

Impact of Digital Media on Children's Well Being In Kampala Capital

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of digital media on children's well-being in Kampala Central, focusing on physical health, mental and emotional well-being, academic performance, and social development. Utilizing a cross-sectional research design, the study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods, gathering data from a sample of 109 participants selected from a population of 150 through simple random and purposive sampling techniques. Data collection involved self-administered questionnaires and interview guides, analyzed using SPSS version 22. Key findings reveal significant concerns regarding excessive screen time, with 45.9% of respondents acknowledging its negative effects on physical health, including obesity and poor posture. Additionally, there is a nuanced understanding of digital media's role in education, with many recognizing its potential to enhance access to information and facilitate collaborative learning, while also expressing worries about its impact on academic performance. The study concludes that a complex interplay exists between digital media consumption and various facets of children's health and development. Recommendations emphasize the need for educational programs on digital literacy for both children and parents, initiatives promoting physical activity, clear guidelines for screen time, and strategies to improve sleep hygiene. These measures aim to foster a balanced approach to digital engagement, ultimately promoting the overall well-being of children.

Keywords: Digital Media, Children's Well Being and Kampala Capital

Background to the study

The 21st century has been characterized by a profound digital revolution, fundamentally reshaping human interaction, learning, and entertainment on a global scale (Emmanuel et al., 2023). For children and adolescents, digital media encompassing smartphones, tablets, social media platforms, and online games has become an inextricable part of their daily lives. The global discourse on this phenomenon is polarized; while digital tools offer unprecedented access to educational resources, creative outlets, and social connection, a growing body of evidence links excessive or unguided use to significant risks (Promise et al., 2024). International research, including studies cited by (Oromo et al., 2023), has associated high screen time with sedentary behaviors, sleep disruption, and cyberbullying. Furthermore, the curated nature of social media has been linked to increased rates of anxiety, depression, and body image issues among youth in various Western contexts (Nelson & Christopher, 2022). This global context establishes a critical need to understand the complex, dual-natured impact of digital immersion on the developing child.

In Africa, the digital landscape is expanding at an exponential rate, driven by increasing mobile internet penetration. This has created a unique scenario where many children are "first-generation digital natives," often leapfrogging traditional desktop computing for mobile-centric internet use. The (Julius, 2025) highlights the potential of this shift

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to accelerate learning and foster innovation. However, it also occurs within a context where regulatory frameworks and digital literacy programs often lag behind the pace of technological adoption. A (Julius, 2024) report on children's online safety in Africa noted a significant protection gap, with children facing emerging risks like online grooming and exposure to harmful content without the necessary safeguarding structures or parental guidance that may be more established in the Global North. This creates a critical juncture where the benefits of digital inclusion must be urgently balanced with the imperative of protecting child well-being (Julius & Audrey, 2025).

Within Uganda, this digital transformation is acutely visible. The country boasts one of the youngest populations in the world and a rapidly growing urban center in Kampala. (Tumusabe Ezera et al., 2022) reported a substantial increase in internet subscriptions, with a significant portion of users being children and adolescents. The Ugandan government has promoted ICT in education through initiatives like the National ICT Policy (2014), aiming to integrate technology into the learning process (F. Christopher et al., 2022a). However, a glaring discrepancy exists between this push for digitization and the national capacity to manage its societal repercussions. There is a severe shortage of empirical research on the psychological and social effects of digital media on Ugandan children, and public discourse is often dominated by anecdotal concerns rather than evidence-based understanding (Sophie & Crispus, 2024). This leaves parents, educators, and policymakers with little guidance on how to navigate this new digital frontier.

Kampala Capital City, the epicenter of Uganda's digital boom, the implications for child well-being are particularly concentrated and complex. Children in Kampala are exposed to a dense and dynamic media environment, with high ownership of smartphones and prolific use of platforms like WhatsApp, TikTok, and YouTube (T. Christopher & Nelson, 2024). The urban setting presents a unique confluence of factors: higher disposable income for data purchases, peer pressure driven by urban consumer culture, and often, dual-working parents with less capacity for direct supervision. Preliminary observations suggest that these children are navigating a digital world with minimal mediation, facing the full spectrum of its content both enriching and harmful without adequate support systems (Kazaara et al., 2023). Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the impact of digital media on the well-being of children in Kampala. It aims to move beyond speculation and provide a nuanced, evidence-based analysis of how digital consumption is influencing their mental health, social relationships, physical activity, and academic performance, thereby generating crucial data to inform parental guidance, educational strategies, and protective public policy in the digital age (Winny et al., 2023).

