

## Digital Game Addiction as a Predictor of Meaning in Life Among Adolescents

*Ergenlerde Yaşamda Anlamın Yordayıcısı Olarak Dijital Oyun Bağımlılığı*

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### ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between digital game addiction and meaning in life among adolescents while considering selected demographic variables. The sample consisted of 487 high school students attending different school types in Istanbul, Türkiye. Data were collected using the Game Addiction Scale for Adolescents–Short Form and the Meaning in Life Scale–High School Form, which includes the subdimensions of presence of meaning and search for meaning. Descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, one-way ANOVA, Pearson correlation analysis, and hierarchical regression analysis were conducted. The findings indicated that adolescents' digital game addiction levels were generally below moderate. Given the possible score range of 9–45 on the scale, the sample mean was below the mid-point (27), supporting the 'below-moderate' interpretation. Male students reported significantly higher digital game addiction scores than female students. Digital game addiction was negatively associated with academic achievement, whereas no significant differences were found according to school type or grade level. Adolescents reported moderate levels of meaning in life. A weak but significant negative relationship was found between digital game addiction and the presence of meaning in life, whereas no significant relationship emerged with the search for meaning. Hierarchical regression analysis demonstrated that digital game addiction significantly and negatively predicted the presence of meaning in life after controlling for gender, academic achievement, and daily internet use. These findings suggest that excessive engagement in digital gaming may be associated with a lower sense of purpose. Promoting balanced digital media use and supporting adolescents' meaning-making processes may contribute to psychological well-being and healthier developmental outcomes.

### Article Information

#### Keywords

Digital game addiction  
Meaning in life  
Presence of meaning  
Search for meaning  
Adolescent

#### Anahtar Kelimeler

Dijital oyun bağımlılığı  
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### ÖZET

Bu çalışmada, dijital oyun bağımlılığı ile ergenlerin yaşamda anlam düzeyleri arasındaki ilişki seçilmiş demografik değişkenler dikkate alınarak incelenmiştir. Araştırmanın örneklemini, Türkiye'nin İstanbul ilinde farklı lise türlerinde öğrenim görmekte olan 487 lise öğrencisi oluşturmaktadır. Veriler, Ergenler İçin Oyun Bağımlılığı Ölçeği Kısa Formu ile Yaşamda Anlam Ölçeği–Lise Formu kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Yaşamda Anlam Ölçeği, “anlamın varlığı” ve “anlam arayışı” alt boyutlarını içermektedir. Verilerin analizinde betimsel istatistikler, bağımsız örneklem t-testi, tek yönlü varyans analizi (ANOVA), Pearson korelasyon analizi ve hiyerarşik regresyon analizi kullanılmıştır. Bulgular, ergenlerin dijital oyun bağımlılığı düzeylerinin genel olarak orta düzeyin altında olduğunu göstermiştir. Ölçeğin olası puan aralığının 9–45 olduğu dikkate alındığında, örneklem ortalaması orta noktanın (27) altında kalmıştır; bu da ‘orta düzeyin altında’ yorumunu desteklemektedir. Erkek öğrencilerin dijital oyun bağımlılığı puanlarının kız öğrencilere göre anlamlı düzeyde daha yüksek olduğu bulunmuştur. Dijital oyun bağımlılığının akademik başarı ile negatif yönde ilişkili olduğu, ancak okul türü ve sınıf düzeyine göre anlamlı farklılık göstermediği belirlenmiştir. Ergenlerin yaşamda anlam düzeylerinin orta düzeyde olduğu saptanmıştır. Dijital oyun bağımlılığı ile yaşamda anlamın varlığı arasında zayıf fakat anlamlı düzeyde negatif bir ilişki bulunurken, anlam arayışı ile anlamlı bir ilişki tespit edilmemiştir. Hiyerarşik regresyon analizi sonuçları, cinsiyet, akademik başarı ve günlük internet kullanımı kontrol edildikten sonra dijital oyun bağımlılığının yaşamda anlamın varlığını anlamlı ve negatif yönde yordadığını göstermiştir. Bu bulgular, dijital oyunlara aşırı düşkünlüğün, yaşam amacı duygusunun azalmasıyla ilişkili olabileceğini düşündürmektedir. Dengeli dijital medya kullanımının desteklenmesi ve ergenlerin anlam oluşturma süreçlerinin güçlendirilmesi, psikolojik iyi oluş ve sağlıklı gelişim açısından önemli görünmektedir.

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## INTRODUCTION

Digital technologies have become deeply embedded in adolescents' daily lives, shaping how they communicate, learn, and spend their leisure time. Among various digital activities, digital gaming has emerged as one of the most widespread forms of engagement worldwide (Kuss & Griffiths, 2012; Stevens et al., 2021). Digital games offer entertainment, social interaction, and opportunities for achievement and competition. However, excessive and uncontrolled engagement may lead to problematic patterns conceptualized as digital game addiction or internet gaming disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; World Health Organization, 2019). Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to such behaviors due to developmental characteristics, including identity exploration, emotional regulation challenges, and heightened sensitivity to reward mechanisms (Paulus et al., 2018).

A growing body of research has demonstrated that excessive gaming is associated with a range of negative outcomes, including lower academic performance, reduced social engagement, emotional dysregulation, and diminished psychological well-being (Aznar-Díaz et al., 2020; Király et al., 2020; Stevens et al., 2021). In addition, demographic and behavioral variables—such as gender, academic achievement, and duration of internet use—have been identified as important correlates of digital gaming behaviors, with male adolescents typically exhibiting higher levels of gaming involvement (Kuss & Griffiths, 2012; Su et al., 2020).

