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A QUANTITATIVE STUDY EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCREEN USE PATTERNS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

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ABSTRACT

The rising dominance of screens has transformed leisure practices in everyday life; this has become particularly evident among children and young people. Studies focusing on this issue have generally examined children as their primary samples and have reported statistically significant negative associations between increasing screen time and psychological well-being. This study was conducted to examine the relationship between screen use patterns and psychological well-being by analyzing a large young sample aged 18–28 (N = 458). Using a Demographic Information Form, a Screen Use Patterns Information Form, and the Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB), the study was carried out within the framework of the Compensatory Internet Use Theory (CIUT) and employed a quantitative cross-sectional design. Sixty-two percent of participants were classified in the "heavy user" category with four or more hours of daily screen time. Escape from daily events and stress constituted the primary motivation for screen use (65.7%; n = 301), and Instagram emerged as the most prominent compensatory platform. Following prolonged screen use, participants reported "tiredness" and "inattention." The relationship between prolonged screen time and lower psychological well-being reported in studies focusing on children did not exhibit a linear pattern among young people. The findings indicate that, as age increases, compensatory use motivations gain importance beyond screen duration.

Keywords: Digital culture, Screen usage, Compensatory internet use theory, Psychological well-being, Sociology of youth

EKRAN KULLANIMI BİÇİMLERİ VE PSİKOLOJİK İYİ OLUŞ ARASINDAKİ İLİŞKİNİN İNCELENMESİNE YÖNELİK NİCEL BİR ARAŞTIRMA

ÖZ

Ekranların yükselen egemenliği, gündelik yaşamdaki boş zaman değerlendirme pratiklerini değiştirmiş; bu durum özellikle çocuklar ve gençlerde daha belirgin bir hâl almıştır. Konu üzerine odaklanan çalışmalar örneklem olarak genellikle çocukları incelemiş ve artan ekran kullanım süreleri ile psikolojik iyi oluş arasında istatistiksel olarak negatif yönlü, anlamlı ilişkiler bildirmiştir. Bu çalışma, 18–28 yaş arası geniş bir genç örneklem grubunu (N = 458) ele alarak ekran kullanım biçimleri ve psikolojik iyi oluş ilişkisini tartışmak amacıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Demografik Bilgi Formu, Ekran Kullanım Biçimleri Bilgi Formu ve Psikolojik İyi Oluş Ölçeği'nin (PİO) kullanıldığı çalışma, Telafi Edici İnternet Kullanımı Teorisi'ni (CIUT) merkeze almış; nicel ve kesitsel bir tasarımla yürütülmüştür. Katılımcıların %62'si, 4 saat ve üzeri ekran süresi ile "ağır kullanıcı" kategorisinde yer almıştır. Günlük olaylardan ve stresten kaçış birincil ekran kullanım motivasyonunu oluşturmuş (%65,7; n = 301); Instagram

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en önemli telafi edici platform olarak öne çıkmıştır. Uzun süreli ekran aktivitesinden sonra "yorgunluk" ve "dikkat dağınıklığı" hissedildiği bildirilmiştir. Çocukları inceleyen araştırmalarda görülen uzun ekran süresi ile düşük psikolojik iyi oluş arasındaki ilişkinin gençlerde doğrusal bir nitelik taşımadığı tespit edilmiştir. Çalışmada, yaş grubu yükseldikçe ekran süresinin ötesinde telafi edici kullanım motivasyonlarının önem kazandığı sonucuna varılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dijital kültür, Ekran kullanımı, Telafi edici internet kullanımı teorisi, Psikolojik iyi oluş, Gençlik sosyolojisi

INTRODUCTION

The extension of screen time in social life and the realization of practices such as work, education, and entertainment through screens have directed scientists to the subject. Researchers focusing on this issue have frequently concentrated on children and adolescents, while studies focusing on young people have remained more limited compared to younger age groups. Most studies have reported significant relationships between screens and psychological or mental well-being. However, screen time is associated with many activities, and actions such as playing video games are processes that are more open to experience. This study excluded playing video games and focused on relatively more passive screen use activities.

Children and adolescents of today's generation are growing up in a world framed by media tools. The use of digital media tools has become the most common sedentary leisure activity, especially among children and adolescents. The extremely rapid development of mobile and digital technologies over the last quarter century has even made it difficult for researchers to provide evidence regarding ongoing events. Many studies show that screen use has significant consequences on psychological health. In addition to the benefits of screen media in practices of gaining information, socialization, entertainment, and education, it has also been associated with physical, psychological, and social outcomes (Adhikari, 2021, p. 962).