Statement of the problem

The rapid proliferation of digital media in Kampala Capital City has created an urgent and under-researched problem regarding its impact on child well-being. While access to smartphones and social media offers significant educational and social benefits, there is growing concern about the unmediated exposure of children to potential harms (Sophie &

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Crispus, 2024). The core problem is that the swift digital immersion, driven by high mobile internet penetration, has outpaced the development of effective regulatory frameworks, parental guidance strategies, and evidence-based understanding of its psychological and social consequences (Sophie & Crispus, 2024). Preliminary observations and global parallels suggest that excessive screen time may be linked to rising issues of sleep disruption, cyberbullying, attention deficits, and exposure to inappropriate content among Kampala's youth (F. Christopher et al., 2022b). However, a critical gap exists in localized, empirical data quantifying these effects and understanding their specific manifestations within the city's unique socio-cultural context. Without a clear investigation into the nature and extent of digital media's impact, parents, educators, and policymakers lack the necessary evidence to formulate effective interventions (Brian et al., 2024). This knowledge deficit hinders the ability to mitigate risks and harness the positive potential of digital tools, ultimately threatening the holistic well-being and healthy development of children in Uganda's capital.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate impact of digital media on children's wellbeing in Kampala central.

Specific objectives

- i. To investigate the physical health implications of digital media use among children in Kampala central.
- ii. To assess the mental and emotional well-being of children in Kampala central in relation to their digital media consumption.
- iii. To evaluate the influence of digital media on the academic performance and social development of children in Kampala central.

Methodology

This research was fundamentally grounded in a descriptive cross-sectional survey design, a methodological approach chosen for its capacity to capture a snapshot of the phenomenon under investigation at a specific point in time from a diverse range of respondents (Olanrewaju, Lukman Abiodun, et al., 2021). This design was particularly appropriate as it allowed for the systematic collection of data from different segments of the Kampala population including government officials, media experts, and community members simultaneously, providing a comprehensive overview of the prevailing perceptions and experiences related to digital media's impact. To enrich the data and provide a more holistic understanding, the study adopted a mixed-methods framework, strategically triangulating quantitative and qualitative approaches (Jallow et al., 2022). This integration was vital, as the quantitative component offered statistical generalizability regarding the prevalence of certain views and behaviors, while the qualitative dimension provided the necessary depth, context, and nuanced understanding of people's opinions, feelings, and the underlying reasons for their perspectives, thereby painting a more complete picture of the complex issue at hand.

The study population was carefully defined as 150 residents of Kampala City who had been directly or indirectly affected by digital media, ensuring the research remained focused on those with relevant lived experiences (Olanrewaju, Waititu, et al., 2021). To derive a manageable yet statistically significant group from this population, the sample size was calculated using Slovene's formula, which yielded 109 participants. This formula is specifically designed to determine the minimum sample size required from a given population to achieve results with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, thus ensuring the findings would be robust and reliable. The sampling procedure itself was purposive, a non-probability technique deliberately employed to select participants based on their specific knowledge and expertise (Nafiu et al., 2012). This method was crucial for ensuring that the individuals included such as local government officials involved in child welfare, experts in journalism and media studies, and representatives from civil society organizations focused on children's rights possessed the deep, contextual understanding necessary to provide insightful data on the research topic.

For data collection, the study utilized two primary instruments to cater to its mixed-methods design. The first was a self-administered questionnaire, predominantly featuring closed-ended questions, which was distributed to community members (Abiodun et al., 2022). This instrument was chosen for its efficiency in gathering standardized data from a larger subset of the sample, its cost-effectiveness, and its suitability for a population with a high level of English literacy. The second instrument was a semi-structured interview guide, used for conducting in-depth interviews with key informants like government officials and media experts (Inuwa et al., 2017). This guide, with its open-ended questions, was instrumental in allowing for probing and elaboration, thereby capturing rich, detailed qualitative data, exploring complex viewpoints, and uncovering information that the structured questionnaires might have missed. To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of these instruments, their validity was confirmed through expert judgment, achieving a Content Validity Index of at least 70%, and their reliability was established via a test-retest method, which confirmed a Cronbach's alpha coefficient above the accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency.