Beyond behavioral and academic outcomes, recent research has increasingly emphasized the importance of examining existential constructs such as meaning in life. Meaning in life refers to individuals' perception that their lives are purposeful, coherent, and significant and is conceptualized as comprising two dimensions: the presence of meaning and the search for meaning (Steger et al., 2006; Steger, 2012). Adolescence represents a critical developmental stage for meaning construction, during which individuals actively explore their identities, values, and future goals (Kiang & Fuligni, 2010). Difficulties in constructing meaning may increase vulnerability to maladaptive coping strategies, including excessive engagement in digital environments (Bronk, 2014).

From a theoretical perspective, self-determination theory posits that psychological well-being and life meaning are fostered through the satisfaction of basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Although digital games may temporarily satisfy these needs—particularly through structured rewards and feedback systems—excessive engagement may reduce adolescents' involvement in meaningful real-life activities, thereby weakening their sense of purpose and life meaning. Accordingly, this study aims to examine the relationship between digital game addiction and adolescents' perceptions of meaning in life, while considering key demographic and behavioral variables.

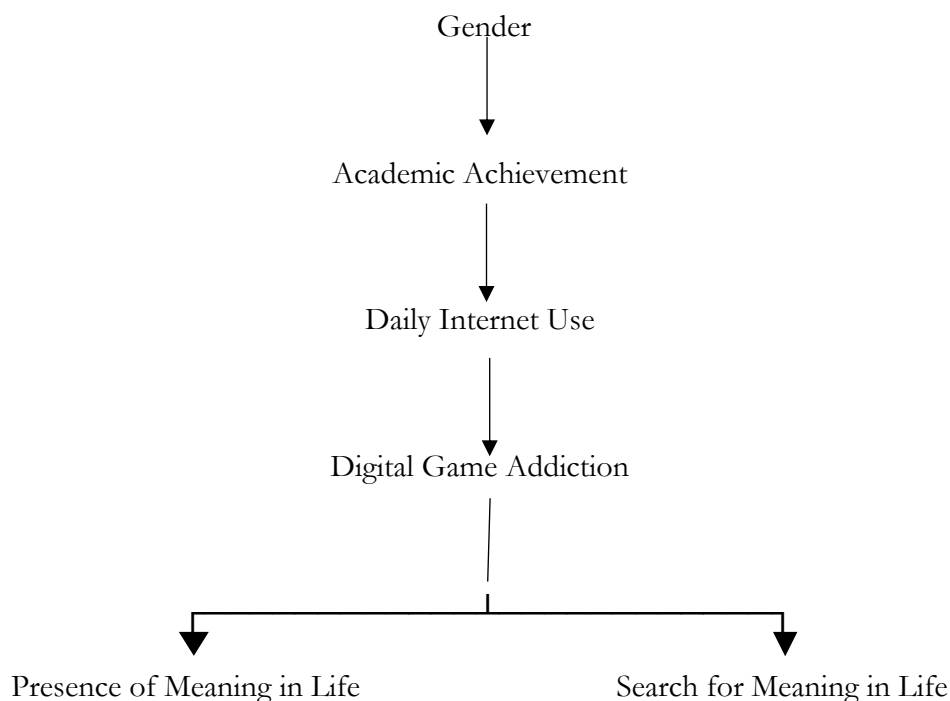
### Conceptual Model

The conceptual model of the present study proposes that digital game addiction is associated with adolescents' perceptions of meaning in life, specifically the presence of meaning and the search for meaning. In addition, demographic and behavioral variables—including gender, academic achievement, and daily internet use—are considered as contextual factors that may influence digital game addiction.

Conceptually, digital game addiction is expected to have a negative relationship with the presence of meaning in life, as excessive engagement in gaming environments may reduce adolescents' opportunities to develop meaningful life goals and real-world experiences. In contrast, the relationship between digital

game addiction and the search for meaning remains theoretically ambiguous, as the search for meaning may reflect both psychological distress and developmental exploration.

Accordingly, the conceptual model guiding the present study is presented in Figure 1.



*Figure 1. The Conceptual Model of Study*

### **Research Questions**

1. Is there a relationship between digital game addiction and meaning in life (presence of meaning and search for meaning) among adolescents?
2. Does the level of digital game addiction differ significantly according to gender, school type, grade level, and academic achievement?
3. Does the level of meaning in life differ significantly across the same demographic variables?

The relationship between digital game addiction and meaning in life is closely linked to adolescents' tendency to seek escape from reality within virtual environments. In accordance with this conceptual framework, the following hypotheses were tested in the present study:

### **Hypotheses**

**H1:** There is a significant negative relationship between digital game addiction and the presence of meaning in life among adolescents.

**H2:** There is no significant relationship between digital game addiction and the search for meaning in life among adolescents.

**H3:** Male adolescents exhibit significantly higher levels of digital game addiction than female adolescents.

**H4:** Adolescents with low academic achievement have significantly higher levels of digital game addiction compared to those with moderate and high academic achievement.

**H5:** Male adolescents report significantly higher levels of presence of meaning in life than female adolescents.

**H6:** Digital game addiction significantly and negatively predicts the presence of meaning in life, even after controlling for gender, academic achievement, and daily internet use.

## METHOD

This study was designed using a quantitative research approach, specifically the relational survey model. The relational survey model enables the examination of associations among variables and the investigation of whether these relationships differ according to demographic characteristics (Büyüköztürk et al., 2017). The primary objective of the study is to determine the relationship between digital game addiction and meaning in life among adolescents and to assess whether these variables vary across selected demographic characteristics.