Some studies, however, argue that screen time alone is not sufficient to determine the relationship with psychological well-being, and state that variables such as motivation, type of content, and gender differences have significant effects (Marciano, Ostroumova, et al., 2022). Although many studies have been conducted on the subject, research has reported different and inconsistent results. Compensatory Internet Use Theory (CIUT) conceptualizes internet use as a response

through which individuals engage with digital media to compensate for various psychosocial deficits. The theory further argues that approaches focusing solely on duration are overly restrictive and, by advancing this position with robust arguments, provides a contextual framework for understanding screen use (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014). One of the prominent findings in the literature on screen use studies conducted with children is the association between screen use and lower psychological well-being (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2017). The study demonstrates that this relationship, which tends to follow a linear pattern in children, does not exhibit a linear character among young people, and reports that, with increasing age, compensatory use motivations gain importance in screen use activity.

1. Conceptual Framework of Basic Findings on Screen Time and Mental Health

According to Tang et al. (2021) the increase in time spent in front of screens has only negligible effects on the prevalence of mental health problems among young people. In order to distinguish the relationship between screen time and mental health, further longitudinal studies examining the underlying motivations for screen use are required. Some studies investigating the relationship between screen use and mental health (some of which are meta-analyses reporting the results of large sample groups) have reported significant positive associations between intensive screen use and depression, low self-esteem, self-harming behavior, and similar outcomes (Santos et al., 2023; Twenge & Farley, 2021). Neophytou et al. (2021, p. 724) stated that screen use functions as a stimulus and increases the risk of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive problems, particularly among adolescents and young adults. It has also been emphasized that this situation has the potential to increase the risk of early-onset dementia in later ages. Babic et al. (2017, p. 124) found that screen use for entertainment purposes in adolescents had negative effects on physical self-perception and psychological well-being. Huang et al. (2023) stated that the effects of screen use vary according to the type of content, and argued that instead of limiting duration in young people's media use, it is more appropriate to recommend a content-based and balanced "digital diet" approach.

Studies addressing the subject in terms of usage duration have identified significant increases in the risks of depression, anxiety, and general psychopathology

with screen use of 2 hours or more, while some have found a relationship between depression and school dissatisfaction. The coexistence of high screen time and insufficient physical activity has constituted the condition in which psychological problems were observed at the highest rate (Cao et al., 2011; Wu et al., 2016). Oberle et al. (2020) argued that gender is one of the important variables in the relationship between screen time and life satisfaction, and stated that increasing screen time particularly reduced life satisfaction among female students. Hoare et al. (2016) suggested that higher screen time during leisure was associated with psychiatric disorders, and Schmidt-Persson et al. (2024) stated that reducing screen time decreased behavioral problems and increased social interaction.

It has frequently been stated in scientific studies that individuals turn to the internet to escape real-life problems or to alleviate negative moods, and that this may sometimes lead to adverse outcomes. In this context, the Compensatory Internet Use Theory (CIUT) was developed in the literature to conceptualize internet use as a coping motivation in response to various adversities or stressors encountered in individuals' everyday lives. Although researchers place internet addiction at the center of the theory, the Compensatory Internet Use Theory (CIUT) also offers an interpretive framework for internet-based technologies and related usage practices. However, scholars emphasize that there is no clear consensus on the issue, noting the presence of conceptual problems and methodological shortcomings, and argue that the mediating roles and interactive effects between psychosocial well-being and motivations need to be taken into account (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014). For this reason, the Compensatory Internet Use Theory (CIUT) was adopted as an interpretive framework in this study.

1.1. Gender, Daily Routine, and Device Differences

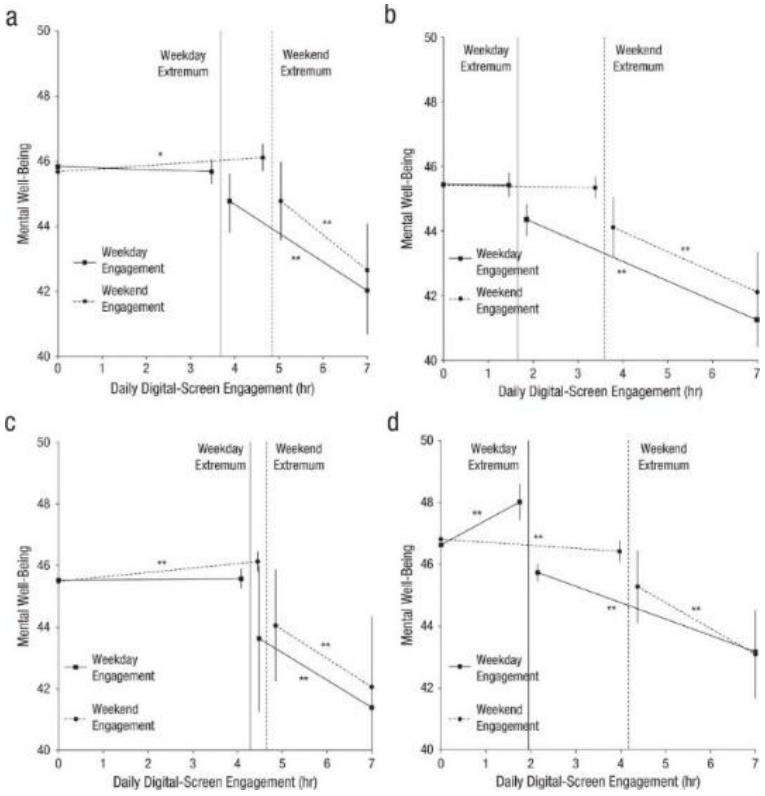
According to Brodersen et al. (2022), high levels of screen or smartphone use are associated with mental health in various ways, and the effects also vary depending on the activity and the day or time at which the activity takes place. According to Zhang et al. (2022), weekday and weekend screen time habits are associated with different psychological effects. In particular, phone/tablet use increases the risk of

