



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Predicting The Digital Burnout Levels of Youth

İbrahim BAYAM^a  Önder BALTAÇI^b 

^a Kırıkkale University, Kırıkkale, Türkiye.

^b Kırşehir Ahi Evran University, Kırşehir, Türkiye.

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the roles of loneliness and depression–anxiety–stress in predicting digital burnout levels among young individuals. The sample consisted of 598 young individuals (368 females, 230 males) recruited from the provinces of Kayseri and Kırşehir. Data were collected using a Personal Information Form developed by the researcher, the Digital Burnout Scale (DBS), the UCLA Loneliness Scale–Short Form (ULS-8), and the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21). The data were analyzed using SPSS 26. Correlational analyses indicated a moderately significant positive relationship between digital burnout and loneliness, and a highly significant positive relationship between digital burnout and depression, anxiety, and stress. Loneliness (ULS-8) and all subscales of the DASS-21 were found to significantly predict digital burnout. Together, loneliness, depression, anxiety, and stress accounted for 55% of the variance in digital burnout. Additionally, statistically significant differences in digital burnout levels were observed based on gender, employment status, daily internet use duration, frequency of notification checking, and primary purpose of digital device use. However, no significant differences were found in digital burnout levels based on academic achievement. Overall, this study contributes to the literature by highlighting the associations among youth mental health, loneliness, and digital habits, and provides insights for developing preventive intervention strategies targeting digital burnout.

Introduction

Individuals continue their lives with certain habits to adapt to the constantly changing conditions brought about by technological transformation. While technology enables individuals to expand their social networks, it may also contribute to various psychological difficulties. Excessive use of digital devices for different purposes can lead some individuals to lose control over their screen time, resulting in declines in their quality of life. Today's youth frequently use digital devices for maintaining social relationships, engaging in economic activities, pursuing career development, following current events, entertainment, and fulfilling certain responsibilities.

The term *digital* refers to something “numerical” or “virtual” (Turkish Language Association [TDK], 2022) and is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “technologies, media, and devices that contain digital data” (OED, 2025). Digitalization—one of the most frequently used concepts today—has brought about significant changes and transformations in both work and social life (Akbaş & Çarıkçı, 2022). Technological transformations have contributed to a quantitative increase in the types of digital content accessible to young

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR İbrahim BAYAM, ibrahimbym.pdr38@gmail.com, ORCID: 0009-0000-0679-8840, Kırıkkale University, Kırıkkale, Türkiye.

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people (Yılmaz et al., 2023). Humanity appears to be at a critical turning point; for years, tension has grown between individuals' online and offline worlds (Chang, 2014). The lives of young people are increasingly shaped by digital technologies used both at home and in school. Although youth tend to adapt easily to digital media, such use may also pose risks for their adjustment (Salmela-Aro & Motti-Stefanidi, 2022).

Technologies that enable large groups of people to work from home became essential during the COVID-19 pandemic (Wang et al., 2021; Gonçalves et al., 2022). While technology provides entertainment and convenience, it can also lead individuals to problematic usage behaviors, sometimes without their awareness (Göker & Turan, 2020). Theoretical perspectives suggest that problematic internet use may constitute a significant risk factor for burnout. Although research shows a positive association between problematic internet use and burnout, discussions regarding the scope and direction of this relationship continue (Mao et al., 2024).

Digital devices used for learning, entertainment, socialization, and fulfilling students' curiosities may contribute to a new concept known as *digital burnout* (De Mascarenhas-Franco, 2022). This phenomenon, emerging as a new type of burnout in the information age, has become increasingly widespread (Yang & Du, 2024). Intensive use of digital devices may lead to anxiety, stress, and digital burnout, posing risks to individuals' mental health (da Silva et al., 2024). Digitalization has also contributed to physical health concerns, including poor posture, back and neck problems, as well as psychological issues such as digital depression and digital burnout (Thomson et al., 2017). Digital burnout often emerges in individuals experiencing the negative effects of stress in environments where they are predominantly exposed to digital stimuli rather than physical interaction (Arkhipova, 2024). Excessive use of digital devices—though convenient, entertaining, and supportive of leisure—may contribute to digital burnout (Göldağ, 2022). Considering rapid technological advancements, it can be assumed that young individuals' digital device usage habits and purposes may also be changing.

In recent years, new avenues of communication have emerged through the internet. While individuals once believed that meaningful communication could not be established online, the internet has now become a critical tool for academic, personal, and professional communication (Baltacı, 2017). Digital technologies occupy a central place in everyday life, shaping individuals' working responsibilities, consumption habits, entertainment preferences, and social interactions (Acuner & Turan, 2024). The widespread presence of social media has accelerated changes in how individuals access information, perceive themselves, and communicate with others (Katırcı & Bulut, 2024). The diversity of content and ease of access in digital media makes social platforms appealing, particularly during stressful periods. In these contexts, social media can become a readily accessible and convenient refuge (Balci & Kaya-Güler, 2023).