### Study Group

The study population consisted of high school students enrolled in public schools in the Maltepe district of Istanbul during the 2020–2021 academic year. A convenience sampling method was employed due to the accessibility of schools and the voluntary participation of students. While this method allowed efficient data collection under pandemic-related constraints, it limits the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, the results should be interpreted as representative of the participating schools rather than the broader adolescent population in Istanbul or Türkiye.

Several high schools from different educational tracks—including Anatolian High Schools, Science High Schools, Vocational and Technical Anatolian High Schools, and Anatolian Imam Hatip High Schools—were contacted, and those that agreed to participate were included in the sample. Including multiple school types made it possible to obtain students from diverse academic contexts; however, the sampling approach prevents statistical representativeness.

Given that participants were minors, the consent process included obtaining approval from school administrations, written parental consent, and voluntary assent from students. Students were informed about the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

Data collection took place during the second semester of the 2020–2021 academic year, during the COVID 19 pandemic. This context is important, as remote schooling and increased time spent at home may have influenced both digital gaming behaviors and internet use patterns. Pandemic related contextual factors were not directly measured and therefore represent an important limitation of the study.

A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed, and after excluding 13 incomplete or invalid forms, the final sample consisted of 487 students. Demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Frequency and Percentage Distributions of Participants' Demographic Characteristics*

Variable	Category	f	%
Gender	Female	150	30.8
	Male	337	69.2

School Type	Anatolian High School	109	22.4
	Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School	104	21.4
	Anatolian Imam Hatip High School	177	36.3
	Science High School	97	19.9
	9th Grade	185	38.0
Grade Level	10th Grade	153	31.4
	11th Grade	88	18.1
	12th Grade	61	12.5
	Low	70	14.4
Academic Achievement	Moderate	341	70.0
	High	76	15.6
	0-1 hour	13	2.7
Daily Internet Use	2 hours	54	11.1
	3 hours	87	17.9
	4 hours	110	22.6
	5 hours and above	223	45.8

Note. N = 487

Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of participants' demographic characteristics. The sample consisted of 487 students, including 150 females (30.8%) and 337 males (69.2%). Regarding school type, the largest group was Anatolian Imam Hatip High School students (36.3%), followed by Anatolian High School students (22.4%), Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School students (21.4%), and Science High School students (19.9%). In terms of grade level, 9th-grade students constituted the largest group (38.0%), whereas 12th-grade students represented the smallest group (12.5%). Finally, most participants reported moderate academic achievement (70.0%), while 14.4% reported low and 15.6% reported high academic achievement.

## Data Collection Instruments

### *Personal Information Form*

A Personal Information Form developed by the researcher was used to collect demographic data and digital usage characteristics. The form includes items assessing gender, age, school type, grade level, perceived academic achievement, family income, parental education level, and parental cohabitation status. In addition, participants reported their daily internet use duration, daily digital gaming duration, preferred gaming device, and whether they perceived a need for or had received psychological support related to gaming behavior.

### *Game Addiction Scale for Adolescents – Short Form*

Digital game addiction was measured using the Game Addiction Scale for Adolescents – Short Form (GAS-SF) originally developed by Lemmens, Valkenburg, and Peter (2009) and adapted into Turkish by Arslan, Kırık, Karaman, and Çetinkaya (2015). Although some previous studies refer to the instrument as a short form of the Internet Gaming Disorder Scale, the original authors classify it as an adolescent game addiction scale, and this study follows the original naming conventions to avoid conceptual confusion.

The Turkish short form consists of 9 items in a single-factor structure, rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Never to 5 = Very often. Total scores range from 9 to 45, with higher scores indicating higher levels of gaming addiction. In line with previous research using the same instrument, no standardized clinical cut-off score exists; therefore, levels (e.g., “below moderate”) were interpreted based on score distribution and normative tendencies reported in the literature rather than formal diagnostic thresholds. In the present study, internal consistency was high (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .89$ ).

### ***Meaning in Life Scale – High School Form***

Adolescents’ perceived meaning in life was assessed using the Meaning in Life Scale – High School Form, adapted to Turkish by Demirbaş Çelik and Gazioğlu (2015) from the original Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Steger et al. (2006).

The scale consists of 10 items across two subdimensions:

- Presence of Meaning (5 items)
- Search for Meaning (5 items)

Items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Absolutely untrue to 7 = Absolutely true, producing possible subscale scores between 5 and 35. Higher scores indicate higher presence or search for meaning. In this study, internal consistency coefficients were as follows:

- Presence of Meaning:  $\alpha = .88$
- Search for Meaning:  $\alpha = .82$
- Total scale:  $\alpha = .85$

To improve interpretability and transparency, the descriptive statistics for the scales—including mean, standard deviation, and minimum/maximum observed scores—are presented in Table 2.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Data collection was carried out during the second semester of the 2020–2021 academic year, a period marked by COVID 19 restrictions, alternating remote and face to face schooling, and limited social interaction among adolescents. These contextual conditions may have influenced students’ digital gaming and internet use behaviors; however, such effects were not directly measured in the present study and therefore constitute an important limitation.

Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the [Name of University] Ethics Committee (Date: [04/04/2022], Approval No: [2022/03-8]). Necessary permissions were also granted by the relevant provincial and school administrations.

