of Studies	Synthesized Key Findings
Screen time duration	9 studies	Excessive screen time is associated with higher risks of depression, anxiety, and poorer sleep quality. Moderate duration is associated with higher life satisfaction.
Quality of digital experience	7 studies	Positive content and active interaction tend to support psychological well-being. Passive interaction is linked to higher risk of social isolation.
Protective factors: Social support	8 studies	Family and peer support are associated with improved subjective well-being and better coping capacity.
Protective factors: Digital literacy	5 studies	Higher digital literacy is associated with lower exposure to negative content and greater resilience in digital environments.
Social media use	10 studies	Social media provides opportunities for online social support, but may increase risks of FoMO and negative social comparison.
Video game use	6 studies	Moderate use may improve cognitive engagement and positive affect. Excessive use is associated with risks of addiction and social withdrawal.

Screen Time Duration and Adolescents' Psychological Well-Being

Overall, the evidence indicates that the association between screen time duration and adolescents' psychological well-being is **ambivalent and not consistently linear**. Several studies suggest that excessive and uncontrolled gadget use increases psychological risks such as anxiety, stress, depressive symptoms, and poorer social relationship quality, particularly when digital engagement disrupts sleep, academic functioning, and offline social interaction (Skogen et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2025). These findings support the view that intensity becomes harmful when it replaces restorative activities and reduces real-life social connectedness.

However, other evidence highlights that moderate and purposeful gadget use may contribute to positive outcomes, including improved access to information, development of digital social skills, and broader opportunities for social support. This suggests that the influence of gadget use cannot be explained solely through duration indicators, as similar screen time levels may produce different well-being outcomes depending on how adolescents engage with digital platforms (Marciano & Viswanath, 2023; Fumagalli et al., 2024). In line with recent perspectives, the present synthesis indicates that screen time duration should be treated as a general exposure factor rather than a direct predictor, and its psychological effects may depend on contextual mechanisms (Valkenburg et al., 2022).

Quality of Digital Experience as a Key Determinant

Beyond duration, the quality of digital interaction emerged as a key determinant of psychological outcomes. Positive experiences—such as supportive communication, beneficial content, and meaningful engagement—tend to strengthen emotional connectedness and adaptive functioning. Conversely, negative experiences—such as cyberbullying, harmful content exposure, and excessive social comparison—are associated with emotional distress and decreased psychological well-being (Siongers & Spruyt, 2024).

This pattern reinforces the argument that adolescents' motives and experiences in digital spaces determine whether gadget use functions as a

developmental opportunity or a psychological risk pathway. Accordingly, duration and quality interact dynamically: higher screen time may not necessarily predict poorer well-being if digital engagement is meaningful and supported, whereas even moderate screen time may be harmful when experiences are negative or uncontrolled (Marciano & Viswanath, 2023; Valkenburg et al., 2022).

Protective Factors: Social Support and Digital Literacy

The synthesis also confirms the central role of protective factors in moderating digital risks and strengthening positive outcomes. Social support from family and peers consistently appears as an important resource that promotes emotional regulation, coping capacity, and psychological safety in adolescents. Adolescents who receive strong emotional support are more capable of managing pressures arising from intense digital interaction and maintaining their psychological well-being (Skogen et al., 2023; Taibi et al., 2023).

Similarly, digital literacy functions as a protective mechanism that enables adolescents to critically evaluate online content, manage boundaries, and engage more productively with digital environments. Strong digital literacy may reduce vulnerability to unhealthy digital content and encourage more meaningful and beneficial digital engagement. These findings suggest that interventions targeting protective resources are essential, especially in the Indonesian context where family involvement and community values remain central to adolescent development.

Differences Between Social Media and Video Game Use

The reviewed studies also demonstrate that social media and video games may influence adolescents' psychological well-being through different pathways. Social media use is frequently associated with risks such as fear of missing out, negative social comparison, and emotional vulnerability, which may reduce psychological well-being in certain conditions (Siongers & Spruyt, 2024; Marciano & Viswanath, 2023). At the same time, social media can also offer opportunities for interpersonal support and social networking, especially when online engagement is positive and supportive (Fumagalli et al., 2024).