depression and ADHD, while computer use on weekends is associated with PTSD and depression (Zhang et al., 2022)

According to Houghton et al. (2015), screen use of less than 2 hours is considered safe, but it is stated that these durations need to be reconsidered. Woo et al. (2021, p. 1419), stated that screen use of more than 4 hours per day negatively affects mental health, and particularly noted that weekday use of more than 4 hours per day worsened indicators related to stress perception, sleep satisfaction, depressive symptoms, and suicide. Many important studies focusing on the subject have also characterized four hours or longer of screen time as negative (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2017, p. 212; Twenge & Campbell, 2018).

Figure 1

Effects of 4 Hours and Longer Screen Time



Kaynak: (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2017, p. 212)

Kamaleddine et al. (2022, p. 220) stated that children with screen time of 2 hours or more per day were more likely to exhibit higher body mass index (BMI), sleep

problems, depression, reduced physical activity, and unusual eating behaviors. Chen et al. (2024) associated both recreational and academic screen use among university students with poor mental health and psychological distress. In particular, as computer use and weekend screen time increased, the risk of mental health problems further increased. Marciano et al. (2022) reported that the increase in social media use was significantly associated with mental health problems and stated that structured media use such as television showed a symptom-reducing effect. Various negative aspects of life and intensive screen use during home schooling were also associated with poor mental health. Wang et al. (2023, p. 369) in a study conducted with Chinese adolescents living in rural areas, stated that screen time of more than 2 hours per day was significantly associated with behavioral problems and reported to have negative effects on mental health. In contrast, time spent outdoors both reduced behavioral problems and increased prosocial behaviors. Screen time of 1–2 hours per day was found to be positively associated with academic achievement, particularly in mathematics. Barthorpe et al. (2020, p. 864) associated greater time spent on social media with self-harming behavior, depression, and lower levels of self-esteem among women.

Zhu et al. (2023, p. 1433) stated that high screen use was associated with depression, anxiety, and behavioral problems in a youth sample in Zurich, Switzerland. Ferguson et al. (2022, p. 205) reviewed studies published between 2015 and 2019 and reported that the evidence suggests screen use plays a very minor role in mental health concerns. They claimed that concerns about screen time and mental health are not based on reliable data.

Kostyrka-Allchorne et al. (2020, p. 2648) found a bidirectional positive relationship between screen use and behavioral problems and indirectly associated increased multiple screen use with higher ADHD symptoms. Waller et al. (2023) found screen use to be directly associated with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) symptoms in children. The researchers also stated that permissive parenting increased attention problems in children through screen time. Donthu et al. (2022) found screen time among children aged 5–15 to be significantly associated with physical and psychological effects such as sleep disorders and avoidance of outdoor

activities, and stated that demographic factors such as parents' education level, number of children, and gender were significantly related to screen time.

Pieh et al. (2025) divided 111 university students with an average daily screen time of approximately 4.5 hours into an intervention group, in which screen time was limited to 2 hours per day for 3 weeks, and a control group, and observed significant small-to-moderate improvements in depressive symptoms, stress, sleep quality, and well-being levels in the intervention group. Paulich et al. (2021), in a study conducted with 11,875 children aged 9–10 in the United States, found that greater screen time was moderately associated with poor mental health, more behavioral problems, lower academic achievement, and poor sleep habits, and emphasized that socioeconomic status (SES) was more decisive. Paulus et al. (2023) stated that screen media activity (SMA) was significantly associated particularly with mental problems such as depression and anxiety, reported that it had negative effects on sleep duration and quality, and noted that its cognitive effects were complex and bidirectional. It was emphasized that the issue should be addressed by considering multilayered factors ranging from the individual to society.