Because participants were minors, a two stage consent process was followed. First, written parental consent was obtained for each participant. Second, students provided voluntary assent after being informed about the aims of the study, confidentiality of responses, and their right to withdraw at any point without penalty. Participation was strictly voluntary, and no incentives were offered.

Data were collected through group administration in participating schools. School counselors assisted in coordinating the process but did not influence students’ decisions to participate. To minimize potential response bias, counselors were instructed not to intervene during administration and to ensure that students completed the questionnaires individually and anonymously.

Completion of the questionnaire set required approximately 20–25 minutes. After data collection, all forms were screened for missing or inconsistent responses. A total of 13 questionnaires were excluded, leaving 487 valid cases for analysis.

## **Data Analysis**

All statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 25.0. Prior to the main analyses, the dataset was examined for missing values, outliers, and compliance with statistical assumptions required for parametric tests.

### ***Preliminary Analyses and Assumption Checks***

A total of 13 questionnaires containing excessive missing data or inconsistent responses were removed, leaving 487 valid cases. Remaining missing data were minimal (<1%) and handled using mean substitution as recommended for low rate, randomly distributed missingness.

Univariate outliers were identified by examining standardized z scores ( $> |3.29|$ ) and were found to be negligible; no cases were removed. Multivariate outliers were examined using Mahalanobis distance, with no observations exceeding critical chi square values for the relevant degrees of freedom.

Normality was evaluated through skewness and kurtosis values, Shapiro–Wilk tests, and inspection of Q–Q plots. Skewness and kurtosis values for all variables fell within the acceptable range (–1.5 to +1.5), indicating approximate normal distribution.

For group comparisons, Levene’s test confirmed homogeneity of variances for all ANOVAs ( $p > .05$ ). Pearson correlation assumptions—linearity, normality, and absence of extreme outliers—were met.

### ***Regression Assumptions***

For the hierarchical regression model, several checks were performed:

- Linearity between predictors and the dependent variable was verified through scatterplots and partial regression plots.
- Multicollinearity was assessed using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance values. All VIF values were below 2.5, indicating no multicollinearity concerns.
- Independence of errors was confirmed by a Durbin–Watson value of 1.86, indicating no autocorrelation.
- Homoscedasticity was evaluated by inspecting standardized residuals and predicted values, indicating no heteroscedasticity patterns.
- Normal distribution of residuals was confirmed using histograms and Q–Q plots.

Daily internet use, originally an ordinal variable (0–1 hr, 2 hr, 3 hr, 4 hr, 5+ hr), was treated as an approximately continuous variable due to its near-linear progression and widespread use of such treatment in behavioral research. Gender was dummy coded (0 = female, 1 = male), and academic achievement (low, moderate, high) was coded using two dummy variables.

### Power Analysis

A post hoc power analysis using G\*Power indicated that the obtained sample size ( $N = 487$ ), with four predictors in the final regression model and an observed effect size of  $f^2 = .11$ , provided adequate power ( $1 - \beta = .95$ ), exceeding the recommended .80 threshold.

### Main Analyses

Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum), reliability analyses (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ), and assumption checks are presented in Table 2. Group differences were tested using independent samples t tests and one way ANOVA with Tukey post hoc tests. Relationships among variables were examined through Pearson correlation coefficients. To determine the unique contribution of digital game addiction to the presence of meaning in life after controlling for demographic variables, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted.

The significance level for all tests was set at  $p < .05$ .

## FINDINGS

This section presents descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients, group comparison results, and correlational and regression analyses. All analyses were performed using parametric tests, as assumptions of normality and homogeneity were met. All analyses were conducted using SPSS 25.0, with the significance level set at .05.

### Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Internal consistency of the scales was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Distribution normality was confirmed, as skewness and kurtosis values ranged between  $-1.5$  and  $+1.5$ , indicating suitability for parametric testing.

**Table 2**

*Descriptive Statistics, Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients, and Normality Indices*

Scale	$\alpha$	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Digital Game Addiction Scale	.89	19.03	6.84	9	45	.513	-.332
Meaning in Life Scale (Total)	.85	44.35	10.13	14	70	-.155	.524
Presence of Meaning in Life (Subscale)	.88	22.90	6.44	8	35	-.158	-.816
Search for Meaning in Life (Subscale)	.82	21.44	7.71	5	35	-.321	-.571

*Note.*  $\alpha$  = Cronbach's alpha. Skewness and kurtosis values fall within the  $\pm 1.5$  range, indicating normal distribution

The internal consistency of the scales used in the study was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. The reliability coefficient was  $\alpha = .89$  for the Digital Game Addiction Scale,  $\alpha = .85$  for the total score of the Meaning in Life Scale,  $\alpha = .88$  for the Presence of Meaning subscale, and  $\alpha = .82$  for the Search for Meaning subscale. These values indicate a high level of reliability, as coefficients of .70 and above are generally considered acceptable.

In addition, skewness and kurtosis values were calculated to assess the normality of the distributions. All values fell within the  $\pm 1.5$  range, suggesting that the assumption of normality was met and that parametric statistical analyses (e.g., ANOVA and Pearson correlation) were appropriate.

### Gender Differences

An independent samples t-test examined gender differences in digital game addiction and meaning in life ( $p < .001$ ).

One-way ANOVA analyses indicated no significant differences in digital game addiction across school type, grade level, family income, or parental education levels ( $p > .05$ ). However, a significant difference was found for academic achievement ( $p < .01$ ), with the low-achievement group reporting higher addiction levels than the moderate and high groups.

Additionally, both daily internet use and gaming duration were significantly associated with digital game addiction ( $p < .001$ ), with participants reporting five or more hours per day showing the highest addiction levels.

