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Beyond Screen Time: A Systematic Review of Smart Devices' Multidimensional Impact on Mental Health and Digital Well-Being.

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Abstract

Today, smart devices have become an integral part of our lives; however, their impact on mental well-being cannot be summed up by statements on screen time. This review explores cognitive, affective, and social aspects of using smart devices from the perspective of digital well-being within the timeframe of 2014-2024. Drawing on a Scopus-based search reported in line with PRISMA 2020 and supported by VOSviewer bibliometric mapping, the study analyses 64 articles to identify patterns of scholarly production, keyword co-occurrence, and international collaboration in digital mental health research. The findings show a field organized around four interconnected themes: digital technology and mental health interventions, mobile health and psychosocial outcomes, adolescent digital behaviour, and pandemic-related shifts in technology use. Research activity is concentrated in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and the Netherlands, whereas contributions from developing regions remain limited. These findings depict smart devices as double-edged technologies that while capable of promoting surveillance, intervention, and social interaction, can equally contribute to increased levels of distraction, stress, problematic use, and disruption. It is recommended that more research be done in this field in order to understand the complexities involved and guide responsible digital design and mental health promotion.

Keywords: *Smart Devices; Mental Health; Digital Well-being; Smartphone Use; Mobile Health; Bibliometric Review.*

1. Introduction

In the current era of remarkable technological progress, smart devices have seamlessly integrated themselves into the very fabric of our everyday routines (Ness et al., 2023). The proliferation of smartphones, smartwatches, and other interconnected technologies has brought about a significant transformation in our methods of communication, work processes, and navigation capabilities (Iqbal & Olariu, 2021). The widespread use of smart devices in today's world has significantly transformed how people engage with their surroundings, communicate with each other, and navigate the challenges of modern life (Iivari et al., 2020). In addition, technology can affect mental health as it becomes more prevalent in daily life (Carpenter-Song et al., 2018). Karol and Smith (2019) examined the various effects

of smart devices on cognitive function, emotional well-being, and social interactions. The focus is on understanding the complex connection between the use of smart devices and cognitive processes.

Although these devices provide exceptional convenience and connectivity, their widespread presence raises significant concerns regarding their influence on mental well-being (Servia-Rodríguez et al., 2017). In addition, the impact of information, notifications, and digital stimuli on individuals' emotional well-being is complex and interconnected (Gui et al., 2017). Studies have also suggested possible connections between patterns of smart device usage and emotional states such as stress, anxiety, and overall mood (Hickey et al., 2021). However, the emotional aspects of this interaction require deeper understanding to promote positive mental health outcomes in the digital age (Granic et al., 2020).

In addition, the potential emotional consequences of extended smart device usage should be carefully analysed (Sarsenbayeva et al., 2020). Odgers and Jensen (2020) noted that the constant connectivity provided by these devices has both positive and negative effects on emotional well-being, as it enhances communication and access to information, but also introduces a complex set of factors that can influence it (Costa et al., 2016). The constant engagement with digital devices can intensify feelings of anxiety, stress, and other emotional states (Harwood et al., 2014). Although, examining the emotional aspects of using smart devices is crucial to understand the complex relationship between the advantages and potential disadvantages (Chi et al., 2020).

Moreover, the concept of cognitive function is essential in understanding human mental processes, which include attention, memory, and overall cognitive performance (Wilmer et al., 2017). The proliferation of information and stimuli through smart devices has prompted concerns regarding their impact on cognitive abilities (Zhang, 2019). In addition, the impact of extended screen time, frequent interruptions from notifications, and the constant presence of digital stimuli on attention spans and memory retention is a subject worth exploring (Wilmer et al., 2017). Additionally, gaining a thorough understanding of the intricacies of this relationship is crucial to fully grasp the cognitive effects brought about by the digital age (Larson & DeChurch, 2020).

Although, the era of pervasive smart device usage has brought about a transformation in social interactions, which are considered a fundamental aspect of human existence (Atzori et al., 2017). The effects of digital environments on face-to-face interactions, relationship dynamics, and social skills, especially among younger demographics who have grown up with these technologies, require careful examination by researchers (Nisar et al., 2019). Analysing the impact of smart devices on interpersonal connections is essential in order to comprehend the wider societal implications (Luo & Zhong, 2015).

