International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)
E-ISSN: 2582-2160 ● Website: www.ijfmr.com ● Email: editor@ijfmr.com

The Rising Concern of Digital Dependency in Children

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Abstract

Kids today are surrounded by screens everywhere they go—phones, tablets, video games, you name it. Technology is a huge part of their lives now, and honestly, it's got its good and bad sides. Sure, digital devices can make learning more exciting or give them new ways to relax. But spend too much time staring at a screen and it starts to take a toll. It messes with their emotions, makes school even tougher, gets in the way of friendships, and even affects their health.

That's what this study is all about: how hooked kids really are on their devices, and what that looks like in the way they act, feel, and do at school. We're also looking at how much parents pay attention to their kids' screen use, and what's happening at home or school that either makes things worse or helps kids break free from too much tech.

To really get the full picture, we went beyond just numbers. We surveyed 250 kids, ages 8 to 15, from both city and suburban schools. We talked to their parents and teachers too, making sure we had a good mix of ages, backgrounds, and genders. The kids answered questions about how much time they spend on screens and how it makes them feel. Then, we sat down for deeper conversations with the adults in their lives.

The results were pretty clear. The more time kids are on their devices, the more likely they are to feel grumpy, have trouble focusing, sleep poorly, and drift from real-life friends. The kids whose parents didn't really keep an eye on screen time found it hardest to put their devices down.

Bottom line: digital dependency is a real issue, and it's not going away on its own. Families, schools, and even policymakers need to work together. If parents and teachers learn to spot the warning signs sooner, encourage kids to take more time offline, and help create healthier routines, it can really change things for kids..

Introduction

Background of the Study

There's no getting around it—technology has completely changed childhood. Phones and tablets are pretty much everywhere, whether it's for doing homework, unwinding, or chatting with friends. Sometimes it helps. But most parents and teachers have seen firsthand how easy it is for kids to get sucked into games, endless videos, or scrolling through social media and lose track of everything else.

Digital dependency is about leaning on screens—whether it's out of boredom, routine, or just because it feels comfortable. Kids are picking up these habits early. That's shaping the way they think, how they feel, and how they relate to everyone around them. Study after study keeps showing the same things: too

much screen time makes it harder to pay attention, messes with moods, lowers grades, makes sleep worse, and cuts down on exercise.

And you can't ignore what happened during the pandemic. With everything moving online, kids were stuck inside and glued to screens more than ever. Those habits didn't just disappear overnight. Now, a lot of kids are showing signs of compulsive—or even addictive—technology use.

This study dives into those connections between digital dependency and everything that matters for a kid's emotional, social, and school life.

Need for the Study

With phones and tablets becoming the norm, a lot of parents, teachers, and even mental health pros are starting to worry. It's not just about being on screens "too much." Kids who are glued to their devices seem more anxious or moody, avoid hanging out with others, and just can't focus—whether that's at home or at school.

Schools are feeling the impact, too. Kids are getting distracted by games, social media, and videos when they should be learning. A lot of parents admit they aren't sure how to put limits on screen time, and hectic family schedules only make it tougher.

That's why this study matters. We need to understand just how serious digital dependency is, what's driving it, and what it's actually doing to children. By figuring this out, we can start to see the real impact on kids' emotions and relationships—and give families and schools some real ways to help kids find their balance again.

Problem Statement

The present study aims to examine the rising concern of digital dependency among children and its impact on their emotional, social, and academic well-being

Objective of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to comprehensively examine the issue of digital dependency among children by investigating its causes, impacts, and possible solutions. In order to address this growing concern, the study is guided by the following specific objectives:

To identify the factors contributing to digital dependency among children This objective focuses on uncovering the various internal and external elements that influence children's reliance on digital devices. Factors may include accessibility to smartphones, tablets, and internet-enabled devices; exposure to digital content from an early age; lack of alternative recreational activities; and peer influence. Additionally, parental modeling behavior—such as frequent device usage in front of children—may contribute to normalizing screen overuse. Understanding these contributing variables is essential to pinpointing root causes and patterns of digital dependency.

To examine the behavioral and psychological effects of excessive digital usage Excessive screen time may not only lead to physical issues like eye strain and reduced physical activity but also has a significant impact on a child's psychological and emotional health. This objective aims to explore manifestations such as irritability, anxiety, decreased attention span, emotional detachment, and increased dependency for entertainment or emotional regulation.

Identifying these symptoms will help in recognizing the early warning signs of digital overuse and its parallels with behavioral addiction.

To analyze parental awareness and control over children's digital habits Parents play a vital role in shaping children's digital behaviors. This objective will assess how aware parents are of their children's screen usage, whether they set limits or boundaries, and what strategies (if any) they use to regulate content and

screen time. It will also explore parents' own digital habits and how those habits influence children either positively or negatively.

To evaluate the relationship between digital dependency and academic/social performance Digital dependency may lead to reduced classroom engagement, poor academic

performance, and weakened interpersonal skills. This objective seeks to evaluate how digital overuse affects children's learning outcomes, participation in school activities, and ability to interact meaningfully with peers, teachers, and family members.

