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From Scroll to Control: Digital Literacy and Gadget Addiction in Children and Adolescents

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Abstract
The increasing use of gadgets among children and adolescents poses a risk of addiction that affects psychological, social, and academic health, making digital literacy an important factor in prevention. This study aims to systematically examine the relationship between digital literacy and gadget addiction in children and adolescents. The method used is a literature review of empirical research articles from the past five years obtainded from various national and international scientific databases, with study subjets involving children and adolescents. The synthesis results show that digital literacy, which includes critical skills and self-regulation, serves as a protective factor against gadget addiction, while literacy that focuses only on technical aspects tends to increase gadget use intensity. It can be concluded that digital literacy must be developed comprehensively to be effective in preventing gadget addiction among children and adolescents.

Kata Kunci
Kecanduan gawai,
Anak dan remaja,
Literasi digital,
Penggunaan gawai,
Perilaku digital

Abstrak
Meningkatnya penggunaan gawai di kalangan anak-anak dan remaja menimbulkan risiko kecanduan yang dapat berdampak pada kesehatan psikologis, sosial, dan akademik, sehingga literasi digital menjadi faktor penting dalam upaya pencegahan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji secara sistematis hubungan antara literasi digital dan kecanduan gawai pada anak dan remaja. Metode yang digunakan adalah tinjauan pustaka terhadap artikel penelitian empiris dalam lima tahun terakhir yang diperoleh dari berbagai basis data ilmiah nasional dan internasional, dengan subjek penelitian melibatkan anak-anak dan remaja. Hasil sintesis menunjukkan bahwa literasi digital yang mencakup keterampilan berpikir kritis dan pengaturan diri berperan sebagai faktor protektif terhadap kecanduan gawai, sedangkan literasi yang hanya berfokus pada aspek teknis cenderung meningkatkan intensitas penggunaan gawai. Dengan demikian, dapat disimpulkan bahwa literasi digital perlu dikembangkan secara komprehensif agar efektif dalam mencegah kecanduan gawai pada anak-anak dan remaja.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology over the past two decades has driven a process of digital transformation, marked by changes across sectors including education, the economy, society, and industry, reshaping social relations and cultural representations within Indonesia's diverse society (Alwi, 2025). This digital transformation increasingly demonstrates the close relationship between individuals and technology, particularly in the use of smartphones, which can help address various social issues and provide convenience in many aspects of life, leading them to be regarded as an integral necessity (Syazaid et al., 2022). According to Exploding Topics, Indonesia ranks fourth globally in smartphone users, with 187.7 million out of a total population of 275.5 million, representing 68.1% of the population (Rachmatunniisa, 2025).

However, alongside the benefits of digital technological development, serious challenges have emerged, particularly the increasing risk of technology misuse, such as gadget addiction or smartphone addiction. Globally, the prevalence of smartphone addiction in Asia is relatively high, including India at 64.6% (Yogesh et al., 2024), Malaysia at 37.1% (Lee et al., 2023), and the Philippines at 62.6% (Buctot et al., 2020). In the national context, the phenomenon of smartphone addiction follows patterns consistent with global findings. In West Sumatra, approximately 72.1% of adolescents aged 15–17 years experience smartphone addiction (Sarfika et al., 2024). Another study reported a smartphone addiction prevalence of 64% among users aged 15–19 years (Ladani et al., 2025).

Smartphone addiction or gadget addiction is one of the most common forms of technology misuse among today's younger generation, including Generation Alpha, who have been closely connected to digital devices from an early age. Digital device addiction is characterized by compulsive smartphone use, difficulty controlling usage duration, and the emergence of psychological symptoms such as anxiety when access to smartphones is restricted (Ladani et al., 2025). Numerous studies indicate that adolescents are the group most vulnerable to the negative impacts of technology use, including exposure to problematic content, cyberbullying, social-emotional disturbances, and addictive gadget-use behaviors. Janah and Diana (2023) emphasized that children who receive insufficient supervision in gadget use tend to exhibit aggressive behavior and experience difficulties in emotional regulation (Iftaqul Janah & Diana, 2023). This situation aligns with various findings on the phenomenon of gadget addiction among children and adolescents.