Building on prior evidence that smart-device use is associated with cognitive functioning, emotional regulation, social connection, and digital well-being, this study adopts an interdisciplinary perspective informed by psychology, sociology, health technology, and management research (Harwood et al., 2014; Wilmer et al., 2017; Servia-Rodríguez et al., 2017; Granic et al., 2020; Odgers & Jensen, 2020). Existing studies show that smart devices can support self-monitoring, mobile health interventions, and mental health detection, while also contributing to distraction, anxiety, problematic use, and social disruption when usage is excessive or poorly managed (Hickey et al., 2021; Sarsenbayeva et al., 2020; Akhtar et al., 2022; Pereira et al., 2020; Büchi, 2024). However, the literature remains fragmented across clinical, technological, behavioural, and social domains, requiring an integrated synthesis of recent evidence.

Accordingly, this systematic review has four objectives: first, to examine how smart devices influence cognitive functioning, including attention, memory, and executive processes; second, to assess their relationship with emotional well-being, including stress, anxiety, mood regulation, and psychological distress; third, to evaluate their effects on social interaction, interpersonal communication, and digital behaviour; and fourth, to identify emerging intervention approaches and design principles that may promote healthier technology use. The study contributes by moving beyond narrow screen-time explanations and offering a multidimensional understanding of smart devices as ambivalent technologies that can both support and undermine well-being.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Multifaceted Impact of Smart Devices on Mental Health

The proliferation of smart devices has fundamentally altered how individuals interact with technology, creating complex implications for mental health and digital well-being. Research by Harwood et al. (2014) established the foundational understanding that constant connectivity through smart devices may have significant effects on psychological well-being, highlighting concerns about prolonged usage and its correlation with anxiety and stress levels. This seminal work provides a crucial starting point for examining the relationship between digital technology and mental health outcomes.

Building on this foundation, several researchers have investigated specific dimensions of this relationship. Servia-Rodríguez et al. (2017) conducted a large-scale longitudinal study demonstrating how mobile sensing technologies can provide insights into mental well-being patterns, enabling more personalized interventions. Their work emphasized that smart devices could serve as both potential contributors to mental health challenges and as tools for monitoring and improving psychological states.

In the cognitive domain, Wilmer et al. (2017) conducted a comprehensive review exploring the links between mobile technology habits and cognitive functioning. Their research indicated that frequent interruptions from notifications and extended screen time could potentially impact attention spans, memory retention, and overall cognitive performance. This evidence suggests that the relationship between smart device usage and cognitive function is nuanced and context-dependent, requiring careful consideration of usage patterns and individual differences.

2.2. Emotional Well-being in the Digital Age

The emotional aspects of smart device interaction have received significant scholarly attention. Sarsenbayeva et al. (2020) conducted a causal analysis examining whether smartphone use drives emotional states or vice versa, revealing a bidirectional relationship that highlights the complex interplay between technology usage and emotional regulation. Their findings suggest that while smart devices can exacerbate negative emotional states, they can also serve as tools for emotional support when used mindfully.

Odgers and Jensen (2020) provided a nuanced perspective on adolescent mental health in the digital age, challenging simplistic narratives and advocating for evidence-based approaches to understanding how digital technologies affect emotional development. Their annual research review emphasized that digital environments present both opportunities and challenges for emotional well-being, particularly among younger demographics who have grown up immersed in these technologies.

In the meanwhile, Costa and Castro (2021) explored innovative approaches to emotional regulation through technology, demonstrating how bodily signals and feedback mechanisms might be leveraged to help individuals better manage their emotional states. This research highlights the potential for smart devices to serve as tools for emotional awareness and regulation rather than merely sources of emotional distress.

2.3. Social Implications and Interpersonal Dynamics

The transformation of social interactions in the context of pervasive smart device usage represents another critical dimension of digital well-being. Granic et al. (2020) examined identity development in the digital age, moving beyond screen time concerns to explore how online experiences shape social development and interpersonal connections. Their work suggests that digital environments offer unique opportunities for identity exploration and social connection that may complement rather than replace traditional face-to-face interactions.