There are many factors that influence screen time at the individual or societal level. Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic is one such example. The pandemic led to significant increases in screen time worldwide and directed scientists to focus on the effects of screen time on mental health. Li et al. (2021) stated that children with higher screen time during the pandemic were significantly more prone to mental health problems. Pandya and Lodha (2021, 2022) reported that screen time increased substantially during COVID-19 and noted that prolonged screen use became a permanent unhealthy habit. Wiciak et al. (2022) stated that during COVID-19 the average weekly screen time among young adults aged 18–28 increased to 23.26 hours, and noted that screen time varied according to demographic differences such as gender, student status, and continent. Increased screen time was significantly associated with poorer sleep quality, longer sleep duration, higher levels of depression and anxiety, and greater alcohol and tobacco use. In particular, screen time related to entertainment and social media showed the strongest association with mental health problems. Hmidan et al. (2023) reported that internalizing behaviors increased in

children who spent more time in front of screens and lived in households where parents reported higher stress levels.

Various studies have stated that variables such as social life, family education level, and income level increase screen time. It is possible to say that family structure is an important factor in screen use and that it plays a significant role in shaping usage habits. Liu et al. (2024, p. 1401) stated that children of parents with low socioeconomic status were more vulnerable to screen time–related mental health problems. According to Xiao et al. (2025, p. 219), children who were prone to suicidal behavior had social media addiction, and it was stated that as the level of social media addiction increased, suicidal behavior tended to increase. Chau et al. (2022) revealed that total daily screen time was strongly associated with the accumulation of problems related to school, behavior, and mental health. Santos et al. (2023) associated intensive use of screens and social media with the risk of depression, anxiety, loneliness, and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO).

Most studies focusing on children and adolescents have reported associations between psychological well-being and common screen-based activities such as playing digital games, watching films or series, and using social media, as well as the motivations and gratifications underlying these activities (Balcı & Ayhan, 2013; Kazaz & Acar, 2024; Söğütlüler, 2025; Söğütlüler & Başer, 2023). Although some of these studies indicated that screen time could have very serious consequences on psychological well-being, and others stated that this effect was insignificant, the general consensus has been that psychological well-being decreases as screen time increases. Researchers have made various recommendations based on this general consensus. According to Kaewpradit et al. (2025), interventions aimed at regulating screen time and improving time management skills were deemed necessary. Hrafnkelsdottir et al. (2018) stated that reducing screen time together with increasing physical activity provided a synergistic benefit to the mental health of young people. Cioffredi et al. (2021) stated that regular screening for screen time, mental health, and substance use in adolescents is of critical importance in preventing risky behaviors.

This study focuses on the relationship between screen use and psychological well-being by excluding more interactive activities such as playing video games and

centers on the Compensatory Internet Use Theory (CIUT). Although many studies examining the online activities of adolescents or young adults have investigated usage motivations, the Compensatory Internet Use Theory (CIUT) has not been adopted as an interpretive perspective. Studies addressing the issue within the framework of the Compensatory Internet Use Theory (CIUT) remain quite limited (Hargittai & Hinnant, 2008; Weidman et al., 2012)

Most studies in the field have been conducted on children and adolescents and therefore have not examined today's youth, whose screen time is considerably high. The study differs from others in that it focuses on young people, centers on the Compensatory Internet Use Theory (CIUT), and emphasizes relatively more passive use.

2. Methodology

In the study, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were asked to complete the demographic information form, the screen use patterns form, and the *Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB)*. The Psychological Well-Being Scale was answered on a scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7). Scores ranged from 8, indicating "strongly disagree" on all items, to 56, indicating "strongly agree" on all items. The scale developed by Diener et al. (1985, 2010; 2009a; 2009b; 1996) was adapted into Turkish by Telef (2011, 2013). A higher score on the scale indicates that the participant possesses greater psychological resources and strength. The Psychological Well-Being Scale used in this study, consisting of 8 items, demonstrated high internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .966$ ($M = 36.37$, $SD = 14.16$). IBM SPSS Statistics 26.0 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY) was used for statistical procedures. Percentages are given to one decimal place. Due to rounding, the total may not add up to 100%.

Internet addiction and the associated increase in screen time is a rapidly growing field of research that has attracted the attention of researchers, journalists, and policymakers. Although a large amount of empirical data has been collected and analyzed, clear results and conclusions on the subject are still lacking. According to Kardefelt-Winther (2014, pp. 351-354), it is known that people go online and use

screens to escape from real-life problems or to alleviate negative moods. In order to theorize the common assumption that this situation sometimes leads to negative consequences, an alternative model called compensatory internet use is presented. This theory, which integrates the psychological literature on internet addiction with research on the motivations for internet use, proposes an empirical approach to examining compensatory internet use. Although the theory primarily emphasizes internet use, screen time is directly related to internet addiction, and therefore the theory can also be extended to research on screen time.