A content analysis by Turan-Eroğlu et al. (2024) showed that internet-related problems have been increasingly discussed in studies conducted after 2010, especially concerning issues such as lack of socialization and awareness. Youth's attitudes toward digital technologies play a vital role in shaping the future of societies, as effective digital use may contribute to educational, political, and economic developments on a global scale (Erten, 2019). Internet technologies also enable limitless expansion in social relationships and reshape society in digital spaces, thus integrating the online world into real social life (Sili-Kalem, 2022).

According to the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK, 2022), a study conducted in 26 provinces with participants aged 15–21 found that 78.9% of youth were able to learn to use new technological products, indicating that the majority do not experience difficulties with technological adaptation. Long-term research by the Pew Research Center (2022) shows the growing prevalence of social media use worldwide. Data from We Are Social (2023) highlight that today's youth are highly dependent on digital platforms for accessing news, learning opportunities, and information about brands. This underscores the importance of guiding youth regarding their perceptions and use of digital devices. According to the Household Information Technologies Use Survey, internet usage among youth aged 16–24 increased from 96.9% in 2022 to 97.5% in 2023. Usage rates were 97.6% among young males in 2022 and 98.4% in 2023, while rates among young females increased from 96.1% in 2022 to 96.6% in 2023 (Turkish Statistical Institute [TURKSTAT], 2024).

Various societal events—such as the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters, and rapid technological developments—may have influenced youths' levels of loneliness, depression, anxiety, and stress. Given the

critical developmental importance of adolescence and young adulthood, understanding the relationships among loneliness, depression–anxiety–stress, and digital burnout may offer valuable insights into the mental health of youth. Accordingly, this study aimed to examine the extent to which loneliness and depression–anxiety–stress (DAS) levels predict digital burnout among young individuals. The study also sought to investigate the correlations among digital burnout, loneliness, and DAS.

Sub-Purposes of the Research

1. Does the digital burnout of youth differ significantly by gender?
2. Does digital burnout differ significantly according to academic achievement?
3. Does digital burnout differ depending on whether youth are employed?
4. Does digital burnout vary according to average daily internet use time?
5. Does digital burnout vary according to the frequency of checking notifications, even when none are present?
6. Does digital burnout vary according to the intended purpose of digital device use?
7. Is there a significant relationship between youth's digital burnout levels and their levels of loneliness and DAS?
8. Do loneliness and DAS levels predict youth's digital burnout levels?

Method

Research Model

This study employed a relational screening model due to its suitability for the research objectives. A relational screening model enables the examination of relationships between variables without implying causality. It aims to determine whether a relationship exists between two or more variables and, if so, the degree of that relationship (Karasar, 2022; Gürbüz & Şahin, 2015). In this context, the present study investigated the relationships among youth's digital burnout, loneliness, and depression–anxiety–stress (DAS) levels, as well as the predictive roles of loneliness and DAS on digital burnout.

Sample Group

The research population consisted of young individuals aged 18–35 residing in the provinces of Kayseri and Kırşehir. These provinces were specifically selected due to their similar socio-economic and demographic characteristics, which align with the scope of the research problem. The sample included 598 young individuals (18–35 years old) drawn from this population. A simple random sampling method was employed to ensure that each individual within the defined two-province population had an equal probability of being selected (Büyüköztürk et al., 2013). Of the participants, 368 (61.5%) were female and 230 (38.5%) were male. The mean age of the sample was 22.12 years ($SD = 3.025$).

Measures

Digital Burnout Scale (DBS)

The Digital Burnout Scale (DBS), developed by Erten and Özdemir (2020), is a three-dimensional, 24-item, 5-point Likert-type scale designed to assess individuals' digital burnout levels. The sub-dimensions of the scale are digital aging, digital deprivation, and emotional exhaustion. The total score ranges from 24 to 120, with higher scores indicating higher levels of digital burnout. The DBS contains no reverse-scored items. Of the 24 items, 12 belong to the digital aging sub-dimension, 6 to digital deprivation, and 6 to emotional exhaustion. Response options range from 1 ("completely disagree") to 5 ("completely agree"). Sample items include "I am starting to think I am showing signs of depression" (digital aging), "I feel restless when I am offline/not connected" (digital deprivation), and "I have become easily angered" (emotional exhaustion). The scale's total score was shown to be significant according to the results of the second-order confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). High scores reflect greater severity of digital aging, digital deprivation, and emotional exhaustion in

digital contexts. In the original study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the overall scale was reported as .94, indicating high reliability. Internal consistency coefficients for the sub-dimensions were .91 (digital aging), .88 (digital deprivation), and .86 (emotional exhaustion). In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the DBS was found to be .83.

Depression–Anxiety–Stress Scale (DASS-21)

The Depression–Anxiety–Stress Scale (DASS), developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995), originally consists of 42 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale (0 = “does not apply to me at all,” 3 = “applies to me very much or most of the time”). The short form, DASS-21, adapted into Turkish by Yılmaz et al. (2017), is a three-dimensional scale consisting of 21 items aimed at assessing levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. Each sub-dimension contains seven items, and responses are rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 0 (“does not apply to me”) to 3 (“applies to me completely”). Subscale scores range from 0 to 21, with higher scores indicating greater symptom severity. Factor loadings of the scale range between .41 and .81, and reliability coefficients range from .75 to .82. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were reported as .81 for depression, .80 for anxiety, and .75 for stress. Analyses conducted using three different estimation methods support the reliability and validity of the 21-item short form. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the DASS-21 was calculated as .85.