A growing body of empirical evidence indicates that gadget addiction negatively affects the well-being of children and adolescents. Research conducted by Savas et al. (2025) showed that digital game addiction significantly influences adolescents' healthy lifestyles and contributes to psychological disorders and declining academic performance. Fitriana et al. (2024) also found that elementary school students have demonstrated gadget-use patterns indicative of addiction in the post–COVID-19 pandemic period, marked by increased screen duration and intensity (Dewi et al., 2024). Similar phenomena have been observed among university students and late adolescents. Okela (2023) reported that university students in Egypt exhibited high gadget use closely associated with addictive patterns, particularly through entertainment applications such as Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp, resulting in addiction symptoms including loss of control, sleep disturbances, and decreased academic functioning (Okela, 2023). These findings suggest that addiction to digital media, such as gadgets, is not merely a behavioral issue but also affects cognitive structures involved in healthy decision-making within digital contexts.

In their digital campaign, Fitriana et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of digital literacy in the current era of technological advancement to prevent digital addiction, as well as the crucial role of parental caregiving in shaping children's digital behavior (Dewi et al., 2024). Children with low digital literacy and permissive parenting styles are more vulnerable to gadget addiction and experience difficulties in regulating usage duration and the types of digital content they consume (Akar, 2025). This indicates that digital literacy is not solely an individual issue but is also influenced by the family environment and early digital education practices.

These findings indicate that the core issue lies not merely in the duration of gadget use but also in the limited capacity of children and adolescents regarding digital literacy, which encompasses the ability to manage digital experiences in a healthy, critical, and reflective manner. The fundamental problem is the low level of digital literacy amid rapid technological development. Adolescents' limited ability to filter information and understand digital risks encourages impulsive behavior that keeps them continuously engaged in the digital world, thereby increasing their vulnerability to digital addiction.

The urgency of this study is underscored by the increasing prevalence of gadget addiction across age groups, ranging from elementary school children to university students. Existing studies demonstrate that gadget addiction has multidimensional impacts, affecting mental health, academic functioning, social skills, and physical well-being. Conversely, digital literacy has been shown to enhance risk awareness, content selection skills, and self-regulation in technology use. Therefore, digital literacy should not be viewed merely as a set of technical skills but as a psychological and social foundation for fostering healthy digital behavior.

Accordingly, this study selects digital literacy and gadget addiction as the main variables because both are crucial and mutually influential. Strengthening digital literacy is chosen as a strategic approach because it is not only preventive but also enables individuals to use technology intelligently, critically, and independently without completely disengaging from the digital world, which has become an integral part of modern life.

This study aims to examine and synthesize research on the relationship between digital literacy and gadget addiction among children and adolescents. The focus of this study is to understand how digital literacy functions as a protective factor against gadget addiction. In addition, this study seeks to identify risk patterns, impacts, and intervention strategies reported in previous research.

METHOD

This study employs a literature review to systematically examine the relationship between digital literacy and gadget addiction among children and adolescents. A literature review is a scholarly study that focuses on a specific topic and provides an overview of its development over time (Cahyono et al., 2019). The purpose of a literature review is to identify and understand the relationships among findings from previous studies relevant to the research topic (Pradana et al., 2021). The stages of the literature review conducted in this study include: (1) identification of the research topic, (2) literature search, (3) literature selection, (4) literature analysis, (5) literature synthesis, (6) literature evaluation, and (7) literature review writing.

In the initial stage, the study identified the main topic: the relationship between digital literacy and gadget addiction. Topic selection was based on the phenomenon of increasing digital technology use among children from early childhood through adolescence and its impacts on mental, social, and academic well-being. The research focused on the role of digital literacy as a protective factor against gadget addiction.

The literature search was conducted systematically using national and international scientific databases, including Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, PubMed, Scopus, and Frontiers. The keywords used included digital literacy, smartphone addiction, internet addiction, digital media literacy, gadget addiction, and literasi digital.

The retrieved literature was then selected based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria consisted of: empirical research articles; studies discussing digital literacy and gadget or digital addiction; research involving children and adolescents; publications published within the last five years (2020–2025); and full-text availability. The exclusion criteria included articles that were not relevant to the topic, duplicate studies, and non-scientific reports. After screening based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria, several main articles, along with additional relevant publications, were selected and included in the final synthesis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

To provide a comprehensive overview of the development of research related to digital literacy and gadget addiction among children and adolescents, this study conducted a systematic review of scholarly publications published between 2020 and 2025. The synthesis of findings was derived from various empirical studies examining how digital literacy skills, digital media use, and psychosocial factors contribute to tendencies toward gadget addiction in younger age groups.