The data gathering procedure was a multi-stage process that began with securing an introductory letter from the academic institution to gain official access to the research sites and participants. The researcher then trained and deployed research assistants to help administer the questionnaires, ensuring a wider reach. Respondents were given a two-week period to complete the questionnaires, during which the researcher and assistants conducted follow-up visits to encourage participation and clarify any issues. Following collection, the data analysis phase commenced using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) (Nelson et al., 2022). The quantitative data from questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics frequencies, percentages, and mean scores which were interpreted on a four-point scale to determine the level of agreement or disagreement with various statements. Throughout the entire

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research process, strict ethical considerations were upheld, including obtaining informed consent, ensuring participant anonymity, and guaranteeing confidentiality.

Results

Table 1: Statements on the physical health implications of digital media use among children in Kampala central.

Statement	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean	Std Dev
Excessive screen time negatively impacts physical health (e.g., obesity, poor posture)	23 (21.1%)	29 (26.6%)	22 (20.2%)	20 (18.3%)	16(14.3%)	3.23	1.356
Digital media use contributes to sleep disturbances among children	23 (21.1%)	29 (26.6%)	22 (20.2%)	20 (18.3%)	15 (13.8%)	3.23	1.356
Online interactions increase anxiety and stress levels in children	31 (28.4%)	35 (32.1%)	0 (0%)	25 (22.9%)	18 (16.5%)	3.34	1.498
Digital media can lead to sedentary behavior, reducing physical activity	24 (22.0%)	34 (31.2%)	20 (18.3%)	21 (19.3%)	10 (9.2%)	3.38	1.275
Access to health information via digital media improves awareness and health literacy among children	25 (22.9%)	31 (28.4%)	13 (11.9%)	25 (22.9%)	15 (13.8%)	3.25	1.392

Source: Primary Data, 2024

Key: n=109, SA=strongly agree, A=agree, NS=not sure, D=disagree, SD=strongly disagree, M=Mean, Std. Dev=standard deviation

The data in Table 1 provides insights into the physical health implications of digital media use among children in Kampala Central. The findings reveal a range of concerns regarding how digital media consumption affects children's health, with several statements highlighting significant issues. The first statement addresses the negative impact of excessive screen time on physical health, such as obesity and poor posture. A combined 47.7% of respondents either strongly agree or agree with this statement, yielding a mean score of 3.23 and a standard deviation of 1.356. This indicates a general recognition among participants of the potential health risks associated with prolonged screen

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exposure, reflecting widespread concern about the physical consequences of digital media use. Similarly, the second statement regarding digital media's contribution to sleep disturbances among children also received a mean score of 3.23. With 47.7% of respondents agreeing, this reinforces the idea that excessive screen time may disrupt sleep patterns, which is critical for children's overall health and development. The consistent findings across these two statements suggest a strong awareness of how digital media usage can negatively affect both physical health and sleep quality.

The third statement, which examines the relationship between online interactions and increased anxiety and stress levels in children, garnered a higher mean score of 3.34. Here, 60.5% of participants either agree or strongly agree, indicating significant concern about the psychological impacts of digital engagement. This highlights the dual challenge posed by digital media, as it not only affects physical health but also contributes to emotional and mental well-being issues. The fourth statement points to the link between digital media use and sedentary behavior, showing that 53.2% of respondents agree that digital media reduces physical activity levels. With a mean of 3.38, this finding underscores the concern that reliance on screens can lead to a more sedentary lifestyle, which is detrimental to children's physical health.

Table 2: Correlation results for the physical health implications of digital media use.

	Physical health implications	Digital media use
Physical health implications	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.958**
	N	.000
Digital media use	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.958**
	N	.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The data presented in Table 2 explores the correlation between the physical health implications of digital media use and the extent of digital media consumption among children in Kampala Central. The findings reveal a remarkably strong positive correlation, indicated by a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.958. This suggests that as digital media use increases, there is a corresponding increase in the physical health implications associated with that use.

The significance level for this correlation is reported at 0.000, which is well below the conventional threshold of 0.05. This strong significance indicates that the correlation observed is statistically robust, reinforcing the reliability of the relationship between digital media consumption and its physical health implications. With a sample size of 109

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respondents, the data provides a solid foundation for these findings. The high correlation coefficient implies that higher levels of digital media use are associated with more pronounced physical health issues, such as obesity, poor posture, and other related conditions. This raises important concerns regarding the impact of excessive screen time on children's physical health, suggesting that interventions may be necessary to mitigate these risks.

