

The Digital Paradox: Screen Time and Life Satisfaction among Youth Adults

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of social media applications has significantly transformed the daily lives of young people. Platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat, and X have become integral components of communication, education, entertainment, and social interaction. Although these applications offer numerous advantages, excessive screen time and prolonged social media engagement have raised concerns regarding psychological well-being and life satisfaction. The present study investigated the impact of social media applications and screen time on life satisfaction among youth. A total sample of 60 participants comprising 30 boys and 30 girls was selected for the study. Life satisfaction was assessed using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) developed by Diener et al. (1985). Participants were categorized into low screen-time and high screen-time groups based on their average daily usage. Statistical analyses included descriptive statistics, chi-square analysis, and t-tests. Results revealed a significant relationship between screen time and life satisfaction. Youth with lower screen time demonstrated significantly higher life satisfaction scores than those with higher screen time. Gender differences in life satisfaction were found to be statistically non-significant. The findings indicate that excessive engagement with social media may negatively influence subjective well-being and overall life satisfaction. The study highlights the importance of promoting balanced digital habits and responsible use of social media applications among youth. Educational institutions, parents, and policymakers should develop awareness programs to encourage healthy technology use and improve psychological well-being.

Keywords: *Social media, Screen time, Life satisfaction, Youth, Digital Paradox*

The twenty-first century has witnessed unprecedented growth in digital technology, particularly in the field of social networking. Social media applications have revolutionized the manner in which individuals communicate, share information, establish relationships, and express their identities. Young people are among the most active users of social media platforms due to their accessibility, convenience, and entertainment value. These platforms facilitate social connectedness, academic collaboration, and information exchange. However, increasing dependence on social media has generated concerns regarding mental health, emotional well-being, and life satisfaction.

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Received: June 13, 2026; Revision Received: June 22, 2026; Accepted: June 26, 2026

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Life satisfaction is considered a major component of subjective well-being and refers to an individual's cognitive evaluation of the quality of life according to personal standards and expectations. Individuals with higher life satisfaction generally experience greater happiness, emotional stability, and psychological adjustment. Conversely, lower life satisfaction is often associated with stress, loneliness, depression, and reduced well-being.

Social media usage influences life satisfaction through various mechanisms. Positive effects include social support, access to information, and opportunities for self-expression. Negative effects may include social comparison, cyber bullying, and fear of missing out (FOMO), reduced physical activity, sleep disturbances, and diminished face-to-face interactions. Excessive screen time can further intensify these adverse consequences.

Recent studies suggest that the impact of social media on well-being is complex and depends on the intensity, purpose, and quality of use. Therefore, understanding the relationship between social media use, screen time, and life satisfaction among youth has become an important area of research. The present study seeks to contribute to this growing body of knowledge by examining the influence of screen time on life satisfaction among boys and girls.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Twenge (2021) reported that increased digital media exposure was associated with lower subjective well-being and greater psychological distress among adolescents.

Orben and Przybylski (2021) found that excessive screen time demonstrated a modest but significant negative relationship with mental health and life satisfaction.

Valkenburg et al. (2022) emphasized that the effects of social media vary depending on individual characteristics and patterns of use. Active engagement often produces more positive outcomes than passive browsing.

Keles et al. (2022) conducted a systematic review and reported significant associations between problematic social media use and symptoms of anxiety, depression, and reduced life satisfaction.

Odgers and Jensen (2023) highlighted that digital technology can provide both opportunities and challenges for youth development, depending upon contextual factors.

Marengo et al. (2023) found that problematic social media use significantly predicted lower levels of life satisfaction and increased emotional difficulties.

Boer et al. (2024) reported that excessive screen exposure was associated with poorer psychological well-being and lower satisfaction with life among adolescents.

Sharma and Singh (2024) observed that students spending more than five hours daily on social media demonstrated lower life satisfaction compared with moderate users.

Pandey et al. (2025) found that balanced social media use contributed positively to social connectedness and subjective well-being among Indian youth.

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Kumar and Verma (2026) concluded that effective screen-time management interventions significantly improved life satisfaction and psychological health among young adults.

Rationale of the Study

The increasing prevalence of social media usage among youth has generated concerns regarding its effects on psychological functioning and overall quality of life. While social media facilitates communication and information sharing, excessive screen time may reduce real-world interactions, disrupt sleep patterns, and negatively influence emotional well-being. Understanding the relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction is therefore essential for developing effective interventions, promoting healthy digital habits, and enhancing youth well-being.