Table 1.1 summarizes the reviewed articles, including key information such as authors, year of publication, research title, methodology, research subjects, and main findings. Overall, these studies emphasize that digital literacy plays a strategic role as both a protective and a risk factor for digital addiction, depending on the dimensions of literacy individuals possess. Collectively, the eight core studies included in this review assert that digital literacy encompasses technical, critical, and regulatory aspects, each of which contributes differently to the tendency toward gadget addiction.

Table 1. Results of the Literature Review

Author(s) and Year	Title	Method and Sample	Research Findings
Shobhit et al., 2025	Smartphone Addiction and Smartphone Use–Digital Literacy among Allied Health Sciences Students in Indore	Cross-sectional study, 335 university students	Students with smartphone addiction spend a considerable amount of time using smartphones for educational purposes and social media, indicating a relatively adequate level of digital literacy.
Akar, 2025	Digital Game Addiction in Elementary Students: The Impact of Digital Literacy, Parental Styles, and Background Variables	Cross-sectional survey, 530 elementary school students	There is a complex interaction between digital literacy, parental roles, and background factors in shaping tendencies toward online game addiction. Digital literacy acts as a sub-factor that significantly contributes to increased digital game addiction.
Savas, 2025	Correlation between Digital Literacy, Digital Game Addiction, and Healthy Lifestyle Beliefs in Adolescents: Structural Equation Model Analysis	Cross-sectional study, 938 junior high school students aged 10–14 years	Higher levels of digital literacy reduce digital game addiction and enhance healthy lifestyle beliefs.
Santoso & Gunaidi, 2025	Screening of TikTok Social Media Addiction to Improve Digital Literacy and Self-Control among Adolescents	Cross-sectional survey, 145 senior high school students	The majority of students showed addictive tendencies, particularly in the dimensions of tolerance and mood modification, highlighting the urgent need for digital literacy and self-control interventions.
Dewi et al., 2024	Digital Literacy Campaigns in Addressing Digital Addiction among Elementary School Children	Participatory Action Research (PAR), 50 elementary school students	Digital literacy programs improved students' understanding of healthy digital device use and helped them distinguish addictive behaviors.

Author(s) and Year	Title	Method and Sample	Research Findings
Chen, 2023	Investigating Links between Internet Literacy, Internet Use, and Internet Addiction among Chinese Youth and Adolescents in the Digital Age	Conceptual model, 2,276 elementary school students in China	Internet literacy has a positive effect on preventing tendencies toward internet addiction.
Okela, 2023	Egyptian University Students' Smartphone Addiction and Their Digital Media Literacy Level	Quantitative survey, 558 university students	The intensity of smartphone use is positively correlated with digital media literacy; however, excessive use—particularly for social media and entertainment—increases the risk of smartphone addiction, indicating that technical literacy alone is insufficient without critical literacy and self-regulation.
Liu et al., 2023	The Relationship between Health Literacy and Internet Addiction among Middle and High School Students in Chongqing, China: A Cross-Sectional Survey Study	Cross-sectional study, 8,971 junior and senior high school students	Internet addiction prevalence among adolescents was 6.1%. Students with higher levels of critical literacy were more protected from internet addiction.

THEME 1: Digital Literacy as a Protective Factor Against Gadget Addiction

The majority of studies (Chen, 2023; Dewi et al., 2024; Santoso & Gunaidi, 2025; Savas, 2025) agree that digital literacy among children and adolescents is increasingly recognized as an essential skill in responding to rapid technological advancement. The ability to understand, access, and use digital information wisely helps individuals identify potential risks and limit unhealthy gadget-use behaviors. In the adolescent context, digital literacy encompasses not only technical skills but also critical abilities to evaluate digital content and manage the amount of time spent using gadgets.

Several studies indicate that digital literacy plays a protective role against tendencies toward gadget addiction (Utomo et al., 2021). Adolescents with higher levels of digital literacy are better able to understand the negative consequences of excessive use and therefore tend to regulate their usage patterns more effectively. These studies also note that the ability to select content, avoid addictive exposure, and manage interactions in digital spaces contributes to reducing the risk of internet and gaming addiction.

These findings suggest that digital literacy functions as a protective mechanism by providing a foundation of knowledge and skills that prepare adolescents to cope with digital pressures. With adequate understanding, adolescents are better able to make conscious decisions about their gadget use, thereby avoiding impulsive use patterns.

