

1-25-2024

Editorial: The impact of social media, gaming, and smartphone usage on mental health

King Abdulaziz Centre for World Culture Thomas, Justin (Sync, Digital Wellbeing Program
Ithra

, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia , Dhahran, Saudi Arabia
, *Dhahran, Saudi Arabia*

King Abdulaziz Centre for World Culture Al-Beyahi, Fahad (Sync, Digital Wellbeing Program
Ithra

, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia , Dhahran, Saudi Arabia
, *Dhahran, Saudi Arabia*

Carl Gaspar
Zayed University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://zuscholars.zu.ac.ae/works>



Part of the [Medicine and Health Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Thomas, Justin (Sync, Digital Wellbeing Program, King Abdulaziz Centre for World Culture; , Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, , Dhahran, Saudi Arabia; Al-Beyahi, Fahad (Sync, Digital Wellbeing Program, King Abdulaziz Centre for World Culture; , Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, , Dhahran, Saudi Arabia; and Gaspar, Carl, "Editorial: The impact of social media, gaming, and smartphone usage on mental health" (2024). *All Works*. 6346. <https://zuscholars.zu.ac.ae/works/6346>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ZU Scholars. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Works by an authorized administrator of ZU Scholars. For more information, please contact scholars@zu.ac.ae.



OPEN ACCESS

EDITED AND REVIEWED BY
Wulf Rössler,
Charité University Medicine Berlin,
Germany

*CORRESPONDENCE

Justin Thomas
✉ profjustinthomas@gmail.com

RECEIVED 08 January 2024
ACCEPTED 10 January 2024
PUBLISHED 25 January 2024

CITATION

Thomas J, Al-Beyahi F and Gaspar C (2024)
Editorial: The impact of social media, gaming,
and smartphone usage on mental health.
Front. Psychiatry 15:1367335.
doi: 10.3389/fpsy.2024.1367335

COPYRIGHT

© 2024 Thomas, Al-Beyahi and Gaspar. This is
an open-access article distributed under the
terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution
License \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). The use, distribution or
reproduction in other forums is permitted,
provided the original author(s) and the
copyright owner(s) are credited and that the
original publication in this journal is cited, in
accordance with accepted academic
practice. No use, distribution or reproduction
is permitted which does not comply with
these terms.

Editorial: The impact of social media, gaming, and smartphone usage on mental health

Justin Thomas^{1*}, Fahad Al-Beyahi¹ and Carl Gaspar²

¹Sync, Digital Wellbeing Program, King Abdulaziz Centre for World Culture (Ithra), Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, ²Department of Psychology, College of Natural and Health Sciences, Zayed University, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

KEYWORDS

digital wellbeing, cyberpsychology, addiction, gaming, social media

Editorial on the Research Topic

[The impact of social media, gaming, and smartphone usage on mental health](#)

In 2019, the World Health Organization ratified the inclusion of “gaming disorder” in its official diagnostic system, the 11th revision of the International Classification of Disease (1). That year also saw a raft of new legislation proposed to the US Senate, such as the SMART, Detour, and Filter Bubble Transparency Acts. These proposed laws aimed to regulate social media platforms in the interests of public mental health. Around the same time, the Chinese government enacted laws targeting video game play. One of the initiatives was a curfew prohibiting minors from playing video games between 10 pm and 8 am, with the responsibility for implementation primarily placed on the gaming industry (2). All these legislative and nosological moves reflect a growing global concern about the potential adverse impacts of digital technology on our physical, mental and social health.

Research, however, has not kept pace with our concerns or, indeed, with the advent and proliferation of new digital technologies. The paucity of conclusive evidence concerning the psychological harms (or safety) of digital technologies has frequently led to premature conclusions, with tentative speculation often distorted and broadly amplified by media hyperbole. One such notion is that screen time (time spent on digital technology), especially social media, is unequivocally associated with, and perhaps even causative of, poorer psychological well-being. While several studies report such associations (3, 4), others don't, and some even find positive links in specific contexts (5, 6). Further research, with greater nuance and methodological sophistication, is required.