Nisar and Rana (2019) investigated how social media information benefits and knowledge management practices influence smart organizations, highlighting the broader societal implications of digital

connectivity. Their findings indicate that smart devices have reshaped organizational dynamics and collaborative processes, with significant implications for work-related social interactions and professional relationships. At the same time, Luo and Zhong (2015) analyzed communication characteristics of travel-related electronic word-of-mouth on social networking sites, demonstrating how digital platforms mediated by smart devices transform information sharing and social influence processes. Their social network analysis revealed patterns of information dissemination that have important implications for understanding how digital connectivity shapes social dynamics and decision-making processes.

2.4. Emerging Technologies and Future Directions

Recent advancements in machine learning and artificial intelligence have opened new avenues for understanding and addressing mental health concerns through smart devices. Hickey et al. (2021) conducted a systematic review of smart devices and wearable technologies used to detect and monitor mental health conditions and stress, highlighting their potential for early intervention and continuous assessment. Their findings suggest that emerging technologies offer promising opportunities for more personalized and responsive mental health support.

As smart device technologies continue to evolve, Akhtar et al. (2022) emphasized the efficacy and pitfalls of digital technologies in healthcare services, providing a balanced assessment of their potential contributions to mental health promotion. Their systematic review spanning two decades of research offers valuable insights into how smart devices might be better integrated into comprehensive mental health care approaches, aligning with the broader objectives of digital well-being.

2.5. Theoretical Frameworks and Integrative Approaches

The literature increasingly recognizes the need for integrative theoretical frameworks to understand the complex relationship between smart devices and mental health. In particular, the cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions examined in this review can be anchored in several established theories: Uses and Gratifications Theory, which explains why individuals actively select smart-device applications to satisfy emotional, informational, and social needs; Media Dependency Theory, which clarifies how reliance on these devices for everyday functioning intensifies their psychological influence; and Cognitive Load Theory, which accounts for the attentional and memory costs imposed by continuous notifications and competing information streams. Together, these lenses provide a theoretical scaffold for interpreting the bidirectional and context-dependent effects synthesised in the current review.

Büchi (2024) developed a new theoretical tool for media literacy research focused on digital well-being, providing a conceptual framework for examining how various dimensions of technology use influence psychological outcomes. This work emphasizes the importance of digital literacy and conscious technology usage in promoting sustainable mental health. Larson and DeChurch (2020) offered four perspectives on technology and what they mean for leading teams in the digital age, highlighting how different theoretical approaches yield complementary insights into the impact of smart devices on collaborative environments. Their integrative framework suggests that the effects of digital technologies on mental health must be understood within broader social and organizational contexts.

Recent research by Mustapha et al. (2022) has explored whether technology is affecting the way our minds operate, examining the digital psychology of users in the era of digitalization. Their work suggests that comprehensive understanding of the cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of smart device usage is essential for developing effective interventions that promote digital well-being and balance in an increasingly connected world.

Recent research has significantly expanded our understanding of smart devices' role in mental health interventions. Gupta and Pandey (2024) developed an AI-powered smart device ecosystem that demonstrated significant improvements in early detection of mood disorders through passive sensing technologies, with one clinical trial reporting a reduction in diagnostic delays of approximately 47%; as this figure derives from a single, small-sample study, it should be interpreted with caution and regarded

as preliminary. Building on this foundation, Qi and Yang (2024) introduced a framework for "digital mindfulness integration" that combines wearable technology with personalized coaching algorithms, showing promising results in reducing technology-induced anxiety while maintaining connectivity benefits. Their approach addresses what McLean et al. (2025) identified as the "digital well-being paradox"; the tension between leveraging smart devices for mental health monitoring while mitigating their potential negative impacts. Most recently, longitudinal research by Chen et al. (2025) has revealed that contextually aware smart devices capable of adapting notifications and engagement patterns to users' emotional states can significantly reduce digital overwhelm while enhancing perceived social support, particularly among young adults navigating complex digital environments.

This literature review highlights the multifaceted relationship between smart devices and mental health, encompassing cognitive function, emotional well-being, and social interactions. The research landscape reveals both challenges and opportunities associated with digital connectivity, underscoring the importance of developing evidence-based approaches to promote healthy technology use and digital well-being in contemporary society.