The findings further emphasize the importance of strengthening digital literacy comprehensively, encompassing technical, critical, and behavioral aspects. Some researchers have focused primarily on correlations between digital literacy and addiction, indicating the need for further studies to examine causal mechanisms in greater depth.

THEME 2: Technically Oriented Digital Literacy May Increase Gadget Use Intensity

On the other hand, several previous studies (Okela, 2023; Shobhit et al., 2025) indicate that digital literacy focused solely on technical skills does not necessarily provide adolescents with a protective effect. High technical proficiency, such as advanced skills in operating applications, navigating device features, and accessing multiple digital platforms, can lead to more intensive gadget use. In certain groups, technical literacy enhances enjoyment of online activities and encourages excessive digital exploration.

Findings from several studies show that adolescents with high technical literacy spend more time using digital devices than those with more balanced literacy profiles. This increased intensity is particularly evident in entertainment-related activities such as online gaming, social media, and other digital applications. Without the support of critical skills and self-regulation, technical competence may instead heighten vulnerability to the development of addictive behaviors.

Interpretation of this phenomenon indicates that digital literacy is not a one-dimensional construct. When adolescents possess technical skills without critical awareness, they may maximize technology use without adequate control. This helps explain why some studies report that higher levels of literacy are correlated with increased addiction risk, especially when usage is primarily entertainment-oriented.

These findings underscore that technical literacy should be viewed as a component requiring guidance and balance. Digital literacy programs that emphasize device-use skills without fostering critical thinking and self-regulation may become counterproductive. Therefore, the development of digital literacy curricula must adopt a multidimensional approach to ensure that literacy does not inadvertently increase unhealthy levels of gadget use.

THEME 3: The Role of Psychosocial Factors in the Literacy–Addiction Relationship

Several studies (Akar, 2025; Chen, 2023; Liu et al., 2023) on gadget addiction among children and adolescents indicate that psychosocial factors mediate the relationship between digital literacy and addiction risk. Factors such as family communication patterns, social support, emotional regulation, and adolescents' psychological needs can either strengthen or weaken the impact of digital literacy. Adolescents who grow up in supportive social environments tend to use digital literacy as a protective resource. In contrast, those experiencing psychological stress or limited support may use gadgets as a form of escapism, regardless of their level of digital literacy.

Research shows that high digital literacy does not always correspond to lower addiction risk when adolescents are exposed to stress, anxiety, or disharmonious family dynamics. Under such conditions, gadgets may function as tools for emotional coping, while digital literacy merely facilitates access to distracting content. In contrast, adolescents with strong self-regulation and positive family relationships are better able to use digital literacy to reinforce healthy gadget-use behaviors.

These findings demonstrate that digital literacy does not operate in isolation but is shaped by the psychosocial context in which children and adolescents live. Parental roles, the quality of communication, and emotional support are key determinants of whether digital literacy functions as a protective factor or has limited effectiveness in preventing gadget addiction.

This evidence suggests the need for research that considers broader environmental contexts. Much of the existing literature still treats digital literacy as an individual variable, even though the risk of gadget addiction arises from interactions between personal and social factors. Therefore, family- and community-based approaches are essential for understanding the dynamics of digital literacy among children and adolescents.

THEME 4: The Effectiveness of Digital Literacy Interventions in Reducing Addictive Behaviors

Several studies (Dewi et al., 2024; Santoso & Gunaidi, 2025) emphasize that digital literacy interventions have emerged in response to the increasing prevalence of gadget addiction among children and adolescents. These programs aim to enhance understanding of healthy gadget use, develop critical skills for evaluating information, and strengthen self-control when interacting with digital

environments. Some studies indicate that digital literacy interventions can increase awareness of addiction risks and reduce tendencies toward excessive use.

Several studies have found that participatory or school-based digital literacy programs are effective in improving gadget-use patterns. Interventions that incorporate discussions, self-regulation training, and experiential learning tend to produce significant behavioral changes. In addition, programs that integrate parental involvement have been shown to enhance intervention outcomes by providing consistent support and supervision at home.

Overall, the findings indicate that digital literacy interventions are most effective when they integrate technical skills, critical abilities, and the development of self-regulation. Interventions that focus solely on knowledge acquisition are insufficient to produce sustained behavioral change. Emotional and social components must be incorporated so that children and adolescents are equipped to manage gadget use across diverse situations.