A significant challenge for empirical research exploring the mental health implications of digital technologies (tech) is that these electronic tools, services, and platforms evolve rapidly. Progress in the tech world is frequently characterized by radical - disruptive - impacts. Conversely, methodologically robust research moves much slower, typically inching forward incrementally. Furthermore, digital technologies, such as the internet, are global in their reach. At the same time, much of the research to date has focused on populations within individual countries, typically the high-income nations of the global north. However, patterns of usage and associations observed in the global north may not be applicable across cultures or other world regions. For instance, rates of gaming disorder

symptomatology vary significantly by nation and world region (7), as do rates of problematic social media use.

Cognizant of these current challenges, this Research Topic explores the use of digital technology and its potential impact on mental health from diverse perspectives across numerous world regions. Several of the articles in this Research Topic explore the socio-demographic correlates of problematic technology use among citizens of lower-and middle-income nations. Al-Mamun et al., for example, examine problematic technology use among university students in Bangladesh, while Thomas et al. perform a similar epidemiological exploration across 30 nations with broad representation from countries outside of Europe and North America.

Beyond the multinational focus, the Research Topic also focuses on relatively neglected populations. For example, Guo et al. explore internet use and depression among older adults. Considering current demographic transitions (e.g., increased longevity and falling birth rates) and global population ageing, this is a knowledge gap that requires addressing.

Several of the studies in this Research Topic also aim to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on technology use. An obvious consequence of the pandemic is that more people than ever before are now working remotely, with a greater deal of their working lives being spent online via digital technology (8). A previous review (9) exploring the mental and physical health effects of remote working reported a broad array of associated problems, including stress, depression, fatigue and reduced quality of life. Exploring technology use during the COVID-19 pandemic offers us potential insights into the mental health implications of our increasingly digitized lifestyles.

We are entangled in a web of digital technologies, from occupation functioning to recreational pursuits. This Research Topic contributes to a broad and evolving evidence base concerning the links between technology use and our mental health. We hope this Research Topic encourages further research at this critical human-computer interface.

Author contributions

JT: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. FA-B: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. CG: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Publisher's note

All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

References

- World Health Organization. (2018). International classification of diseases for mortality and morbidity statistics (11th Revision). World Health Organization.
- Goh B. *Three hours a week: Play time's over for China's young video gamers*, in *Reuters*. China: Reuters (2021).
- Twenge JM, Joiner TE, Rogers ML, Martin GN. Increases in depressive symptoms, suicide-related outcomes, and suicide rates among U.S. adolescents after 2010 and links to increased new media screen time. *Clin Psychol Sci* (2018) 6(1):3–17. doi: 10.1177/2167702617723376
- Madhav KC, Sherchand SP, Sherchan S. Association between screen time and depression among US adults. *Prev Med Rep* (2017) 8:67–71. doi: 10.1016/j.pmedr.2017.08.005
- Boer M, van den Eijnden RJJM, Boniel-Nissim M, Wong S-L, Inchley JC, Badura P, et al. Adolescents' Intense and problematic social media use and their well-being in 29 countries. *J Adolesc Health* (2020) 66(6, Supplement):S89–99. doi: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2020.02.014
- Johannes N, Vuorre M, Przybylski AK. Video game play is positively correlated with well-being. *R Soc Open Sci* (2021) 8(2):202049. doi: 10.1098/rsos.202049
- Thomas J, Gaspar C, Al-Beyahi F, Al-Bassam B, Aljedawi Y. International comparison of gaming disorder symptomatology: analysis of ithra's 30-nation digital wellbeing survey. *Computers in Human Behaviour* (In Review). doi: 10.2139/ssrn.4489171
- McKinsey. *The future of work after COVID-19*. London (2021).
- Oakman J, Kinsman N, Stuckey R, Graham M, Weale V. A rapid review of mental and physical health effects of working at home: how do we optimise health? *BMC Public Health* (2020) 20(1):1825. doi: 10.1186/s12889-020-09875-z