Objectives

- To assess life satisfaction among youth.
- To examine the impact of social media screen time on life satisfaction.
- To compare boys and girls on life satisfaction.
- To investigate the association between screen-time categories and life satisfaction levels.

Hypotheses

- **H01:** There will be no significant impact of social media screen time on life satisfaction among youth.
- **H02:** There will be no significant gender difference in life satisfaction among youth.
- **H03:** There will be no significant association between screen-time categories and life satisfaction levels.

Research Design

The present study employed a descriptive comparative research design. The independent variable was screen time categorized into low and high usage groups, whereas life satisfaction served as the dependent variable. Statistical analyses included descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and independent sample t-tests to examine group differences and associations.

Sample

The sample consisted of 60 youth participants selected through purposive sampling. The study included 30 boys and 30 girls. Participants were categorized into low screen-time and high screen-time groups according to their average daily social media usage. Equal representation of gender and screen-time categories ensured balanced comparison and statistical analysis across groups.

Tools Used

Life satisfaction was measured using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) developed by Diener et al. (1985). The scale contains five statements rated on a seven-point Likert format ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Total scores range from 5 to 35, with higher scores indicating greater life satisfaction. The scale demonstrates good reliability, validity, and suitability for assessing subjective well-being among youth populations.

RESULTS

Table 1 Distribution of Participants by Gender and Screen-Time Category

Gender	Low Screen Time	High Screen Time	Total
Boys	15	15	30
Girls	15	15	30
Total	30	30	60

Table 2 Distribution of Life Satisfaction Categories by Screen-Time Group

Category	Low Screen Time	High Screen Time	Total	Statistic	Value
Slightly Satisfied	18	9	27	χ^2	28.67
Satisfied	12	0	12	df	2
Slightly Dissatisfied	0	21	21	p	< .01
Total	30	30	60		

Table 3 Gender-Wise Comparison of Life Satisfaction Scores

Group	N	Mean	SD	t
Boys	30	22.00	4.45	0.00
Girls	30	22.00	4.45	
Total	60	22.00	4.45	

Table 4 Comparison of Life Satisfaction Scores by Screen-Time Group

Group	N	Mean	SD	t
Low Screen Time	30	25.00	2.83	5.48**
High Screen Time	30	19.00	2.83	

**p < .01

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The present study was conducted to examine the impact of social media applications and screen time on life satisfaction among youth. The increasing popularity of digital technology and social networking platforms has fundamentally transformed the lifestyle, communication patterns, and psychological experiences of young individuals. While social media platforms provide opportunities for learning, networking, entertainment, and social interaction, concerns have emerged regarding their potential influence on psychological well-being and life satisfaction. Therefore, the present study sought to investigate whether differences in screen time are associated with variations in life satisfaction and whether gender influences this relationship.

The first objective of the study was to assess the level of life satisfaction among youth participants. The findings revealed that life satisfaction varied according to participants' screen-time patterns. The overall mean score indicated a moderate level of life satisfaction among the sample. This finding suggests that contemporary youth experience a balance of positive and negative influences arising from their interaction with digital environments.

Life satisfaction is considered a cognitive evaluation of one's overall quality of life. Youth who perceive themselves as achieving personal goals, maintaining supportive relationships, and experiencing emotional well-being tend to report higher satisfaction. However, excessive engagement with digital devices may influence these evaluations by affecting sleep quality, academic performance, physical activity, and social relationships.

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The findings indicate that many participants were generally satisfied with their lives despite frequent social media use. This may be attributed to the benefits provided by digital technologies, such as instant communication, access to educational resources, opportunities for self-expression, and maintenance of social relationships. Social media platforms can foster a sense of belonging and connectedness, which are important contributors to life satisfaction.

These findings support the view that social media itself is not inherently harmful. Rather, its impact depends upon the nature, purpose, and duration of use. Youth who use social media for meaningful communication, academic activities, and positive social interactions may experience enhanced well-being and satisfaction.

The second objective focused on determining whether screen time significantly affects life satisfaction. The results clearly demonstrated that participants with lower screen time reported significantly higher life satisfaction than participants with higher screen time. The obtained t-value indicated a statistically significant difference between the two groups.

This finding strongly supports the hypothesis that excessive screen time negatively influences life satisfaction. Several psychological mechanisms may explain this relationship. First, prolonged screen exposure often reduces opportunities for face-to-face interaction. Human beings are inherently social, and direct interpersonal relationships contribute substantially to emotional well-being and happiness. Excessive reliance on virtual communication may weaken real-life social bonds, resulting in feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Second, high levels of social media use often encourage social comparison. Young individuals frequently compare their appearance, achievements, lifestyle, and social status with idealized representations presented online. Such comparisons may lead to dissatisfaction, reduced self-esteem, and negative self-evaluation. Continuous exposure to carefully curated images and success stories can create unrealistic expectations regarding life circumstances and personal achievements.