The literature also indicates that although digital literacy interventions show promising results, most studies have been conducted over relatively short periods. Further research is needed to examine long-term impacts, the sustainability of behavioral change, and the effectiveness of interventions across different cultural and educational contexts. Nevertheless, the existing literature consistently indicates that digital literacy represents a promising preventive approach for reducing the risk of gadget addiction.

Discussion

The results of this literature review indicate that digital literacy has a complex and multidimensional relationship with gadget addiction among children and adolescents. These findings emphasize that digital literacy is not merely a set of technical skills for operating digital devices, but also encompasses cognitive, critical, and regulatory dimensions that shape gadget-use behaviors. This discussion connects these findings with the research background, which highlights the increasing prevalence of gadget addiction among younger generations as a consequence of rapid digitalization.

As outlined in the background, the increasing intensity of gadget use among children and adolescents is driven not only by technological advancement but also by individuals' limited readiness to manage digital interactions healthily. The findings under Theme 1 reinforce this argument by demonstrating that comprehensive digital literacy functions as a protective factor against gadget addiction. Adolescents with strong digital literacy are better able to recognize risks, manage screen time, and select content wisely (Prayogi et al., 2024). This helps explain why strengthening digital understanding is considered a key approach in addressing the high levels of compulsive gadget use highlighted in the research background.

However, Theme 2 reveals an important contrasting perspective, showing that digital literacy focused solely on technical skills may actually increase the intensity of gadget use. This indicates that the provision of technological skills must be accompanied by the development of critical awareness and self-regulation to prevent counterproductive outcomes. These findings are closely related to the issues raised in the background, namely the tendency of children and adolescents to spend excessive time on digital entertainment such as social media and online games. In other words, when digital literacy emphasizes only operational aspects, technology may cease to be an empowering tool and instead become a potential source of addiction risk.

Furthermore, Theme 3 deepens understanding by showing that digital literacy does not operate at an individual level alone but is significantly influenced by psychosocial factors. Family support, the quality of parent–child communication, and the emotional conditions of children and adolescents have been shown to shape how digital literacy is applied (Pahlevi & Utomo, 2024). These findings reinforce the view that gadget addiction cannot be explained solely by individual factors but is the result of interactions between personal characteristics and the social environment. Therefore, the issue of gadget

addiction highlighted in the background cannot be adequately addressed through individual-based interventions alone, but requires broader social approaches.

The review also demonstrates that digital literacy interventions, as discussed in Theme 4, have substantial potential to reduce tendencies toward gadget addiction. School- and family-based programs have been shown to increase awareness, improve usage patterns, and strengthen adolescents' self-control. This is consistent with the background emphasis on the importance of educational solutions in responding to the negative impacts of gadget use. These findings further confirm that digital literacy is not merely a theoretical concept, but can be implemented as a concrete preventive strategy.

CONCLUSION

Based on this literature review, digital literacy has a significant and multifaceted relationship with gadget addiction among children and adolescents, functioning both as a protective factor and, in specific contexts, as a risk factor, depending on its dimensions. Digital literacy that incorporates critical thinking and self-regulation has consistently been shown to reduce the likelihood of gadget addiction by enabling young users to recognize digital risks, manage screen time, and make informed decisions about content consumption. In contrast, digital literacy that is limited to technical proficiency may inadvertently increase the intensity of gadget use, as enhanced operational skills can facilitate prolonged engagement without adequate behavioral control. These findings highlight that digital literacy is not inherently protective; its impact depends on the balance between technical competence and reflective, self-regulatory capacities.

Moreover, the effectiveness of digital literacy in preventing addictive gadget use is strongly influenced by psychosocial factors, including family support, the quality of parent–child communication, and emotional regulation. Adolescents who receive consistent guidance and emotional support are more likely to apply digital literacy skills to promote healthy technology use. In contrast, those experiencing psychosocial stress may remain vulnerable to addictive behaviors despite having adequate technical knowledge. Therefore, efforts to develop digital literacy among children and adolescents should adopt a comprehensive approach that integrates technical skills with critical awareness, emotional regulation, and behavioral control. Future research is recommended to employ longitudinal or experimental designs to examine the long-term effectiveness of digital literacy interventions and to understand better their causal impact on reducing gadget addiction across developmental stages.

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