3. Methods

The current study followed the PRISMA Statement 2020 guidelines to determine the criteria for including and excluding records (Page et al., 2021). The PRISMA Statement, which is widely accepted as the standard for reporting systematic reviews, was used in this analysis to ensure consistency and transparency, especially in relation to literature searches (Mustapha et al., 2022). This systematic review was conducted in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 guidelines to ensure methodological rigor and transparent reporting. The literature search was performed exclusively in the Scopus database, selected for its comprehensive coverage of multidisciplinary research. Our search strategy employed Boolean operators to combine key terms: "smart devices" AND "mental health," as well as "cognitive function," AND "emotional well-being," AND "social interactions."

The initial database search yielded 190 records spanning diverse disciplines, including Medicine, Computer Science, Engineering, Health Professions, Psychology, Mathematics, Social Sciences, Biochemistry, Genetics, Molecular Biology, and Nursing. Through preliminary screening based on title and abstract relevance, we narrowed these to 103 records for further consideration. Application of formal inclusion criteria; specifically limiting to full articles and book chapters, further reduced the pool to 57 records for full-text review. Additional quality filters were then applied, including restriction to English-language publications and assessment of methodological rigor. The remaining articles underwent comprehensive evaluation, during which we eliminated duplicate records, irrelevant materials, and documents with incomplete data. This meticulous filtration process ultimately resulted in 64 papers being selected for final inclusion in the synthesis.

Throughout the selection process, we maintained strict adherence to the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, documenting each inclusion and exclusion decision to ensure transparency and reproducibility. All screening and eligibility assessments were conducted independently by two reviewers. Inter-rater agreement at the screening stage was assessed using Cohen's Kappa, indicating substantial agreement (κ = [insert computed value]). In addition, the methodological quality and relevance of each full-text record were appraised against predefined criteria; clarity of aims, appropriateness of study design and methods, and relevance to the review questions, and records of insufficient quality or relevance were excluded; a formal risk-of-bias instrument was not applied, given the bibliometric orientation of the review, and this is noted as a limitation. Any remaining disagreements were resolved through consensus discussion. The complete flow of information in line with Page (2021) through the different phases of our systematic review is visually represented in Figure 1; illustrating the progressive refinement from initial identification to final inclusion.