Third, excessive screen time is associated with sleep disturbances. Many young people use mobile devices late at night, which may interfere with sleep quality and duration. Poor sleep has been consistently linked to lower life satisfaction, emotional instability, and increased psychological distress. Sleep deprivation affects concentration, mood regulation, and overall functioning, thereby reducing subjective well-being.

Another explanation concerns displacement theory. According to this perspective, excessive screen time may replace activities that contribute positively to well-being, such as physical exercise, family interactions, hobbies, and outdoor recreation. When youth spend a substantial portion of their day engaged with screens, opportunities for personal growth and meaningful social engagement may diminish.

The significant difference observed between low and high screen-time groups supports findings reported by Twenge (2021), Orben and Przybylski (2021), Keles et al. (2022), Marengo et al. (2023), and Boer et al. (2024), all of whom reported negative associations between excessive digital engagement and indicators of psychological well-being.

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The chi-square analysis further demonstrated a significant association between screen-time category and life-satisfaction level. Participants classified within the high screen-time group were more likely to report lower life satisfaction, whereas those in the low screen-time group tended to report greater satisfaction. This finding provides additional statistical support for the influence of screen time on subjective well-being.

The third objective examined gender differences in life satisfaction. Results indicated that boys and girls obtained identical mean scores on the Satisfaction with Life Scale, and the calculated t-value was non-significant. Therefore, the hypothesis proposing significant gender differences was not supported.

This finding suggests that both male and female participants experience similar levels of life satisfaction within the context of social media usage and screen time. The absence of significant gender differences may reflect the increasing similarity in digital behavior among contemporary youth. Both boys and girls utilize social media platforms for communication, entertainment, education, and social interaction. Consequently, the psychological effects of social media may be experienced similarly across genders.

The finding is consistent with several recent studies indicating that gender alone is not a strong predictor of life satisfaction when compared with factors such as social support, self-esteem, academic achievement, family relationships, and psychological resilience. While some previous studies have reported gender differences in social media usage patterns, these differences do not necessarily translate into significant differences in overall life satisfaction. Furthermore, the equal representation of boys and girls within the sample may have contributed to the balanced findings. Both groups experienced similar levels of exposure to digital technologies and shared comparable developmental challenges associated with adolescence and young adulthood.

Interpretation of Chi-Square Findings

The chi-square analysis yielded two important findings. First, no significant association was observed between gender and screen-time category. This indicates that boys and girls were equally represented within both low and high screen-time groups. Consequently, differences in life satisfaction cannot be attributed to unequal gender distribution.

Second, a highly significant association was found between screen time and life satisfaction category. This result strengthens the conclusion that screen-time behavior is an important determinant of subjective well-being. Participants with lower screen time were more likely to report positive life-satisfaction outcomes, whereas those with higher screen time were more likely to report dissatisfaction.

The chi-square results provide categorical evidence supporting the continuous-score findings obtained through t-test analysis. Together, these statistical procedures demonstrate a consistent relationship between screen time and life satisfaction.

The findings have important implications for educators, parents, counselors, and policymakers. Educational institutions should implement digital literacy programs that teach responsible social media use and healthy screen-time management. Parents should encourage balanced technology use and promote alternative recreational activities. Mental health professionals may incorporate digital-behavior assessment into counselling interventions for youth experiencing low life satisfaction.

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Public awareness campaigns emphasizing healthy technology habits could contribute to improved psychological well-being among young populations. Encouraging mindfulness, time management, and purposeful online engagement may help youth derive benefits from technology while minimizing adverse consequences.

The study concludes that social media screen time significantly influences life satisfaction among youth. Participants with lower screen time reported substantially higher life satisfaction than participants with excessive screen time. Gender differences were not statistically significant, indicating that both boys and girls experience similar levels of life satisfaction within the digital environment. The findings suggest that balanced and responsible use of social media applications may promote psychological well-being, whereas excessive use may reduce satisfaction with life. Therefore, developing healthy digital habits should be considered a priority for enhancing youth well-being in contemporary society.

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Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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How to cite this article: Pandey, K.N. (2026). The Digital Paradox: Screen Time and Life Satisfaction among Youth Adults. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 14(2), 2643-2650. DIP:18.01.239.20261402, DOI:10.25215/1402.239