UCLA Loneliness Scale Short Form (ULS-8)

The UCLA Loneliness Scale, originally developed by Russell et al. (1980), was later adapted into the 8-item short form (ULS-8). The Turkish validity and reliability study of ULS-8 was conducted by Doğan et al. (2011). The ULS-8 consists of eight items (ULS01–ULS08), with items ULS03 and ULS06 revised in the short form. Each item describes a feeling or thought related to social relationships, and participants report how often they experience these situations using a 4-point Likert-type scale. Higher scores indicate higher levels of loneliness. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient obtained in the Turkish adaptation study was .80, demonstrating acceptable reliability. In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the ULS-8 was also found to be .80. The scale's psychometric properties were examined through exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), criterion-related validity, and internal consistency analyses. EFA results showed that the single-factor structure explained 36.69% of the total variance. CFA conducted with Turkish university students confirmed the adequacy of the single-factor model. The ULS-8 demonstrated expected positive correlations with social–emotional loneliness and depression, and negative correlations with perceived social support. Collectively, these results indicate that ULS-8 is a valid and reliable tool for assessing loneliness in the Turkish context.

Personal Information Form

The Personal Information Form was developed by the researcher to collect demographic data and information on participants' digital usage habits. The form includes items assessing gender, age, academic achievement, employment status, daily internet use duration, frequency of notification checking, and purpose of digital device use. The questions consisted of both open-ended and Likert-type formats, and participants were asked to select the most appropriate response for each item.

Procedure

Ethics committee approval for the study was obtained from the Kırşehir Ahi Evran University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee (Meeting Date: 21/12/2023; Decision Number: 2023/11/18). Informed consent was also obtained from all participants before data collection, and their voluntary participation was confirmed. Permissions required for the use of the scales were secured in advance.

Participants were informed that they could receive feedback on their results upon request after data collection was completed. Data collection tools were administered in printed form, and data were obtained through face-to-face application. Prior to administration, students who volunteered to participate were provided with detailed information about confidentiality, anonymity, and the overall purpose and reliability of the research. No incentives were offered to participants.

Data Analysis

The research data were analyzed using SPSS 26. For all hypothesis tests, the alpha error level was set at .05. Descriptive statistics (minimum, maximum, mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis) were calculated for the primary variables: digital burnout (DBS), loneliness (ULS-8), depression (DASS_Dep), anxiety (DASS_Anx), and stress (DASS_Str). These descriptive analyses allowed for a comprehensive examination of participants' digital burnout, loneliness, and depression–anxiety–stress levels.

During data preprocessing, missing values were assessed. One participant had incomplete responses across several demographic variables (gender, academic success, working status, daily internet use, and frequency of notification checking) but completed the item regarding the “purpose of using digital devices”. Accordingly, analyses including this variable used the full sample (N = 598), whereas analyses involving the incomplete demographic variables were conducted with the adjusted sample (N = 597) using listwise deletion.

Bivariate relationships between variables were examined using Pearson correlation analysis. As the data followed a normal distribution, parametric statistical methods were applied. Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to identify predictors of digital burnout. The regression model included loneliness and depression–anxiety–stress variables as predictors (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). The significance of the model and the regression coefficients of the independent variables were examined in detail. To evaluate the validity of the regression model, important assumptions such as Durbin–Watson and VIF values were reviewed.

Differences in digital burnout levels according to gender, academic success, working status, daily internet use duration, and frequency of notification checking were analyzed using independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA. Differences based on intended purpose of digital device use were also examined using one-way ANOVA. Homogeneity of variances was tested using Levene's test, and post-hoc comparisons were conducted using Tukey's HSD and the Kruskal–Wallis H test where appropriate. These analyses provided detailed insights into variations in digital burnout levels among youth. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for the Digital Burnout Scale (DBS), the ULS-8 Loneliness Scale, and the DASS-21 scale. Information regarding scale reliability is provided in the Measures section.

Results

The numerical distribution of participants in the research sample according to gender, academic success, working status, average daily internet use time, frequency of notification checking, and purpose of using digital devices is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of participants according to demographic characteristics

Variable	Category	f	%
Gender	Female	368	61.54
	Male	230	38.46
Academic Success	Low	27	4.52
	Medium	356	59.53
	High	215	35.95
Working Status	Not working	466	77.93
	Working	132	22.07
Average Daily Internet Use Time	0-1 hour	30	5.02
	1-3 hours	152	25.42
	3-5 hours	202	33.78
	5-7 hours	129	21.57
	7 hours and above	85	14.21
Frequency of Notification Checking	0-5 minutes interval	47	7.86
	5-10 minutes interval	70	11.71
	10-15 minutes interval	91	15.22
	15-20 minutes interval	82	13.71
	30 minutes interval	139	23.24
	Once an hour	95	15.89
	Several times a day	74	12.37
Purpose of Using Digital Devices	Social Media	287	47.99
	Taking Photos/Videos	14	2.34
	Text Messaging	122	20.40
	News/Current Topics	32	5.35
	Shopping	18	3.01
	Research-Academic Studies	62	10.37
	Music-Video	53	8.86
	Game Playing	10	1.67