Overall, the results underscore the need for increased awareness and proactive measures to address the physical health challenges posed by digital media consumption. It highlights the importance of promoting balanced media use, encouraging physical activity, and fostering healthy habits among children to counteract the potential negative effects of digital media on their physical well-being.

Table 3: Statements on the mental and emotional well-being of children in Kampala central in relation to their digital media consumption.

Statements	SA	A	NS	D	SD	Mean	Std.Dev
Excessive screen time has negative effects on children's physical health, including obesity and poor posture	21 (19.3%)	29 (26.6%)	16 (14.7%)	23 (21.1%)	20 (18.3%)	3.94	1.30
Children experience sleep disturbances due to prolonged digital media use.	34 (31.2%)	39 (35.8%)	12 (11.0%)	15 (13.8%)	9 (8.3%)	3.09	1.411
Digital media use can lead to increased levels of anxiety and stress in children.	29 (26.6%)	34 (31.2%)	15 (13.8%)	17 (15.6%)	14 (12.8%)	3.67	1.290
Sedentary behaviors linked to digital media adversely affect children's physical activity levels.	19 (17.4%)	23 (21.1%)	18 (16.5%)	29 (26.6%)	20 (18.3%)	3.44	1.367
Access to online health information does not always translate to	24 (22.0%)	27 (24.8%)	12 (11.0%)	29 (26.6%)	17 (15.6%)	2.95	1.387

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improved health literacy
among children.

Children may develop poor social skills due to reliance on digital communication over face- to-face interactions.	17 (15.6%)	21 (19.3%)	14 (12.8%)	31 (28.4%)	26 (23.9%)	3.13	1.421
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Source: Primary Data, 2024

Key: n=109, SA=strongly agree, A=agree, NS=not sure, D=disagree, SD=Strongly disagree, M=Mean, Std. Dev=standard deviation

The data in Table 3 presents key insights into the mental and emotional well-being of children in Kampala Central concerning their digital media consumption. The findings reveal a range of perspectives on how digital media impacts various aspects of children's health and social skills. The first statement addresses the negative effects of excessive screen time on children's physical health, including obesity and poor posture. A significant portion of respondents (45.9%) either strongly agree or agree with this statement, resulting in a mean score of 3.94 and a standard deviation of 1.30. This high mean indicates a strong consensus among participants that excessive screen time poses serious health risks for children.

In relation to sleep disturbances, the second statement notes that children experience issues due to prolonged digital media use. Here, 67.0% of respondents agree or strongly agree, with a mean of 3.09 and a standard deviation of 1.411. This suggests that a majority of parents and guardians are concerned about the impact of digital media on their children's sleep quality, highlighting a significant area of concern linked to digital consumption. The third statement indicates that digital media use may lead to increased levels of anxiety and stress in children. With 57.8% of participants either agreeing or strongly agreeing and a mean score of 3.67, it reflects a notable recognition of the psychological challenges associated with digital engagement. This finding underscores the potential emotional toll that constant digital interaction can exert on children. The fourth statement discusses sedentary behaviors associated with digital media and their negative influence on physical activity levels. Here, a combined 38.5% of respondents express agreement, resulting in a mean of 3.44. This indicates a concern that reliance on digital media may contribute to a more sedentary lifestyle, which can have long-term health implications. The fifth statement explores whether access to online health information translates into improved health literacy. With a mean of 2.95, this statement received mixed responses, suggesting that while some acknowledge the potential benefits of online information, others are skeptical about its effectiveness in enhancing children's health knowledge. Lastly, the sixth statement addresses the concern that children may develop poor social skills due to reliance on digital communication over face-to-face

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interactions. The data shows a mean score of 3.13, indicating a divided opinion on this issue, with a significant number of respondents expressing concern about the impact of digital communication on children's social development.

Table 4: Correlation results for the mental and emotional well-being of children in Kampala central in relation to their digital media consumption

	Mental and emotional wellbeing	Digital media consumption
Mental and emotional wellbeing	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.957**
	N	109
Digital media consumption	Pearson Correlation	.957**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	1
	N	109

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The data presented in Table 4 examines the correlation between the mental and emotional well-being of children in Kampala Central and their digital media consumption. The results indicate a very strong positive correlation, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.957 (Nelson et al., 2023). This suggests that as digital media consumption increases, so does the mental and emotional well-being of the children in this sample. The significance level of this correlation is reported at 0.000, which is well below the conventional threshold of 0.05. This high level of significance implies that the correlation observed is statistically reliable and not likely due to random chance. The data was collected from a sample of 109 respondents, ensuring a robust basis for these findings. The strong correlation coefficient indicates that digital media consumption may play a crucial role in influencing the mental and emotional health of children. This could suggest that engaging with digital media possibly through educational content, social interactions, or entertainment might contribute positively to children's overall well-being. However, it is important to consider the nature of the digital media consumed, as not all media may yield the same benefits.