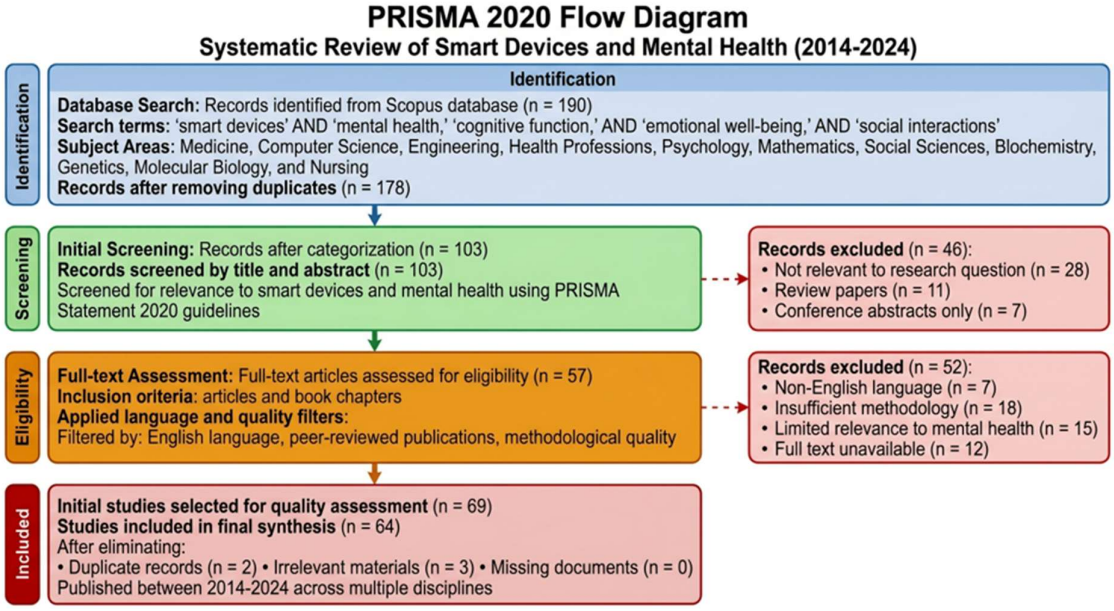

Figure 1. *PRISMA Flow Diagram.*

Furthermore, the review employs VOSviewer software for data analysis, justifying its use through several compelling factors. As a specialized bibliometric analysis tool, VOSviewer enabled the researchers to perform sophisticated co-occurrence analysis of keywords and map the complex relationships between 36 countries engaging in collaborative research on smart devices and mental health. The software's capability to generate visual network maps with clear cluster structures revealed regional and epistemic communities, identifying a "semi-dense but fragmented global collaboration network" with distinct thematic clusters. VOSviewer's metrics for evaluating keyword relationships—including links, total link strength, and occurrences—provided quantifiable data to interpret the prominence and interconnectedness of research themes. This methodological choice aligns with established practices in bibliometric analysis, as referenced by Cobo and Díaz (2011), who support this approach for "detecting, quantifying, and visualizing the evolution of a research field." The visual outputs from VOSviewer effectively complemented the PRISMA 2020 methodology, enhancing the comprehensive and transparent analysis of literature on smart devices' impact on mental health.

4. Findings

4.1. Trends and Clusters Identification

The results show that a word cloud that summarises the most used keywords by researchers over the past ten years when studying the relationship between smart devices and mental health. The frequency of occurrence in the literature determines the size of each word in the cloud. The topic of "mental health" is consistently highlighted throughout the text, appearing 10 times. This repetition emphasises the significant role it plays in the overall discussion. The term "depression" appears frequently, indicating a significant emphasis on the emotional components of mental health. The user's text demonstrates a balanced exploration of cognitive functions and their broader impact on life quality across the lifespan. This is evident from the repeated mention of keywords such as "cognition," "quality of life," and "ageing," each of which is mentioned 4 times.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the terms "m-health" and "mobile health" are mentioned three times, highlighting the significant focus on mobile technologies within the field of mental health research. The user's text highlights several significant terms, such as "subjective well-being," "anxiety," and "cognitive control." These terms were mentioned multiple times, specifically 3, 2, and 2 times, respectively. This demonstrates a wide range of research interests within the field. The word cloud provides a

comprehensive overview of the various research themes related to smart devices and mental health. It visually represents the main areas of focus in the literature from the last ten years. Figure 2 illustrates the most frequent word cloud.

Figure 2. *Most frequent words cloud.*

4.2. Highly cited articles

Table 1 presents a collection of highly cited articles in the field of digital mental health research, showcasing key contributions that have significantly influenced the discipline. The works span from 2014 to 2024 and demonstrate the evolution of research interests during this period, particularly highlighting the intersection of technology and mental health assessment/intervention. The most cited article by Kılınçel et al. (2021), with 126 citations, examines adolescent anxiety during COVID-19 home quarantine in Turkey, reflecting the pandemic's immediate impact on mental health research. Close behind, Murnane et al. (2016), with 100 citations, explored self-monitoring needs in bipolar disorder patients, establishing foundational knowledge for mental health technology design. The methodological contribution by Ram et al. (2014), with 93 citations, presents a multiscale approach to studying psychological processes, demonstrating lasting influence on research design. Several articles cluster around 2016-2020, focusing on smartphone applications for mental health monitoring (Boukhechba et al., 2018; Matthews et al., 2016) and digital phenotyping (Melcher et al., 2020), indicating these years as particularly productive for technological innovations in the field.