Kardefelt-Winther's (2014, p. 351) aimed to understand how motivations for internet use influence the relationship between psychosocial well-being and internet addiction, as well as to draw conclusions about how online activities may compensate for psychosocial problems. According to the researcher, this may help explain why people spend so much time on screens despite some negative consequences. To achieve this, research needs to move away from focusing solely on direct effect models and instead consider the interactions between psychosocial well-being and motivations. In this context, participants were asked to respond to a question based on the Compensatory Internet Use Theory (CIUT) developed from studies in the literature. Participants responded to five screen use motivation items derived from the CIUT literature: escape from daily events/stress, reducing loneliness, postponing decisions, forgetting real-life problems, and suppressing feelings of emptiness. These items were theoretically interpreted within three broader domains associated with CIUT: Avoidance, Mood Regulation/Social Compensation, and Compensation of Unmet Needs (Grieve et al., 2017; Hu & Huang, 2024; Kardefelt-Winther, 2014, p. 351; Snodgrass et al., 2018, p. 10; Wegmann et al., 2025, p. 263; Weidman et al., 2012).

2.1. Participants

Data collection began following the approval of the Ethics Committee of Social and Human Sciences at Aydın Adnan Menderes University (Ref: E-21315140-050.04-743061, 23/06). Participants were recruited through WhatsApp groups, and those who provided consent were included in the study. A total of 458 participants, consisting of 165 men and 293 women, took part in the study. Participants were between 18 and 28

years old. Educational level was predominantly university student, with 89.7% of men and 89.1% of women enrolled. Monthly individual income levels were most commonly "10,000–20,000 TL" (33.3%) among men and "5,000–10,000 TL" (36.5%) among women. Regarding place of residence, 57.2% participants had spent most of their lives in cities, while 26% had lived in a metropolitan area (one of Istanbul, Ankara, or Izmir). The total proportion of individuals who had lived in villages or towns was 16.8%.

2.2. Limitations of the Study

The study has a cross-sectional design and is therefore not suitable for making causal inferences regarding the relationship between screen use and psychological well-being. The sample consists of young individuals aged 18–28, which delineates a specific age group and points to cohort-specific tendencies. Accordingly, the generalizability of the findings to other age groups is limited. In addition, the data were collected in Türkiye, and thus the results are confined to a particular sociological context and cultural characteristics.

3. Findings and Discussion

After completing the demographic information form, participants were asked questions regarding their screen use patterns. The mean psychological well-being score of the participants was identified as 36.37. The scale range is 8–56. This indicates that the general psychological well-being level of the participants was slightly above the medium level.

Regarding screen time, 62% (n = 285) reported four or more hours of daily screen use and were categorized as heavy users. Thirty-one percent (n = 142) reported using screens between 2–4 hours and were categorized as moderate users. A total of 6.8% (n = 31) reported less than 2 hours of screen use and were categorized as light users. This finding shows that the majority of participants had screen time above the 2-hour threshold defined in the literature as a safe limit.

Considering the purpose of screen use, for both male and female participants, the largest portion of screen time was for entertainment at 55.9%, followed by socialization and communication at 29.7%, and education/work at 11.4%. News

consumption accounted for 1.7% and shopping for 1.3%, ranking lowest among other purposes. This indicates that obtaining news and engaging in shopping had little influence on the screen time of young people.

When asked about the platforms that accounted for the majority of their screen time, 50.7% of participants reported Instagram, 21.8% YouTube, 15.9% TikTok, 8.3% X, 2.2% Netflix, 0.7% Facebook, and 0.4% Snapchat as the platforms they used most. This finding is consistent with related studies in the literature and demonstrates that Facebook, which marked the 2000s, has lost its popularity among young people. At the same time, it is evident that Snapchat has also declined in popularity. YouTube, however, has become the platform in a determinant position with respect to viewing activities.

When asked about the types of applications most frequently used on screens, 68.8% indicated “social media applications,” followed by “streaming services” at 21.4%, “games” at 7.4%, “news–content platforms” at 1.7%, and “work and education platforms” at 0.7%. These findings indicate that Facebook and Snapchat have lost their popularity, social media use is the most important screen activity, and young people engage in social media use primarily in the pursuit of entertainment.

When participants were asked about the physical/sensory effects they experienced after spending long periods in front of screens, “lack of attention” ranked first with 26.6%, followed by “sleep problems” at 24.7%, “headache” at 22.3%, “mental fatigue” at 21.6%, and “social withdrawal” at 4.8%. After screen use activities, participants reported feeling “tired” at 39.7%, “happy” at 27.7%, “relaxed” at 19.9%, “mentally refreshed” at 8.7%, and “stressed” at 3.9%. This indicates that feeling tired is the most prominent outcome of increased screen time among young people.

When participants were asked why they turned to screens, “escape from daily events and stress” ranked first with 42.4%. This was followed by “suppressing the feeling of emptiness” at 24.7%, “forgetting real-life problems” at 12.2%, “postponing situations requiring decisions” at 11.1%, and “reducing the feeling of loneliness” at 9.6%. This shows that escape from daily events and stress was the primary motivation

driving screen activity. However, there was no linear, statistically significant relationship indicating that psychological well-being either decreased or increased as screen time increased.