**Table 3**

*Independent Samples t-Test Results for Digital Game Addiction and Meaning in Life Subscale Scores by Gender*

Variable	Group	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Digital Game Addiction	Female	150	18.03	7.26	-2.156	485	.032	.21
	Male	337	19.47	6.60				
Meaning in Life Scale (Total)	Female	150	42.49	10.52	-2.72	485	.007	.27
	Male	337	45.18	9.86				
Presence of Meaning	Female	150	20.85	6.49	-4.79	485	<.001	.47
	Male	337	23.82	6.21				
Search for Meaning	Female	150	21.63	7.51	.362	485	.717	.04
	Male	337	21.36	7.81				

*Note.* An independent samples *t* test was conducted. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation. Statistical significance was evaluated at  $p < .05$

In this study, digital game addiction and meaning in life were compared by gender. Digital game addiction scores were higher in males than females; the difference was statistically significant ( $t(485)=-2.156$ ,  $p=.032$ ) with a small effect size (Cohen's  $d=0.21$ ). Males also scored higher on the Meaning in Life Scale total score ( $t(485)=2.72$ ,  $p=.007$ ), again with a small effect ( $d=0.27$ ). At the subscale level, males scored significantly higher on Presence of Meaning ( $t(485)=4.79$ ,  $p<.001$ ), corresponding to a medium effect size ( $d=0.47$ ). In contrast, there was no significant gender difference on Search for Meaning ( $t(485)=0.362$ ,  $p=.717$ ), and the effect size was negligible ( $d=0.04$ ). Overall, the findings indicate that males report higher scores than females on digital game addiction and especially on the “presence of meaning” component of meaning in life; however, most differences are small, with only Presence of Meaning reaching a medium magnitude.

**Table 4**

*ANOVA Results for Digital Game Addiction and Meaning in Life Scores by School Type*

Scale	School Type	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Post Hoc Differences
Digital Game Addiction	Anatolian High School (A)	109	19.16	6.85	1.852	.137	
	Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School (B)	104	20.23	7.41			
	Imam Hatip High School (C)	177	18.25	6.74			
	Science High School (D)	97	19.02	6.24			
Meaning in Life Scale (Total)	Anatolian High School (A)	109	43.57	10.98	3.232	.022*	B>D
	Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School (B)	104	46.06	10.57			
	Imam Hatip High School (C)	177	45.08	9.73			
	Science High School (D)	97	42.04	8.99			
Presence of Meaning in Life	Anatolian High School (A)	109	21.65	6.74	4.413	.004*	B>A, C>A
	Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School (B)	104	23.92	6.55			
	Imam Hatip High School (C)	177	23.73	6.27			
	Science High School (D)	97	21.71	5.91			
Search for Meaning in Life	Anatolian High School (A)	109	21.92	8.18	1.098	.349	
	Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School (B)	104	22.13	7.08			
	Imam Hatip High School (C)	177	21.36	7.91			
	Science High School (D)	97	20.33	7.42			

*Note.* A = Anatolian High School, B = Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School, C = Imam Hatip High School, D = Science High School. Post hoc comparisons were conducted using Tukey’s test. \* $p < .05$

Table 4 presents the results of the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) conducted to examine whether students’ digital game addiction and meaning in life levels differed according to high school type.

The findings indicated that digital game addiction scores did not differ significantly by school type, ( $F(3, 483) = 1.852, p = .137$ ). Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School students had relatively higher mean scores for digital game addiction ( $M = 20.23$ ) compared to other school types, this difference was not statistically significant. This finding suggests that the type of high school attended was not a determining factor in students’ digital game addiction levels.

In contrast, a significant difference was found in total meaning in life scores according to school type, ( $F(3, 483) = 3.232, p = .022$ ). Post hoc analyses revealed that Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School students reported significantly higher meaning in life scores than Science High School students ( $B > D$ ). Examination of the mean scores showed that Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School students had the highest mean score ( $M = 46.06$ ), whereas Science High School students had the lowest ( $M = 42.04$ ).

A significant difference was also identified in the “presence of meaning” subdimension of meaning in life, ( $F(3, 483) = 4.413, p = .004$ ). Post hoc analyses indicated that Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School students and Imam Hatip High School students scored significantly higher than Anatolian

High School students ( $B > A$ ,  $C > A$ ). The mean scores demonstrated that Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School students had the highest scores ( $M = 23.92$ ), while Anatolian High School students had the lowest ( $M = 21.65$ ).

However, no significant difference was found in the “search for meaning” subdimension according to school type, ( $F(3, 483) = 1.098, p = .349$ ). This finding suggests that students’ search for meaning levels were similar regardless of the type of high school they attended.

**Table 5**

*ANOVA Results for Digital Game Addiction and Meaning in Life Scores by Grade Level*

Scale	Grade Level	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Digital Game Addiction	9th Grade	185	18.89	6.41	1.328	.264
	10th Grade	153	19.20	7.25		
	11th Grade	88	18.13	6.46		
	12th Grade	61	20.34	7.47		
Meaning in Life Scale (Total)	9th Grade	185	43.76	8.91	2.389	.068
	10th Grade	153	43.43	10.57		
	11th Grade	88	45.27	10.87		
	12th Grade	61	47.10	11.03		
Presence of Meaning in Life	9th Grade	185	22.56	6.23	.500	.683
	10th Grade	153	22.86	6.31		
	11th Grade	88	23.19	6.49		
	12th Grade	61	23.64	7.33		
Search for Meaning in Life	9th Grade	185	21.19	8.01	2.318	.075
	10th Grade	153	20.58	7.67		
	11th Grade	88	22.08	6.82		
	12th Grade	61	23.46	7.86		