Table 5: the influence of digital media on the academic performance and social development of children in Kampala central.

Statements	SA	A	NS	D	SD	Mean	Std Dev
Digital media use can enhance children's access to educational resources and information.	19 (17.4%)	26 (23.9%)	15 (13.8%)	27 (24.8%)	22 (20.2%)	2.96	1.417

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Excessive use of digital media is linked to decreased academic performance among children.	18 (16.5%)	25 (22.9%)	14 (12.8%)	28 (25.7%)	24 (22.0%)	2.88	1.425
Digital platforms can facilitate collaborative learning and improve social interactions among students	24 (22.0%)	27 (24.8%)	13 (11.9%)	28 (25.7%)	17 (15.6%)	3.13	1.417
Children who engage with educational content online tend to perform better academically	27 (24.8%)	29 (26.6%)	10 (9.2%)	23 (21.1%)	20 (18.3%)	3.20	1.476

Source: Primary Data, 2024

Key: n=109, SA=strongly agree, A=agree, NS=not sure, D=disagree, SD=Strongly disagree, M=Mean, Std. Dev=standard deviation

The data presented in Table 5 explores the influence of digital media on the academic performance and social development of children in Kampala Central. The findings reveal a complex relationship between digital media use and educational outcomes, as well as social interactions among students. The first statement indicates that 41.3% of respondents either strongly agree or agree that digital media enhances children's access to educational resources. Despite this positive perception, a significant portion (44.9%) either disagrees or strongly disagrees, resulting in a mean score of 2.96 and a standard deviation of 1.417. This suggests that while many believe in the potential benefits of digital media for educational access, there is also considerable skepticism about its effectiveness. The second statement reflects concerns about excessive digital media use, with 39.4% of participants indicating agreement that it is linked to decreased academic performance. This view is further supported by the mean score of 2.88 and a standard deviation of 1.425, which highlights a general apprehension regarding the impact of overuse on academic success. The relatively high disagreement rate (47.7%) may indicate differing perspectives on how digital media affects learning outcomes.

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In terms of social development, the third statement suggests that digital platforms can facilitate collaborative learning and enhance social interactions, with a combined 46.8% of respondents agreeing. The mean score of 3.13, along with a standard deviation of 1.417, demonstrates a more favorable view towards the social benefits of digital media compared to its academic implications. Finally, the fourth statement emphasizes that children who engage with educational content online tend to perform better academically. A notable 51.4% of respondents support this assertion, reflected in the mean score of 3.20 and a standard deviation of 1.476. This finding underscores the potential for educational content to positively influence academic performance, even amidst concerns about excessive media use.

Conclusions

The findings from the study on the mental and emotional well-being of children in Kampala Central reveal a complex interplay between digital media consumption and various aspects of children's health and development. Parents and guardians express significant concerns regarding the negative impacts of excessive screen time, including physical health issues, sleep disturbances, and increased anxiety. Despite these concerns, there is also recognition of the potential benefits of digital media, particularly in enhancing educational access and facilitating social interactions. The data underscores the necessity of balancing digital engagement with healthy habits to promote overall well-being among children.

Recommendations

Schools and community organizations should create initiatives that promote physical activity and outdoor play, particularly in conjunction with digital media use. This could include organized

Health organizations and educational institutions should collaborate to develop clear guidelines for appropriate screen time for different age groups. These guidelines should be disseminated through community workshops, schools, and online resources to ensure broad accessibility.

Initiatives should be launched to educate families on the importance of sleep hygiene, particularly the impact of screen time on sleep quality. Strategies could include setting screen time limits in the evening and creating tech-free zones in the home.

Encourage the use of educational and developmental digital content that promotes learning and emotional well-being. Schools can curate lists of recommended apps and websites that offer valuable educational resources and foster positive social interactions.

Schools should implement programs to monitor children's emotional health and provide support for those struggling with anxiety or stress related to digital media use. This could involve training teachers to recognize signs of distress and providing access to counseling services.

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