Descriptive Statistics for Research Variables

Descriptive statistics for the research variables are presented in Table 2. The table includes the minimum and maximum values, means, standard deviations, and skewness and kurtosis coefficients for the variables examined in the study. These descriptive indicators provide an overview of participants' levels of digital burnout (DBS), loneliness (ULS-8), depression (DASS_Dep), anxiety (DASS_Anxiety), and stress (DASS_Str)

Table 2. Descriptive statistics

Variable	Min	Max	$\bar{x}$	Sd	Skewness	Kurtosis
Digital Burnout (DBS)	24	113	65.93	17.14	-0.01	-0.35
Loneliness (ULS-8)	8	32	13.63	4.56	0.80	0.13
Depression (DASS_Dep)	0	21	7.08	5.45	0.61	-0.57
Anxiety (DASS_Anxiety)	0	21	6.47	5.21	0.77	-0.06
Stress (DASS_Str)	0	28	7.78	5.41	1.00	1.18

Since the skewness and kurtosis values for digital burnout, loneliness, depression, anxiety, and stress fall within the acceptable range of -2 to $+2$, the distributions can be considered approximately normal (George & Mallery, 2019). Although the skewness and kurtosis values for the stress subscale approach the upper limits of this range, the mean ($\bar{x}$) and mode values were found to be close to one another, and visual inspection of histograms and Q-Q plots supported the assumption of approximate normality.

During data analysis, the assumptions underlying parametric tests were rigorously examined. For tests involving subgroup comparisons, such as independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA, the dependent variable is expected to be approximately normally distributed within each level of the independent variable. Additionally, for the independent samples t-test, the assumption of homogeneity of variances must be met.

This assumption was assessed using Levene's test, which confirmed the suitability of the data for parametric analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019).

Relationships Between Research Variables

In the study, Pearson correlation analysis was performed to examine the bilateral relationships between the variables. As a result of the analysis, correlations between digital burnout, loneliness, depression, anxiety and stress were examined. Table 3 shows the correlations between the variables.

Table 3. Correlation analysis results

Variable	DBS	ULS-8	DASS_Dep	DASS_Ank	DASS_Str
Digital Burnout (DBS)	1				
Loneliness (ULS-8)	0.462**	1			
Depression (DASS_Dep)	0.688**	0.522**	1		
Anxiety (DASS_Ank)	0.616**	0.372**	0.700**	1	
Stress (DASS_Str)	0.671**	0.434**	0.736**	0.770**	1

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

The analysis revealed significant positive correlations between digital burnout and all other study variables. A moderate and significant positive relationship was found between digital burnout and loneliness ($r = .462$, $p < .05$). Digital burnout also demonstrated strong and significant positive correlations with depression ($r = .688$), anxiety ($r = .616$), and stress ($r = .671$) ($p < .05$).

Loneliness showed a moderate significant positive correlation with depression ($r = .522$), a low-level positive correlation with anxiety ($r = .372$), and a moderate positive correlation with stress ($r = .434$). Among the DASS-21 subscales, strong and significant positive correlations were observed between depression and anxiety ($r = .700$) and between depression and stress ($r = .736$). Anxiety and stress were also strongly and positively correlated ($r = .770$) ($p < .05$).

Regression Analysis for Digital Burnout

In this study, multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to identify the variables that predict levels of digital burnout. The analysis examined both the overall significance of the regression model, which included loneliness and depression–anxiety–stress variables, and the regression coefficients of the independent variables. One key assumption of linear regression is the presence of a significant relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The results indicated positive and statistically significant relationships between digital burnout and loneliness at a moderate level ($r = .46$), as well as between digital burnout and depression ($r = .69$), anxiety ($r = .62$), and stress ($r = .67$) at high levels ($p < .05$). Table 4 presents the results of the multiple linear regression analysis, in which digital burnout is treated as the dependent variable.

Table 4. Multiple linear regression analysis results

Variables*	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	p
(Constant)	42.65	1.53		27.951	0.000
Loneliness (ULS-8)	0.45	0.12	0.12	3.676	0.000
Depression (DASS_Dep)	1.04	0.14	0.33	7.314	0.000
Anxiety (DASS_Ank)	0.40	0.15	0.12	2.679	0.008
Stress (DASS_Str)	0.93	0.16	0.28	5.791	0.000

* Model Summary: $R^2 = 0.547$, $F(4, 590) = 177.853$, $p < 0.05$

Prior to interpreting the regression analysis results, the assumptions of multiple linear regression were examined to assess the validity of the model. The Durbin–Watson statistic was 1.820, indicating the absence of autocorrelation in the residuals, as values between 1.5 and 2.5 are considered acceptable (Kalaycı, 2009). The variance inflation factor (VIF) values ranged from 1.384 to 3.052, all of which were well below the threshold of 10, suggesting that multicollinearity was not a concern (Field, 2009). Overall, these findings indicate that the necessary regression assumptions were met and that the results of the multiple linear regression analysis can be interpreted reliably.