*Note.* No statistically significant differences were found in any comparisons ( $p > .05$ )

Table 5 presents the ANOVA results examining whether students’ digital game addiction and meaning in life scores differed according to grade level. The findings indicated that digital game addiction scores did not differ significantly across grade levels, ( $F(3, 483) = 1.328, p = .264$ ). Similarly, no significant grade-level differences were found for total meaning in life scores, ( $F(3, 483) = 2.389, p = .068$ ), presence of meaning, ( $F(3, 483) = .500, p = .683$ ), or search for meaning, ( $F(3, 483) = 2.318, p = .075$ ). These findings suggest that students’ levels of digital game addiction and meaning in life were generally similar across grade levels.

**Table 6**

*ANOVA Results for Digital Game Addiction and Meaning in Life Scores by Academic Achievement*

Scale	Academic Achievement	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Post Hoc Differences
Digital Game Addiction	Low (A)	70	21.16	7.50	9.763	< .001**	A > C, B > C
	Moderate (B)	341	19.20	6.58			
	High (C)	76	16.33	6.55			
Meaning in Life Scale (Total)	Low (A)	70	42.38	10.75	2.487	.084	
	Moderate (B)	341	44.35	9.78			
	High (C)	76	46.12	10.90			
Presence of Meaning in Life	Low (A)	70	20.89	7.14	6.489	.002*	A < B, A < C
	Moderate (B)	341	22.92	6.06			

	High (C)	76	24.68	6.96			
Search for Meaning in Life	Low (A)	70	21.50	9.02	.002	.998	—
	Moderate (B)	341	21.43	7.24			
	High (C)	76	21.43	8.54			

Note. A = Low, B = Moderate, C = High academic achievement. Post hoc comparisons were conducted using Tukey’s test.  $P < .05, p < .01$

Table 6 presents the ANOVA results examining whether students’ digital game addiction and meaning in life scores differed according to academic achievement levels. The findings indicated a significant difference in digital game addiction scores based on academic achievement,  $F(2, 484) = 9.763, p < .001$ . Post hoc analyses showed that students with low academic achievement reported significantly higher digital game addiction scores than those with moderate and high academic achievement ( $A > C, B > C$ ). Mean scores demonstrated that students with low academic achievement had the highest digital game addiction levels ( $M = 21.16$ ), whereas students with high academic achievement had the lowest ( $M = 16.33$ ).

No significant difference was found in total meaning in life scores according to academic achievement,  $F(2, 484) = 2.487, p = .084$ . However, a significant difference emerged in the “presence of meaning” subdimension,  $F(2, 484) = 6.489, p = .002$ . Post hoc analyses indicated that students with moderate and high academic achievement reported higher presence of meaning scores than students with low academic achievement ( $A < B, A < C$ ).

In contrast, no significant difference was identified in the “search for meaning” subdimension based on academic achievement,  $F(2, 484) = .002, p = .998$ . These findings suggest that lower academic achievement was associated with higher digital game addiction and lower presence of meaning levels.

### The Relationship Between Digital Game Addiction and Meaning in Life

Pearson correlation analysis indicated that there was no significant relationship between digital game addiction and the search for meaning ( $r = .078, p > .05$ ). However, a weak negative relationship was found between digital game addiction and the presence of meaning in life ( $r = -.158, p < .01$ ).

Pearson correlation analysis indicated that there was no significant relationship between digital game addiction and the search for meaning ( $r = .078, p > .05$ ). However, a weak negative relationship was found between digital game addiction and the presence of meaning in life ( $r = -.158, p < .01$ ).

**Table 7**

*Pearson Correlations Among Digital Game Addiction, Presence of Meaning, Search for Meaning, and Total Meaning in Life Scores*

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Digital Game Addiction	—			
2. Presence of Meaning in Life	-.158**	—		
3. Search for Meaning in Life	.078	.018	—	
4. Meaning in Life Scale (Total)	-.041	.649**	.772**	—

Note.  $p < .01$  (two-tailed)

Table 7 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients among digital game addiction, presence of meaning, search for meaning, and total meaning in life scores. The findings revealed a significant negative

correlation between digital game addiction and presence of meaning ( $r = -.158, p < .01$ ). However, digital game addiction was not significantly associated with search for meaning ( $r = .078, p > .05$ ) or total meaning in life ( $r = -.041, p > .05$ ). These findings suggest that higher levels of digital game addiction were associated with lower levels of presence of meaning among adolescents.

**Table 8**

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting the Presence of Meaning in Life*

Model	Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Step 1	Gender	2.895	0.612	.208	4.732	< .001
	Academic achievement	1.835	0.517	.156	3.550	< .001
	Daily internet use	-0.366	0.209	-.077	-1.754	.080
Step 2	Gender	3.126	0.610	.224	5.121	< .001
	Academic achievement	1.549	0.520	.132	2.979	.003
	Daily internet use	-0.224	0.211	-.047	-1.057	.291
	Digital game addiction	-0.136	0.043	-.144	-3.179	.002

Note.  $N = 487$ . Step 1: gender, academic achievement, and daily internet use were entered as control variables. Step 2: digital game addiction was added to the model

**Table 9**

*Model Summary for Hierarchical Regression Analysis*

Model	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>Adjusted R</i> <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$	<i>F change</i>	<i>df1</i>	<i>df2</i>	<i>p</i>
Step 1	.280	.078	.073	.078	13.684	3	483	< .001
Step 2	.312	.097	.090	.019	10.107	1	482	.002

A hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine whether digital game addiction predicts the presence of meaning in life after controlling for gender, daily internet use, and academic achievement.