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the scores of male and female participants on the Psychological Well-Being Scale. According to the results of the analysis, female participants (M = 37.43, SD = 13.54) scored significantly higher on psychological well-being than male participants (M = 34.48, SD = 15.04).

The relationship between screen use motivations and the most frequently used platform was examined using the chi-square test. Cross-tabulations revealed that Instagram was the dominant platform across all motivations. In particular, 65.9% of participants who turned to screens to "reduce the feeling of loneliness" reported Instagram as their primary screen use. Among those who used screens to "escape from daily events/stress," 52.6% reported Instagram as their primary platform; 41.2% of those who used screens to "postpone situations requiring decisions," 48.2% of those who used screens to "forget real-life problems," and 46.9% of those who used screens to "suppress the feeling of emptiness" also indicated Instagram as their most frequently used platform. For participants who turned to screens with motivations of avoidance, emotion regulation, and compensation of unmet needs, Instagram emerged as the most important compensatory platform. YouTube was identified as the second most frequently used platform.

When the scores from the Psychological Well-Being Scale and screen time groups (low, medium, high) were compared using a one-way ANOVA, significant differences were found between groups, $F(2, 455) = 5.37$, $p = .005$. Since the variances were not equally distributed, Levene's test indicated a violation of homogeneity ($F(2, 455) = 5.566$, $p = .004$), Welch's ANOVA was reported, and the result was statistically significant, $F(2, 77.516) = 3.626$, $p = .031$.

According to the post-hoc Games-Howell test, participants with moderate screen use (M = 37.87, SD = 13.92) had significantly higher psychological well-being scores compared to low users (M = 28.77, SD = 17.65). No significant differences

were found between heavy users (M = 36.45, SD = 13.64) and the other groups. These results suggest that, unlike in children, motivations for screen use—rather than duration—become more important for psychological well-being among young people (Table 1).

Table 1

One-Way ANOVA Analysis of Screen Time and Total Scores on the Psychological Well-Being Scale

(I) Low Users (1) Moderate Users (2) Heavy Users (3)	(J) Low Users (1) Moderate Users (2) Heavy Users (3)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	2	-9.09905*	3.37892	0.028	-17.3350	-.8631
	3	-7.67142	3.27196	0.063	-15.6891	.3462
2	1	9.09905*	3.37892	0.028	.8631	17.3350
	3	1.42763	1.42005	0.574	-1.9186	4.7738
3	1	7.67142	3.27196	0.063	-.3462	15.6891
	2	-1.42763	1.42005	0.574	-4.7738	1.9186

**. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.*

Dependent Variable: Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB) Total Score

A hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine the variables predicting psychological well-being, and only gender, age, and income level were included in the first model. In the first model, which included only the basic demographic variables, significance was found, $F(3, 454) = 3.37$, $p = .019$, $R^2 = .022$. Gender and income level were significant predictors of psychological well-being, whereas age was not significant.

The second model of the hierarchical regression analysis included screen time, satisfaction, and purpose of use variables, and the model was statistically significant, $F(6, 451) = 3.65$, $p = .002$, $R^2 = .046$. The analysis yielded $\Delta R^2 = .025$, indicating that these variables significantly increased the explained variance. In both the first and second models, gender and screen use satisfaction were found to be significant predictors of psychological well-being. Other variables did not make a significant contribution to the model (Table 2).

Table 2

Hierarchical Regression Analysis: Coefficients Table

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	26.951	3.101		8.691	000		
	Gender	3.549	1.393	0.120	2.549	0.011	0.964	1.037
	Age	0.142	0.298	0.023	0.477	0.634	0.907	1.103
	Income	1.372	0.666	0.101	2.060	0.040	0.893	1.120
2	(Constant)	18.843	4.202		4.484	000		
	Gender	3.565	1.382	0.121	2.579	0.010	0.960	1.041
	Age	0.189	0.299	0.031	0.635	0.526	0.886	1.128
	Income	1.166	0.665	0.086	1.755	0.080	0.880	1.137
	Daily Total Screen Time	0.212	0.503	0.019	0.422	0.673	0.993	1.007
	Satisfaction Level with Screen Use	1.830	0.620	0.137	2.951	0.003	0.975	1.025
	What is your motivation for turning to screens?	0.699	0.392	0.083	1.783	0.075	0.984	1.016

a. Dependent Variable: Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB) Total Score

b. Screen use motivation was coded as an ordinal variable based on CIUT categories.

