



# Press Release

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## How Do Digital Technologies Affect Adolescents? Findings from 15 Studies on Wellbeing

As part of Safer Internet Day on 11 February 2025, researchers from the Interdisciplinary Research Team on Internet and Society (IRTIS), a member of the EU Kids Online network, present findings from 15 studies examining the impact of digital technology use on adolescent wellbeing.

Between 2020 and 2025, researchers from IRTIS at Masaryk University in the Czech Republic conducted a series of studies investigating how smartphones, social networks, and online gaming influence adolescents' psychological, social, and physical wellbeing. Using longitudinal studies, experiments, and intensive data collection via mobile phones, the research provides unique insights into the varying effects of digital technology. The findings indicate that these effects depend on individual characteristics such as gender, age, media use frequency, and use patterns. While some adolescents experience positive outcomes, others face negative consequences, highlighting the complexity of the relationship between technology use and wellbeing.

David Smahel, head of the research team, explains that it is impossible to speak of universal effects when it comes to digital media. The impact depends largely on how media is used. Some adolescents engage with violent content, while others rely on the internet for learning and information. Social media, for instance, can be both beneficial and harmful depending on the context of its use. At the same time, adolescents differ in their capacity to manage online experiences, with some handling online risks well and others struggling with the consequences.

One of the studies focused on the relationship between smartphone use and stress, revealing that increased smartphone use was linked to higher stress levels in about 20% of adolescents. However, the way smartphones were used proved to be more significant than the time spent on them. Adolescents who used their phones consistently throughout the day reported higher stress levels. According to Michaela Šaradín Lebedíková, the study's author, the findings suggest that it is not just about screen time but about the nature of engagement. She emphasises that parents and teachers should not only discuss how long adolescents use their phones but also how and how often they engage with them. Strategies that help regulate stressful aspects of phone use, such as reducing notifications, could contribute to minimising stress.

Another study examined the link between social gaming, depressed mood, and loneliness. The findings showed that changes in social gaming did not significantly



affect depressed mood overall. However, increased social gaming was associated with a slight decrease in loneliness, though with notable gender differences. For boys, playing more social games was linked to lower levels of depressed mood and loneliness, whereas for girls, increased engagement in social gaming was associated with higher levels of depressed mood and loneliness. David Lacko, the study's author, suggests that these differences may stem from the distinct motivations that boys and girls have for gaming. The findings indicate that for some girls, social gaming may serve as an escape mechanism from feelings of depression, a pattern that was not observed among boys. However, further research is needed to explore this relationship in more depth.

In addition to psychological and social wellbeing, the researchers also examined the effects of technology use on sleep. One study investigated how smartphone use before bed influences sleep quality. Contrary to expectations, adolescents who used their smartphones more than usual before bedtime tended to go to bed slightly earlier and sleep longer. However, increased use of other media, such as computers and laptops, had a negative effect, leading to later sleep times. These findings suggest that while smartphones may, in some cases, serve as a sleep aid, the effects of technology use on sleep are complex and depend on the type of media being used.

The overall findings of these studies demonstrate that the effects of digital technology use on adolescent wellbeing vary across different domains. Most studies found little impact on social wellbeing, such as social support or social competence. In contrast, gender differences emerged in physical wellbeing, particularly in relation to body perception and related factors. These findings challenge the notion of a uniform effect of technology on adolescents and underscore the importance of considering individual differences. The researchers caution against making broad generalisations or implementing strict technology bans, as such measures are not supported by evidence. Instead, they emphasise the need for a more nuanced understanding of how digital technologies interact with adolescents' characteristics and usage patterns.

The full findings are available in a newly released report as part of the EU Kids Online project.

***“Understanding the diverse ways adolescents use digital technologies is key to supporting their wellbeing. It's not just about limiting screen time or making other restrictions but rather fostering positive and meaningful online experiences.”*** -

David Smahel (report co-author)

Report: <https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/127158/>

Website: <https://www.lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications/research/research-projects/eu-kids-online/news>