According to the regression analysis, loneliness, depression, anxiety, and stress were all significant predictors of digital burnout. Among these variables, depression emerged as the strongest predictor, exhibiting a high and positive effect on digital burnout ($\beta = 0.332$, $p < 0.001$). Stress was also a significant positive predictor ($\beta = 0.280$, $p < 0.001$). The regression coefficients for loneliness ($\beta = 0.120$, $p < 0.001$) and anxiety ($\beta = 0.122$, $p < 0.01$) further indicated that both variables were significant and positively associated with digital burnout. Considering the standardized beta coefficients, the regression model—including depression, stress, anxiety, and loneliness in order of predictive strength—explained 55% of the variance in digital burnout, $F(4, 590) = 177.853$, $p < 0.05$.

Digital Burnout According to Gender

This study examined gender-based differences in digital burnout levels among youth. Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics and the results of the independent-samples t-test comparing digital burnout levels across gender groups.

Table 5. Digital burnout t-test results according to gender

Gender	N	$\bar{x}$	Ss	t	Sd	p
Female	368	67.50	17.17	-2.855	595	.004
Male	229	63.41	16.85			

According to the results of the independent-samples t-test, a statistically significant difference in digital burnout levels was observed between genders among youth, $t(595) = -2.855$, $p < .05$. Female participants ($M = 67.50$, $SD = 17.17$) reported significantly higher levels of digital burnout than male participants ($M = 63.41$, $SD = 16.85$). Descriptive analyses further indicated that although both female and male participants exhibited moderate levels of digital burnout, females demonstrated higher burnout levels overall.

Digital Burnout Levels According to Academic Success

In this study, digital burnout levels among youth were compared across academic success levels. Prior to conducting the one-way ANOVA, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was tested and found to be satisfied, as indicated by Levene's test, $F(2, 594) = 1.376$, $p = .253$. Table 6 presents the descriptive statistics and the results of the one-way ANOVA examining differences in digital burnout levels across academic success categories (low, medium, and high).

Table 6. Digital burnout One-Way ANOVA results according to academic success

Academic Success	N	$\bar{x}$	Sd	F	sd1, sd2	p
Low	27	66.15	16.68	1.717	2, 594	.180
Medium	355	66.95	16.66			
High	215	64.21	17.93			
Total	597	65.93	17.15			

Descriptive results indicated that youth with moderate academic success reported the highest mean digital burnout score ($M = 66.95$, $SD = 16.66$), followed by those with low ($M = 66.15$, $SD = 16.68$) and high academic success ($M = 64.21$, $SD = 17.93$). However, the results of the one-way ANOVA revealed that these differences were not statistically significant, $F(2, 594) = 1.717$, $p = .180$.

Digital Burnout Levels According to Work Status

This study examined differences in digital burnout levels among youth based on their employment status. Table 7 presents the descriptive statistics and the results of the independent-samples t-test comparing digital burnout levels between working and non-working youth.

Table 7. Digital burnout t-test results according to working status

Working Status	N	$\bar{x}$	Ss	t	Sd	p
Non-Working	466	66.81	16.85	2.368	595	.018
Working	131	62.81	17.89			

The results of the independent-samples t-test indicated a statistically significant difference in digital burnout levels according to employment status, $t(595) = 2.368$, $p < .05$. Specifically, non-working participants reported significantly higher levels of digital burnout ($M = 66.81$, $SD = 16.84$) compared to working participants ($M = 62.81$, $SD = 17.89$).

Digital Burnout Levels According to Average Daily Internet Use Time

In this study, digital burnout levels among youth were compared across categories of average daily internet use time. Differences in digital burnout levels were examined using a one-way ANOVA. Prior to the analysis, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was tested using Levene's test and was found to be satisfied, $F(4, 592) = 2.479$, $p > .05$. Table 8 presents the descriptive statistics and the results of the one-way ANOVA examining digital burnout levels according to average daily internet use time.

Table 8. Digital burnout One-Way ANOVA results according to daily average internet use time

Average Daily Internet Use Time	N	$\bar{x}$	Ss	F	Sd1, Sd2	p	Tukey Post-Hoc
(1) 30 minutes-1 hour	29	61.17	17.99	16.317	4, 592	.000	5-1, 5-2, 5-3, 5-4, 4-2, 3-2
(2) 1-3 hours	152	58.47	15.74				
(3) 3-5 hours	202	66.76	14.46				
(4) 5-7 hours	129	68.36	17.81				
(5) 7 hours and above	85	75.25	18.50				
Total	597	65.93	17.15				

Descriptive results indicated that youth who used the internet for an average of 7 hours or more per day reported the highest mean digital burnout score ($M = 75.25$, $SD = 18.50$). This group was followed by those with 5–7 hours ($M = 68.36$, $SD = 17.81$), 3–5 hours ($M = 66.76$, $SD = 14.46$), 30 minutes–1 hour ($M = 61.17$, $SD = 17.99$), and 1–3 hours ($M = 58.47$, $SD = 15.74$) of average daily internet use, respectively. The results of the one-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference in digital burnout levels across average daily internet use categories, $F(4, 592) = 16.317$, $p < .05$.

Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test demonstrated significant differences in digital burnout levels between several groups, indicating that longer durations of daily internet use were associated with higher levels of digital burnout. Specifically, youth who used the internet for 7 hours or more per day reported significantly higher digital burnout levels than all other groups. The mean differences between this group and those using the internet for 30 minutes–1 hour ($\Delta M = 14.07$), 1–3 hours ($\Delta M = 16.78$), 3–5 hours ($\Delta M = 8.49$), and 5–7 hours ($\Delta M = 6.88$) per day were all statistically significant ($p < .05$). In addition, the 9.90-point difference between participants who used the internet for 5–7 hours and those who used it for 1–3 hours daily was significant ($p < .05$). Similarly, the 8.29-point difference between the 3–5 hour and 1–3 hour daily use groups was also statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Digital Burnout Levels According to Frequency of Notification Checking

In this study, digital burnout levels among youth were compared according to the frequency of checking notifications even when no notifications were received. Differences in digital burnout levels across notification-checking frequency categories (0–5 minutes, 5–10 minutes, 10–15 minutes, 15–20 minutes, 30 minutes, once an hour, and several times a day) were examined using a one-way ANOVA. Prior to the analysis, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was assessed using Levene's test and was found to be satisfied, $F(6, 590) = 2.177$, $p > .05$. Table 9 presents the descriptive statistics and the results of the one-way ANOVA examining digital burnout levels according to notification-checking frequency.

Table 9. Digital burnout One-Way ANOVA results according to frequency of notification checking

Frequency of Notification Checking	N	$\bar{x}$	Ss	F	sd1, sd2	p	Tukey Post-Hoc
(1) 0-5 minutes interval	47	73.11	22.68	10.397	6, 590	.000	1-5, 1-6, 1-7, 2-5, 2-6, 2-7, 3-5, 3-6, 3-7, 4-7
(2) 5-10 minutes interval	70	73.21	13.39				
(3) 10-15 minutes interval	91	71.41	15.35				
(4) 15-20 minutes interval	82	66.15	16.91				

(5) 30 minutes interval	139	64.09	16.67
(6) Once an hour	95	60.13	15.91
(7) Several times a day	73	58.33	14.90
Total	597	65.93	17.15

Descriptive statistics indicated that participants who checked notifications at the highest frequencies—every 0–5 minutes and 5–10 minutes—reported the highest mean levels of digital burnout ($M = 73.11$, $SD = 22.68$; $M = 73.21$, $SD = 13.39$, respectively). In contrast, participants who reported checking notifications only a few times a day exhibited the lowest mean digital burnout score ($M = 58.33$, $SD = 14.90$). The results of the one-way ANOVA revealed statistically significant differences in digital burnout levels across notification-checking frequency categories, $F(6, 590) = 10.397$, $p < .001$.

Post hoc analyses using the Tukey HSD test provided further detail regarding these differences. Youth who checked notifications every 0–5 minutes reported significantly higher digital burnout levels than those who checked notifications every 30 minutes ($\Delta M = 9.02$), once an hour ($\Delta M = 13.98$), and several times a day ($\Delta M = 14.78$; all $p < .05$). Similarly, participants who checked notifications every 5–10 minutes had significantly higher burnout levels than those who checked notifications every 30 minutes ($\Delta M = 9.12$), once an hour ($\Delta M = 14.08$), and several times a day ($\Delta M = 14.88$; all $p < .05$). Additionally, significant differences were observed between participants who checked notifications every 10–15 minutes and those who checked notifications every 30 minutes ($\Delta M = 7.32$), once an hour ($\Delta M = 11.28$), and several times a day ($\Delta M = 13.08$; all $p < .05$). Finally, the difference between participants who checked notifications every 15–20 minutes and those who checked notifications several times a day was also statistically significant ($\Delta M = 7.82$, $p < .05$).

Digital Burnout Levels According to the Purpose of Using Digital Devices

In this study, digital burnout levels among youth were compared according to their primary purpose for using digital devices. Differences in digital burnout levels across usage purposes (social media, taking photos/videos, messaging, news and current affairs, shopping, research/academic activities, music/videos, and gaming) were initially examined using a one-way ANOVA. However, Levene's test indicated a violation of the homogeneity of variances assumption, $F(7, 589) = 6.486$, $p < .05$. Given the unequal group sizes and non-homogeneous variances, group differences were subsequently analyzed using the Kruskal–Wallis H test, a nonparametric alternative to ANOVA. Table 10 presents the descriptive statistics and the results of the Kruskal–Wallis H test examining digital burnout levels according to the purpose of digital device use.