In the first step, gender, academic achievement, and daily internet use were entered into the model. The results indicated that these variables explained 7.8% of the variance in the presence of meaning in life ( $R^2 = .078, F(3, 483) = 13.684, p < .001$ ). Among these predictors, gender ( $\beta = .208, p < .001$ ) and academic achievement ( $\beta = .156, p < .001$ ) significantly predicted the presence of meaning in life, whereas daily internet use did not reach statistical significance ( $\beta = -.077, p = .080$ ).

In the second step, digital game addiction was added to the model. This addition significantly improved the model, explaining an additional 1.9% of the variance ( $\Delta R^2 = .019, F \text{ change } (1, 482) = 10.107, p = .002$ ). Digital game addiction emerged as a significant negative predictor of the presence of meaning in life ( $\beta = -.144, p = .002$ ). This finding indicates that digital game addiction predicted lower Presence of Meaning at a weak but statistically significant level, after controlling for gender, academic achievement, and daily internet use.

Overall, the final model explained 9.7% of the variance in the presence of meaning in life ( $R^2 = .097, F(4, 482) = 12.983, p < .001$ ).

## DISCUSSION

The present study investigated the associations between digital game addiction and adolescents' perceptions of meaning in life while considering demographic factors such as gender, academic achievement, and daily internet use. The findings showed that digital game addiction was weakly but significantly negatively associated with the presence of meaning in life. Although the effect size was small, this relationship remained significant after controlling for demographic variables, suggesting that problematic gaming behaviors may coexist with reduced existential fulfillment. However, given the cross-sectional nature of the study, these results reflect associations rather than causal effects, consistent with prior methodological cautions in similar research (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014; Kuss & Griffiths, 2012).

Participants reported gaming levels slightly below moderate and moderate levels of meaning in life. This result may be understood within the broader context of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which adolescents experienced remote schooling, social isolation, and an increase in digital engagement for coping and recreational purposes. Studies have shown that adolescents frequently turned to digital platforms and gaming during this period to manage stress and emotional strain (Han et al., 2022; Gao et al., 2022). Although pandemic-specific variables were not directly measured in the present study, these conditions likely shaped the digital behaviors observed.

Gender differences in gaming addiction replicated well established patterns in the literature, where male adolescents consistently demonstrate higher levels of gaming involvement and gaming related problems (Kuss & Griffiths, 2012; Su et al., 2020). Sociocultural norms emphasizing competitiveness, achievement, and gaming culture may contribute to these differences. In contrast to some previous findings (Moksnes et al., 2013; Hamama & Hamama-Raz, 2021; Seon & Smith-Adcock, 2023), gender differences in meaning in life were significant in this study. Male adolescents reported significantly higher levels of total meaning in life and presence of meaning than female adolescents, suggesting that males in this sample may perceive their lives as more purposeful and coherent. However, no significant gender difference was found regarding the search for meaning, indicating that the exploratory process of seeking meaning is experienced similarly by both genders. Academic achievement emerged as an important correlate. Adolescents with lower academic achievement reported higher digital game addiction and lower presence of meaning. This aligns with previous research indicating that excessive gaming may interfere with academic performance, time management, and sustained attention (Aznar Díaz et al., 2020; Ferguson, 2015), whereas stronger academic engagement contributes to greater perceived competence and clearer future goals, both of which support meaning in life (Steger, 2012; Kiang & Fuligni, 2010).

A noteworthy result is that digital game addiction was associated with the presence of meaning but not the search for meaning. This distinction is theoretically meaningful. According to Steger et al. (2006), the search for meaning reflects an exploratory, developmental process, which is particularly salient during adolescence. This exploration may occur independently of behavioral risks or coping mechanisms such as excessive gaming. By contrast, the presence of meaning reflects a more stable sense of life purpose and coherence, which may be more vulnerable to being diminished when adolescents spend substantial time in structured, immersive digital environments. This pattern is consistent with compensatory internet use theory, which suggests that individuals may engage in digital environments to cope with unmet psychological needs or reduced offline well-being (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014). Similarly, escapism frameworks argue that digital games can offer temporary relief from real-life stressors but do not necessarily contribute to long-term meaning-making processes (Kuss & Griffiths, 2012).

Although the regression model was statistically significant, it explained a modest proportion of variance (9.7%), indicating that meaning in life is influenced by multiple psychosocial, contextual, and developmental factors beyond digital gaming. Prior studies also emphasize that meaning is shaped by social relationships, identity processes, cultural norms, and psychological resilience (Bronk, 2014; Rathi & Rastogi, 2007). Therefore, digital game addiction should be considered as one of many variables interacting within a broader developmental system.

Overall, the findings highlight the importance of supporting adolescents in cultivating balanced digital habits and engaging in offline activities that foster purpose, competence, and social connection. Interventions integrating goal-setting, values clarification, and digital literacy may strengthen adolescents' sense of meaning and reduce reliance on digital environments as primary coping mechanisms. The results also underscore the importance of viewing digital behaviors not only through the lens of academic outcomes but also as components of adolescents' existential well-being.