Most studies conducted on children have found a statistically significant relationship between screen time and psychological well-being. However, in this study, which sampled young people, it is not possible to speak of a linear, one-way relationship. These findings are consistent with major studies in the literature and demonstrate the appropriateness of centering the Compensatory Internet Use Theory (CIUT). In the literature, there is no definitive consensus on the internal classification of the Compensatory Internet Use Theory (CIUT). Researchers have developed their own categorizations based on the principles of the Compensatory Internet Use Theory (CIUT). In this study, in line with the relevant literature, the Compensatory Internet Use Theory (CIUT) was grouped into three clusters. The first cluster, *Avoidance* (1), consisted of motivations such as escape from daily events/stress, forgetting problems, and postponing decisions. The second cluster, *Mood Regulation/Social Compensation*

(2), consisted of the motivation to suppress the feeling of emptiness. The third cluster, *Compensation of Unmet Needs* (3), consisted of the motivation to reduce the feeling of loneliness.

The primary motivation for participants' screen orientation was *Avoidance* at 65.7% (n = 301), the secondary motivation was *Mood Regulation/Social Compensation* at 24.7% (n = 113), and the tertiary motivation was *Compensation of Unmet Needs* at 9.6% (n = 44). A one-way ANOVA conducted across the five specific screen-use motivation items revealed a statistically significant difference in psychological well-being scores, $F(4, 453) = 2.85$, $p = .02$. The post-hoc Games-Howell test showed that participants who turned to screens with the motivation of "suppressing the feeling of emptiness," i.e., *Mood Regulation/Social Compensation* (M = 38.57, SD = 12.28), had significantly higher psychological well-being levels compared to those who used screens with the motivation of "reducing the feeling of loneliness," i.e., *Compensation of Unmet Needs* (M = 34.91, SD = 15.10), (*mean difference* = 7.52, $p = .035$). This indicates that a lack of socialization or loneliness has a significantly negative impact on psychological well-being (Table 3).

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Psychological Well-Being by CIUT-Based Screen Use Motivations

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Escape from daily events/stress	194	36.3505	15.04779	1.08037	34.2197	38.4814	8.00	56.00
Reducing the feeling of loneliness	44	31.0455	15.10114	2.27658	26.4543	35.6366	8.00	56.00
Postponing situations requiring decisions	51	34.1176	14.61047	2.04588	30.0084	38.2269	8.00	53.00
Forgetting real-life problems	56	38.2321	12.26227	1.63862	34.9483	41.5160	8.00	56.00

Suppressing the feeling of emptiness	113	38.5664	12.28085	1.15528	36.2773	40.8554	8.00	56.00
Total	458	36.3690	14.15672	0.66150	35.0690	37.6690	8.00	56.00
Note. The categories represent the original CIUT-based motivation items included in the questionnaire.								

A chi-square analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between Compensatory Internet Use motivations and the emotions felt after screen activity, and significant results were found ($\chi^2(8) = 15.88$, $p = .044$). Among participants with high screen time due to the *Avoidance* motivation, 36.6% reported feeling tired after screen activity. This indicates that screen activity among those who turn to screens for avoidance behaviors may result in "tiredness". Similarly, 40.9% of participants with high screen time due to the *Emotion Regulation* motivation reported feeling tired after screen activity. Among participants with high screen time due to the *Compensation of Unmet Needs* motivation, 53.1% reported feeling tired after screen activity. These findings show that regardless of which compensatory motivation leads to screen use, the primary outcome is "tiredness." This demonstrates that screen activity was not, in fact, a restorative act for the participants (Table 4).

Table 4

Compensatory Internet Use Theory (CIUT) and Emotions Experienced After Screen Exposure: Crosstabulation

			Relaxed	Happy	Mentally Refreshed	Tired	Stressed	Total
CIUT	1	Count	66	93	28	104	10	301
		% within CIUT	21.9%	30.9%	9.3%	34.6%	3.3%	100.0%
	2	Count	6	13	5	18	2	44
		% within CIUT	13.6%	29.5%	11.4%	40.9%	4.5%	100.0%
	3	Count	19	21	7	60	6	113
		% within CIUT	16.8%	18.6%	6.2%	53.1%	5.3%	100.0%
Total		Count	91	127	40	182	18	458
		% within CIUT	19.9%	27.7%	8.7%	39.7%	3.9%	100.0%

CONCLUSION

Global digital transformations have altered the ways in which leisure time is spent in everyday life, and screen use has become one of the main actors of life with multiple purposes and motivations. This situation has facilitated the rapid increase in screen time, and communication sciences have assumed a leading role in discussing these relationships. Screen time, which has risen in direct connection with internet addiction, poses risks particularly for children and young people. Although scientific studies on this issue are being rapidly conducted, screens continue to increase their influence on daily life.