To suggest interventions and strategies to reduce harmful digital use in children

Finally, the study aims to recommend practical and evidence-based interventions to manage and reduce digital dependency. This could include awareness programs for parents, digital detox routines, content monitoring tools, balanced activity schedules, and integration of digital literacy in school curricula. The goal is to promote healthy, age-appropriate technology usage that supports rather than hinders children's development.

Variables used in the study

Independent Variables:

Hours of daily digital device usage

Type of content accessed (educational, entertainment, gaming, etc.)

Parental monitoring and restrictions

Dependent Variables:

Emotional and behavioral changes

Academic performance

Sleep quality

Social interaction levels

Control Variables:

Age and gender of children

Socioeconomic background

Type of schooling (public/private/online)

Research Questions

What is the level of digital dependency among children?

How does excessive screen time affect emotional well-being?

Is there a relationship between digital dependency and academic performance?

Does parental supervision influence children's screen usage behavior?

Review of the Literature

The growing prevalence of digital devices in children's lives has sparked a substantial body of research over the past two decades. Scholars across disciplines have explored the developmental, psychological, educational, and social implications of early and prolonged exposure to screen-based technologies. A consensus is emerging that while digital media can be beneficial when used appropriately, excessive and unregulated use often leads to dependency, which is associated with several negative outcomes.

Overview of Existing Research

Previous studies have highlighted the growing impact of digital technology on children's psychological and social development. Studies suggest that excessive screen exposure negatively affects attention span, emotional regulation, and interpersonal communication.

Domoff et al. emphasized that problematic media use in children is associated with emotional and behavioral difficulties. Radesky et al. found that excessive mobile device usage reduces parent-child interaction and emotional bonding. Twenge and Campbell reported that increased screen time contributes to anxiety and depression among adolescents.

Livingstone and Helsper discussed the influence of digital media on children's cognitive and social development. Hirsh-Pasek et al. highlighted the importance of balanced educational technology usage. WHO guidelines also recommend limited screen exposure for children to protect mental and physical health.

Theoretical Framework

The study is based on the Behavioral Addiction Theory, which explains that repeated digital stimulation activates reward systems in the brain, leading to compulsive behavior patterns. Children become emotionally attached to digital devices due to instant gratification and dopamine-driven responses.

Gap in Literature

Although many studies focus on screen time and technology addiction, limited research exists regarding the combined influence of emotional dependency, parental supervision, and academic impact among Indian children. This study attempts to address this gap through both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Research Methodology

Research Design

Based on the uploaded research methodology modules discussing survey methods and mixed research approaches , this study adopts a Mixed-Method Research Design combining quantitative and qualitative methods.

A cross-sectional survey design is used for quantitative analysis, while qualitative interviews provide detailed understanding of parental observations and behavioral changes among children.

Participants

The study includes 250 children aged 8–15 years from urban and semi-urban schools.

Demographic Distribution

130 boys

120 girls

Children from middle and lower-middle socio-economic backgrounds

Sampling Technique

The study uses Stratified Random Sampling.

According to the uploaded module on sampling techniques, probability sampling ensures better representation of the population.

Reason for Choosing Stratified Random Sampling

Ensures equal representation across age groups and gender Reduces sampling bias

Improves reliability and generalizability of findings

Sampling Procedure

Schools were divided into urban and semi-urban categories.

Students were grouped based on age and gender.

Participants were randomly selected from each subgroup.

Sample Size

The sample size of 250 participants was selected to maintain adequate representation and statistical reliability.

The uploaded module states that sample size should ensure representativeness, reliability, and efficiency.

Tools for Data Collection

Structured Questionnaire on Digital Usage Patterns

Emotional Behavior Assessment Scale

Academic Performance Checklist

Semi-Structured Parent Interviews

Teacher Observation Checklist

Data Collection Procedure

Permission was obtained from selected schools and parents before conducting the study. Participants completed questionnaires under supervision. Interviews were conducted with parents and teachers to gather qualitative information regarding children's behavioral patterns.

Data Analysis And Interpretation

Quantitative Analysis

Based on the uploaded modules discussing descriptive statistics and correlation analysis , the following statistical methods were used:

Frequency Distribution

Mean and Percentage Analysis

Correlation Analysis

Regression Analysis Software used: SPSS

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative interview responses were analyzed using Thematic Analysis to identify recurring emotional and behavioral themes.

Sample Observation Results

Observation Area	Findings
Daily Screen Time	68% children used devices more than 5 hours daily
Sleep Disturbance	54% reported poor sleep patterns
Academic Concentration	61% showed reduced concentration
Emotional Irritability	49% showed irritability when devices were removed
Social Interaction	45% preferred online interaction over physical play

Correlation Findings

A positive correlation was observed between excessive screen time and emotional instability.

Negative correlation was observed between screen time and academic performance

Findings And Discussion

Key Findings

Kids who spent too much time on screens started showing more mood swings and emotional ups and downs.