Table 1. Kruskal–Wallis H results of digital burnout according to the purpose of using digital devices

Purpose of Using Digital Devices	N	$\bar{x}$	Ss	H	Sd	p	Mann-Whitney U
(1) Social Media	287	69.26	16.04	24,148	7	.000	1-3, 1-6
(2) Taking Photos/Videos	14	65.07	10.42				
(3) Text Messaging	122	62.74	18.19				
(4) News/Current Topics	32	61.47	16.41				
(5) Shopping	18	61.83	18.62				
(6) Research-Academic Studies	62	60.95	19.46				
(7) Music-Video	53	67.02	15.71				
(8) Game Playing	10	56.44	16.89				
Total	598	65.93	17.15				

Descriptive statistics indicated that digital burnout levels varied according to the primary purpose of digital device use. Youth who primarily used digital devices for social media reported the highest mean digital burnout score ($M = 69.26$, $SD = 16.04$), whereas those who primarily used digital devices for gaming reported the lowest mean score ($M = 56.44$, $SD = 16.89$). The results of the Kruskal–Wallis H test revealed statistically significant differences in digital burnout levels across usage purposes, $H(7) = 24.148$, $p < .001$.

Post hoc comparisons conducted using the Mann–Whitney U test indicated significant differences between social media use and text messaging and between social media use and research/academic activities. These findings suggest that social media use is associated with significantly higher levels of digital burnout compared to text messaging and research/academic use. Specifically, the mean difference between social media use and text messaging was 6.52 points, while the mean difference between social media use and research/academic activities was 8.31 points ($p < .05$).

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed a statistically significant gender difference in digital burnout levels among youth, with female participants reporting higher levels of digital burnout than male participants. Although both genders demonstrated moderate levels of digital burnout, females consistently exhibited higher burnout scores than males.

While some studies have reported that males spend more time using digital devices than females, research focusing on constructs closely related to digital burnout—such as digital addiction, phubbing, and problematic internet use—has frequently shown that females experience higher levels of psychological strain associated with digital engagement. In line with the present findings, Kahraman (2023) found significant gender differences across all dimensions of digital burnout among university students, with women reporting higher burnout levels in each dimension. Similarly, Küpeli (2023) reported significantly higher phubbing scores among female university students, while Üzgü et al. (2023) found that women exhibited higher levels of digital addiction than men.

Higher levels of digital burnout among women may be attributed to gender-based differences in social roles, responsibilities, and expectations, which have evolved considerably in contemporary society. Compared to previous generations, women today often assume multiple and intersecting roles across academic, professional, and social domains. As a result, women may rely more heavily on digital technologies to manage diverse responsibilities, increasing their exposure to digital stressors and, consequently, their risk of digital burnout.

In addition, sociocultural emphasis on appearance, lifestyle, and self-presentation may contribute to higher digital burnout levels among women. Maintaining a positive public image has become increasingly important, particularly within digital environments (Göksel et al., 2018). Women's perceptions of their own bodies and appearance, along with heightened concerns related to self-presentation, may lead to more intensive engagement with digital platforms. Prolonged exposure to appearance-focused content may, over time, contribute to increased digital burnout. Supporting this view, Bailenson (2021) reported that women were more likely than men to seek cosmetic procedures due to dissatisfaction with their appearance during video conferencing, highlighting the psychological impact of digital self-presentation.

Regarding academic success, the results showed that youth with moderate academic success reported the highest mean digital burnout scores, followed by those with low and high academic success; however, no statistically significant differences were observed across academic success levels. Although this finding contrasts with some studies in the literature, previous research has demonstrated meaningful relationships between academic success and constructs related to digital burnout. For instance, Altınok (2021) found that digital addiction decreased as perceived academic success increased among high school students, while Yavuz (2018) reported lower internet addiction levels among adolescents with high academic achievement. Similarly, Bulatbaeva et al. (2023) found that students with lower academic success and weaker study behaviors exhibited higher levels of technology addiction.

Despite the absence of significant differences in the present study, it remains important to consider that youth who engage in academic tasks while simultaneously using multiple digital devices may be particularly vulnerable to digital burnout. Extended exposure to digital screens during academic activities may result in adverse outcomes such as sleep disturbances, eating problems, and cognitive overload. Multitasking across multiple digital platforms may therefore contribute to increased levels of digital burnout among youth.

The findings further revealed a significant difference in digital burnout levels according to employment status, with non-working youth reporting higher burnout levels than working youth. This result may be explained by the greater amount of free time available to non-working individuals, which may lead to increased engagement with digital platforms. Non-working youth may also use digital technologies more frequently for job searching, information seeking, and social connection (Uslu, 2021). Supporting this interpretation, Kanat (2020) found that non-working university students exhibited higher levels of functional impairment related to internet addiction compared to their working peers.

Environmental and contextual factors may also play a role in digital burnout. Challenges such as unemployment or working outside one's field of interest may lead youth to spend extended periods using digital devices. Collectively, these factors may contribute to increased digital burnout among non-working individuals.