The effects of screen time on psychological well-being have been discussed from many perspectives; however, the primary focus of this debate has undoubtedly been children. Young people have not been sufficiently addressed in research. Therefore, this study aimed to contribute to the gap in the literature. For this purpose, a large young sample group aged 18–28 (N = 458) was examined, and the relationships between screen use and psychological well-being were discussed. The study employed a quantitative and cross-sectional design, using the Demographic Information Form, the Screen Use Patterns Information Form, and the *Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB).*

The mean psychological well-being score of the participants was 36.37 on a scale ranging from 8 to 56, which corresponds to a medium–high level. An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the psychological well-being levels of males and females, and it was found that female participants scored higher on psychological well-being than male participants. A total of 62% (n = 285) of the participants reported four or more hours of daily screen use and were categorized as "heavy users," indicating intensive screen exposure. Thirty-one percent (n = 142) were classified as moderate users with 2–4 hours of daily use, while 6.8% (n = 31) were categorized as light users with less than 2 hours of daily screen time, which is considered the safe limit. Moreover, 50.7% of the participants reported Instagram as their most frequently used platform, and Instagram was the primary choice across all screen use motivations.

When asked about the most important platforms in screen use, 68.8% indicated "social media applications," followed by "streaming services" at 21.4%. It was observed that Facebook and Snapchat had lost their popularity among the young people in the sample. After prolonged screen exposure, 26.6% reported experiencing "lack of attention," and 39.7% reported feeling "tired" after screen use activities. When asked about their motivations for turning to screens, "escape from daily events and stress" was the primary motivation at 42.4%. This was followed by "suppressing the feeling of emptiness" at 24.7%, "forgetting real-life problems" at 12.2%, "postponing situations requiring decisions" at 11.1%, and "reducing the feeling of loneliness" at 9.6%. A hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictors of psychological well-being, and gender and satisfaction with screen use were found to be significant predictors of psychological well-being. Regardless of which compensatory motivation led participants to screen use, the predominant feeling afterward was "tiredness." Therefore, it is not possible to describe prolonged screen activity as a restorative act.

Although scientific studies focusing on children have frequently reported negative and statistically significant relationships between screen time and psychological well-being, this study, which examined young people as the sample, reached different results. It was observed that the linear relationship between screen time and psychological well-being disappeared with increasing age, and therefore the focus was placed on the Compensatory Internet Use Theory (CIUT). The primary motivation for screen orientation was identified as *Avoidance* at 65.7% (n = 301), the secondary motivation as *Mood Regulation/Social Compensation* at 24.7% (n = 113), and the tertiary motivation as *Compensation of Unmet Needs* at 9.6% (n = 44). Future studies conducting longitudinal research using a Compensatory Internet Use Theory (CIUT) scale with established validity and reliability are important for the examination of causal relationships.

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Extended Abstract

Research Background & Aim

The increasing importance of screens in everyday life and their transformation of communication practices have necessitated the reconsideration of many fields. Particularly among younger generations, rising screen time for purposes such as communication and leisure activities has undoubtedly had an impact on mental health. Studies conducted in this area have largely focused on children and adolescents, examining the relationships between screen use and psychological well-being. Many of these studies have reported significant associations, especially among children, between prolonged screen use and declines in psychological well-being.

Addressing the issue together with its theoretical foundations, this study adopted the Compensatory Internet Use Theory (CIUT) as its conceptual framework. Although there is a substantial body of research focusing on children, studies involving young people remain limited; therefore, this study aimed to examine the relationship between screen use and psychological well-being among young adults aged 18–28. Beyond focusing solely on screen time, the study sought to identify the motivations driving screen use and to understand the effects that emerge as a result of this use.

Methodology

The study was designed as a quantitative, cross-sectional investigation and conducted with a large sample of 458 young adults aged 18–28. The Demographic Information Form, CIUT Motivations, the Screen Use Patterns Form, and the Psychological Well-Being Scale were used. Statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, version 26.0 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY), and the significance level was set at .05.

Findings

The findings of the study show that screen use is highly prevalent among young people and directly influences everyday life. A total of 62% of participants were classified as "heavy users," reporting four hours or more of daily screen time. Escape from daily events and stress constituted the primary motivation for screen use (65.7%; n = 301). Instagram emerged as the most important compensatory platform. After prolonged screen use, participants reported experiencing "tiredness" and "inattention." Contrary to the findings reported in studies conducted with children, the relationship between screen time and psychological well-being among young adults did not display a linear pattern, and compensatory use motivations were found to be more important.

Conclusion & Discussion

The study found that psychological well-being among young adults is not directly associated with screen time, whereas motivational factors exert a significant influence. In line with the Compensatory Internet Use Theory, screen activity was found to function as a context-dependent coping strategy. The findings highlight the strong role of screens as an integral part of contemporary youth culture and coping practices. To better understand the psychosocial needs underlying compensatory use and to examine the issue within a more specific framework by establishing causal relationships, future longitudinal studies are needed.

Çalışma tek yazarlıdır.

Çalışma kapsamında herhangi bir kurum veya kişi ile çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.

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