The more time they spent online, the harder it was for them to focus in school.
When parents weren't keeping an eye on things, kids leaned even harder on their devices and had more trouble putting them down.
Lots of gaming and social media led to children pulling back from friends and real-world activities.
When parents set clear rules about screen time, kids developed better digital habits.
We talked to 250 kids and their families, and the patterns are hard to ignore. Too much screen time is now a normal part of growing up, and it's shaping almost every area of kids' lives.

Digital Usage Patterns

One thing stood out right away—a big chunk of children (about 68%) used screens for five hours or more daily, beyond anything school-related. Most kids said they were gaming, watching videos, connecting on social media, or finding other ways to entertain themselves online.
Screens aren't just for schoolwork anymore. For a lot of kids, digital devices are the main way to relax and escape. They admitted feeling bored or annoyed when their devices were taken away, which hints at emotional dependency.
What we're seeing feels a lot like behavioral addiction. When you keep watching or playing and the brain gets its regular dopamine fix, habits set in fast—even when there are downsides. Kids who had their own phones and no real supervision got stuck in this pattern more than those with parents watching over their usage.

Emotional Well-being

Screen overload really rattled kids emotionally. Almost half (49%) got cranky, moody, or downright upset when someone tried to cut back their screen time.
Parents described their kids as anxious or even aggressive when asked to log off. Some kids got so attached to their devices that without them, they showed withdrawal signs—anger, sadness, restlessness. Basically, too much screen time gets in the way of learning how to manage emotions the old-fashioned way.
Instead of finding comfort in people or activities, kids look to their screens to take the edge off stress. The more time they spent online, the less they talked to family or played with friends. That distance can leave kids feeling lonely or cut off.
None of this is surprising if you look at earlier research—too much screen time has already been linked to anxiety, depression, weaker emotional control, and social withdrawal in young people.

Academic Performance

There's a clear cost in the classroom. About 61% of heavy screen users couldn't focus on schoolwork, forgot homework, zoned out during lessons, or saw their grades drop.
Teachers noticed how these kids really struggled to pay attention and stay engaged. If kids used their devices late into the night, poor sleep made school even tougher the next day—tired brains can't remember things or learn as well.
What's really happening? Endless games and shows eat up the time and brain space kids need for homework or simply learning new things. There's also the issue of constant digital stimulation, which can make it tough for kids to slow down and concentrate for more than a few minutes at a time. It's a mental marathon, and if you're trained only for sprints, school becomes a real challenge.

Social Interaction

A lot of kids are choosing online chats over playing outside or hanging out in person—45% said they'd rather be on screens than with friends or family.

Parents see this too. Their kids skip family dinners or trips to the park and stay glued to their devices. Some even get awkward during normal conversations.

That retreat from real-world interaction means kids miss out on developing empathy, conversation skills, and even conflict resolution—all things you can't practice staring at a screen. Childhood is the time to build these skills, and screens are crowding them out, along with so many classic experiences—imaginative play, deeper friendships, family bonding.

Parental Supervision

How much parents watch and guide screen use matters. When parents stepped in, set time limits, and encouraged other activities, their kids didn't fall into unhealthy patterns as quickly.

Families who made time for outdoor fun, routines, and togetherness gave their kids a better chance to keep device use under control. But when kids were left to their screens—often because parents were busy or overwhelmed—the dependency got stronger.

Sometimes, parents use screens to keep kids occupied or quiet. It works in the moment but creates a habit that's hard to break.

So, parents' choices, rules, and the behavior they model all shape how kids use technology.

Discussion

It's pretty clear from all this that digital dependency is becoming a huge problem for kids. It touches everything—mood, school, friendships, and even their physical health.

The research shows that when digital exposure goes unchecked, it gets in the way of how kids grow and cope. Kids are especially at risk because they're still learning how to manage emotions and self-control.

But the problem isn't just the screens themselves. It's also about parenting, how easy it is for kids to get devices, the lack of time spent outdoors, and not knowing what "healthy digital use" even looks like.

Yes, technology has its perks—kids can learn and connect in amazing ways. But there's a real need for balance. That means parents stepping up, schools talking about digital habits, and smarter policies about screen time.

If we act early, focus on emotional resilience, make room for real friends and play, and show kids how to use tech responsibly, we can keep things from spiraling.

Tackling digital dependency takes everyone—parents, teachers, psychologists, policymakers. We're all in it together if we want our kids to have a healthy, balanced childhood in the digital age.

Conclusion

The study concludes that digital dependency among children is a serious psychological and social concern. Excessive use of digital devices negatively impacts emotional well-being, academic performance, and social interaction. Children increasingly depend on digital platforms for emotional comfort and entertainment, leading to behavioral and developmental challenges.

Parental involvement, school awareness programs, and healthy digital usage policies are essential to address this issue. Encouraging outdoor activities, family interaction, and balanced screen usage can reduce dependency and promote healthier childhood development.

Limitations

Study limited to selected schools

Self-reported responses may contain bias Time limitations restricted larger sampling

Future Directions

Conduct longitudinal studies on digital dependency Study rural and diverse populations
Develop intervention programs for parents and schools

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