### **Limitations**

Several limitations of this study should be taken into account when interpreting the findings. First, the research employed a convenience sampling method, and data were collected solely from high school students in the Maltepe district of Istanbul. Although this approach facilitated access during pandemic conditions, it limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader adolescent population. Differences in regional, sociocultural, or socioeconomic contexts across Türkiye may influence both digital gaming behaviors and meaning-making processes.

Second, the sample was not gender-balanced, with a higher proportion of male participants. Given that gender plays a significant role in gaming behaviors (Kuss & Griffiths, 2012; Su et al., 2020), this imbalance may have affected group comparisons and overall mean levels. Future studies should aim for more balanced samples or statistically adjust for gender disproportion.

Third, the study relied exclusively on self-report measures, which may be susceptible to social desirability, inaccurate recall, or subjective interpretation. Since all variables were collected from a single source at the same time, the dataset may also be affected by common method bias. Incorporating parent-, teacher-, or peer-reports, alongside objective behavioral indicators (e.g., digital usage logs), would improve measurement validity.

Fourth, data were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, a period marked by remote schooling, limited social interaction, and increased dependence on digital media. While these contextual conditions likely influenced adolescents' gaming behaviors (Han et al., 2022; Gao et al., 2022), pandemic-specific variables were not directly measured. Therefore, applying these findings to non-pandemic contexts should be approached cautiously.

Fifth, although hierarchical regression analysis identified significant predictors, the model explained a modest proportion of variance (9.7%) in the presence of meaning in life. This suggests that other variables not included in the study—such as family relationships, peer connections, identity development, emotional regulation, and psychological resilience (Bronk, 2014; Rathi & Rastogi, 2007) also play important roles in shaping adolescents' sense of meaning.

Finally, the cross-sectional design of the study prevents causal interpretations. While digital game addiction was associated with lower presence of meaning, the directionality of this relationship cannot

be inferred. Adolescents with diminished meaning in life may turn to gaming as a compensatory coping strategy (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014), or excessive gaming may reduce engagement in activities that promote meaning. Longitudinal and experimental studies are needed to clarify the temporal dynamics between these variables.

## **Practical Implications**

### ***Implications for Educational Settings***

The findings of this study underscore the importance of integrating digital well-being education into school curricula. Given that excessive gaming is associated with lower presence of meaning in life, schools can play a preventive role by promoting balanced technology use, self-regulation strategies, and time-management skills. Previous research shows that adolescents benefit from structured interventions that enhance autonomy, competence, and relatedness—core components of well-being according to self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017). School counselors may incorporate values clarification, goal-setting, and future-oriented planning activities to strengthen students' sense of purpose, which may indirectly reduce reliance on digital environments for compensation or escape.

### ***Implications for Families***

Families are central to shaping adolescents' digital habits. Parents may contribute to healthier usage patterns by establishing consistent digital media guidelines, co-creating daily routines, and maintaining open communication rather than relying solely on restrictive measures. Studies indicate that parental monitoring and supportive involvement reduce problematic gaming behaviors (Kuss & Griffiths, 2012). Encouraging adolescents to participate in meaningful offline activities—such as hobbies, sports, and social engagements—may help reinforce sources of intrinsic meaning and satisfaction.

### ***Implications for Mental Health Professionals***

Given the weak yet significant association between problematic gaming and reduced presence of meaning, mental health professionals should consider screening for gaming behaviors as part of routine adolescent assessments. Meaning-centered therapeutic approaches, such as logotherapy-inspired interventions (Frankl, 2020) and values-oriented counseling, may be effective in helping adolescents strengthen their sense of purpose and reduce compensatory engagement in digital environments. Additionally, adolescents with low academic achievement or high daily screen time may constitute higher-risk groups who could benefit from early preventive programs.

### ***Implications for Policy Makers***

Policy makers may support adolescent well-being by promoting digital literacy programs, fostering safe and balanced media use, and ensuring that schools have access to mental health resources. Considering that pandemic-related conditions contributed to increased gaming and digital engagement, long-term policies should focus on intervention accessibility, family-school cooperation, and the development of healthy digital ecosystems in collaboration with technology platforms. Features such as usage reminders, break prompts, or time-limit tools may help adolescents self-regulate gaming behavior.

## Conclusion

This study contributes to the growing literature on digital behaviors and adolescent well being by examining the relationship between digital game addiction and meaning in life. The findings indicate that while adolescents' gaming levels were below moderate on average, higher digital game addiction was weakly yet significantly associated with lower presence of meaning in life. No relationship was found with the search for meaning, suggesting that existential exploration during adolescence may remain relatively independent of digital gaming behavior.

Gender and academic achievement emerged as relevant contextual factors, with male students reporting higher gaming addiction and students with higher academic achievement demonstrating greater presence of meaning. These results highlight the multifaceted nature of adolescent digital engagement, shaped by both individual and contextual influences.

Although the predictive effect of game addiction on meaning in life was small, the findings emphasize the need to approach digital behaviors within a broader psychosocial and existential framework. Supporting adolescents in developing purposeful life goals and promoting balanced digital media use may strengthen their psychological resources and reduce the risks associated with excessive gaming.

Future research should employ longitudinal designs, include diverse regions and populations, and examine additional variables such as identity development, emotional regulation, family functioning, and resilience. Such work may deepen understanding of how digital behaviors interact with adolescents' developing sense of meaning and overall well being.

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### **Author Contributions**

All authors contributed to the study conception and design. Material preparation and analysis were performed by [Nİ and NAK]. Data collection was performed by Nİ. The first draft of the manuscript was written by [Nİ and NAK], and all authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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This study was performed in line with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Approval was granted by the Istanbul 29 Mayıs University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee.

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