In contrast, video game use shows more diverse outcomes depending on intensity and context. Playing games within reasonable limits may support cognitive engagement, stress relief, and social competence, whereas excessive and uncontrolled gaming may increase risks such as addictive behavior, sleep disruption, and social withdrawal (Skogen et al., 2023). These platform differences indicate that gadget use should not be treated as a homogeneous construct, as psychological impacts depend strongly on the type of platform, usage patterns, motives, and the quality of experience.

Integrative Framework and Theoretical Contribution (Figure 4)

Based on the synthesis of the sixteen included studies, this review proposes the **Digital Protective–Risk Interaction Model** as an integrative framework explaining adolescent psychological well-being in digital contexts (**Figure 4**). The model highlights that psychological outcomes are shaped by the interaction between screen time duration, quality of digital interaction, and platform type, operating through protective mechanisms such as social support and digital literacy. This framework extends prior research by conceptualizing digital engagement as a multidimensional ecosystem rather than a single behavioral indicator, providing boundary conditions under which gadget use becomes beneficial or detrimental to adolescent psychological well-being.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This review has several limitations. First, reliance on a single database (Scopus) may limit the breadth of coverage, although it was selected due to its indexing quality and multidisciplinary relevance. Future reviews are encouraged to include additional databases such as Web of Science, PsycINFO, and PubMed to strengthen representativeness. Second, many included studies used cross-sectional designs, which limits causal conclusions. Future research should prioritize longitudinal and experimental designs to clarify directionality and test the proposed model. Further studies should also explore gender, socioeconomic, and regional variations and evaluate culturally tailored interventions strengthening digital literacy and family-based social support to enhance adolescent psychological well-being.

4. Conclusion

This Systematic Literature Review concludes that the relationship between gadget use and adolescents' psychological well-being is complex and non-linear. Screen time duration alone does not fully explain well-being outcomes, as the direction and magnitude of impact depend strongly on the quality of digital experiences and the presence of protective factors such as social support and digital literacy. Social media and video game use also show different psychological pathways, indicating that platform-specific patterns should be considered in adolescent interventions. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of promoting meaningful digital engagement and strengthening protective resources within families and schools to support adolescent psychological well-being in the digital era.

Ethical Approval
This study is a Systematic Literature Review and did not involve direct human participants or primary data collection. Therefore, ethical approval was not required. All included studies were obtained from publicly accessible databases and were cited appropriately.

Funding
This research received no external funding.

Author Contributions (CRediT)
Rahma Zikra: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Writing – original draft. Layyinah: Supervision, Validation, Writing – review & editing.

Conflict of Interest
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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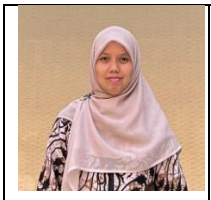
Information of Author :

Rahma Zikra, completed her undergraduate degree in Psychology at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, where she graduated as the best and fastest student, completing her studies in only 3.5 years. She is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Psychology at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta. Her main research interests include adolescent psychology, smartphone use, and psychological well-being. She is also the author of the book *"Tips Menjadi Orang Tua Hebat agar Anak Bahagia"* which focuses on practical parenting strategies. Mailing address: Cluster Dhana 3 No. 7, Suvarna Sutera, Sindang Jaya, Wanakerta, Kabupaten Tangerang, Banten, Indonesia. **Corresponding author:** : (rzikra@gmail.com),



Layyinah is the Assistant Head of the Master's Psychology Study Program at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta. She has extensive teaching and supervisory responsibilities, covering undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Her academic focus includes psychology of education, research methodology, and student development. Mailing address: Faculty of Psychology, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Jl. Kertamukti No. 5, Cirendeu, Kota Tangerang Selatan, 15419, Indonesia. **Corresponding author:**: (layyinahsyaukani@gmail.com)