Consistent with expectations, the study found that youth who used the internet for seven hours or more per day reported the highest digital burnout levels, followed by those who used the internet for 5–7 hours, 3–5 hours, 30 minutes–1 hour, and 1–3 hours, respectively. Significant differences were observed across all categories of average daily internet use time, with particularly elevated burnout levels among heavy users. These findings are consistent with prior research. Çelik-Durmuş et al. (2022) found that nursing students who spent more than five hours per day on online platforms reported higher digital burnout levels. Similarly, Altundağ and Bulut (2016) reported that individuals with higher daily internet use exhibited greater levels of problematic internet use.

The frequency of checking notifications also emerged as a significant factor associated with digital burnout. Youth who checked notifications every 0–5 minutes and 5–10 minutes reported the highest burnout levels, whereas those who checked notifications only several times a day reported the lowest levels. These findings suggest that frequent notification checking may intensify digital burnout, likely due to constant cognitive interruptions and attentional demands. Similar findings were reported by Çiçek et al. (2021), who observed elevated smartphone addiction levels among students who checked their phones frequently during the COVID-19 pandemic. Kahraman (2023) likewise found that increased notification-checking frequency was associated with higher digital burnout levels.

The results further indicated significant differences in digital burnout levels according to the purpose of digital device use. Youth who primarily used digital devices for social media reported the highest burnout levels, while those who used them primarily for gaming reported the lowest levels. However, it should be noted that the number of participants who reported gaming as their primary purpose was relatively small, which should be considered when interpreting this finding. Significant differences were observed between social media use and both messaging and research/academic activities, suggesting that social media use may be particularly taxing in terms of digital burnout. These findings underscore that different digital activities may contribute to digital burnout in distinct ways.

Previous studies support these results, showing that adolescents and young adults use digital technologies primarily for entertainment and social interaction (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). Ertemel and Eroğlu-Pektaş (2018) found that university students preferred activities such as gaming, chatting, and social media use over physical and social activities. Singh et al. (2017) similarly reported excessive social media use among youth, particularly for browsing, chatting, and entertainment.

Finally, this study demonstrated significant positive relationships between digital burnout and loneliness, depression, anxiety, and stress. Regression analyses showed that these variables together explained 55% of the variance in digital burnout, with depression emerging as the strongest predictor. These findings are consistent with previous research linking problematic digital behaviors to psychological distress. Baltacı (2019) reported positive relationships between social media addiction, loneliness, and social anxiety among university students, while Costa et al. (2018) found that loneliness predicted problematic internet use among adolescents and young adults. Karşlı (2022) likewise reported a positive association between loneliness and social media addiction.

Consistent with these findings, studies examining related constructs have demonstrated strong links between digital engagement and mental health variables. Korkmaz (2014) found that depression and anxiety were strong predictors of internet use among high school students, while Göldağ (2022) reported a positive relationship between digital burnout and perceived stress among university students. Similarly, Bilge et al. (2020) found significant associations between social media addiction and depression, anxiety, and stress, with anxiety and stress emerging as key explanatory variables. Overall, the findings highlight the multidimensional nature of digital burnout and emphasize the importance of psychological, behavioral, and contextual factors in understanding youth's digital experiences.

Conclusion

This study provides strong empirical support for the hypothesis that depression, anxiety, stress, and loneliness are significant predictors of digital burnout among youth. The findings demonstrated that loneliness and the depression–anxiety–stress variables together explained 55% of the variance in digital burnout, underscoring the critical role of psychological well-being in understanding digital burnout.

In addition to these predictive relationships, the study identified significant differences in digital burnout levels based on gender, employment status, average daily internet use time, frequency of notification checking, and purpose of digital device use. Notably, female participants reported significantly higher levels of digital burnout than male participants, highlighting the potential influence of changing social roles, responsibilities, and expectations on digital engagement. Overall, these results offer a timely and meaningful contribution to the literature by emphasizing the need to better understand the psychological consequences of intensive digital technology use and to develop preventive and intervention-oriented programs tailored to youth.

Limitations and Recommendations

One limitation of this study is that the sample consisted of youth residing in the provinces of Kayseri and Kırşehir. Future research could enhance generalizability by including participants from different regions and cultural contexts. Additionally, the findings indicated that loneliness (ULS-8) and depression, anxiety, and stress (DASS-21) were significant predictors of digital burnout. Future studies may benefit from employing experimental or longitudinal designs to more clearly examine the causal effects of these variables on digital burnout.

In the present study, demographic variables such as gender, academic success, employment status, daily internet use time, frequency of notification checking, and purpose of digital device use were examined. Future research could extend this framework by incorporating additional variables, including age, socioeconomic status, and family structure, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of digital burnout. Given the finding that female participants experienced significantly higher levels of digital burnout, and considering the limited number of qualitative studies in this area, qualitative research exploring gender-specific digital device use patterns and lived experiences of digital burnout is strongly recommended.

The study also revealed significant positive relationships between digital burnout, loneliness, and depression–anxiety–stress. Accordingly, it is recommended that psychological counselors and mental health professionals carefully consider these interconnected factors when providing support to youth. Preventive efforts such as group guidance programs in high schools and universities may be effective in reducing digital burnout. In addition, workshops and psychoeducational interventions that actively engage students in developing healthy digital habits may contribute to improved psychological well-being.

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