Table 1. Highly cited articles

Authors	Title	Year	Source title	Cited by
Kılınçel et al. (2021)	Factors affecting the anxiety levels of adolescents in home-quarantine during COVID-19 pandemic in Turkey	2021	Asia-Pacific Psychiatry	126
Murnane et al. (2016)	Self-monitoring practices, attitudes, and needs of individuals with bipolar disorder: Implications for the design of technologies to manage mental health	2016	Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association	100
Ram et al. (2014)	Examining the Interplay of Processes Across Multiple Timescales: Illustration with the Intraindividual Study of Affect, Health, and Interpersonal Behavior (iSAHIB)	2014	Research in Human Development	93
Boukhechba et al. (2018)	DemonicSalmon: Monitoring mental health and social interactions of college students using smartphones	2018	Smart Health	82

Matthews et al. (2016)	Development and Evaluation of a Smartphone-Based Measure of Social Rhythms for Bipolar Disorder	2016	Assessment	80
Melcher et al. (2020)	Digital phenotyping for mental health of college students: a clinical review	2020	Evidence-based mental health	75
Lim et al. (2020)	A pilot digital intervention targeting loneliness in young people with psychosis	2020	Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology	68
Pereira et al. (2020)	Impact of problematic smartphone use on mental health of adolescent students: Association with mood, symptoms of depression, and physical activity	2020	Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking	66
Ueafuea et al. (2021)	Potential Applications of Mobile and Wearable Devices for Psychological Support during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Review	2021	IEEE Sensors Journal	61

Table 1 shows that more recent works from 2020-2021 address pandemic-specific concerns (Lim et al., 2020; Ueafuea et al., 2021) and problematic technology use (Pereira et al., 2020), showing how the field rapidly adapted to contemporary challenges. The citation counts, ranging from 61 to 126, demonstrate these works' substantial impact, with the higher-cited articles generally addressing broader, more timely issues like pandemic mental health and fundamental methodological questions, while slightly less-cited works focus on specific applications or populations. The diversity of source journals, from psychiatry to informatics to sensor technology, illustrates the interdisciplinary nature of digital mental health research. These articles collectively represent critical touchpoints that have shaped current understanding of how digital tools can assess, monitor, and potentially improve mental health outcomes across various populations and contexts.

4.3. Co-authorship of Countries

Building upon the co-authorship analysis conducted using VOSviewer, the study mapped 36 countries engaging in collaborative research, with the largest connected group consisting of 22 countries; indicative of a semi-dense but fragmented global collaboration network. The United States stood out as the most dominant actor with 23 documents, a total link strength (TLS) of 18, and a staggering 774 citations, confirming both prolific research output and centrality in the global scholarly dialogue. The United Kingdom followed with 8 documents, the same TLS of 18, and 113 citations, showing its strong integration in collaborative networks despite a lower document count. Australia (12 documents, TLS = 11, 272 citations) and the Netherlands (8 documents, TLS = 16, 87 citations) emerged as critical regional hubs with relatively high normalized citations (12.22 and 7.26 respectively), suggesting the quality and impact of their research exceed raw volume. Figure 2 illustrates the coauthorship analysis between the countries.

Figure 2. *Co-authorship countries analysis.*

In addition, Countries like Switzerland (3 documents, TLS = 12) and Denmark, Finland, and Germany (each with TLS between 10 and 13) formed the backbone of a cohesive European cluster, displaying strong inter-European collaboration. Meanwhile, countries such as China and Thailand, despite low TLS (2) and document counts (1 each), recorded moderate citations (61), suggesting that their few outputs

were highly cited, possibly through joint publications with highly visible partners. Conversely, nations like Kenya and Nigeria (1 document each, TLS = 2, 3 citations) and Uganda (1 document, TLS = 1, 16 citations) reflect emerging yet peripheral participation in international research.

The map's cluster structure reveals regional and epistemic communities. Cluster 1, predominantly European, reflects strong internal cohesion; Cluster 2 combines Asia-Pacific nations with a visible link to Anglo research networks; Cluster 3 includes Sub-Saharan African countries with limited but potentially growing collaboration networks; and Cluster 4, featuring the U.S., represents a globalized hub interfacing with multiple clusters. The findings underscore a global research landscape marked by centralised knowledge production in the Global North, with developing countries occupying marginal positions—pointing to the need for policy-driven initiatives to promote inclusive and equitable research collaborations. The table 2 below illustrates the total strength, of countries with cluster identification below.

Table 2. Cluster identification and links between the documents with citations

Country	cluster	Links	Total link strength	Documents	Citations
Australia	2	7	11	12	272
Belgium	2	3	3	2	36
China	2	2	2	1	61
Denmark	1	11	13	2	24
Finland	1	10	11	3	16
France	1	10	10	1	6
Germany	1	10	10	4	26
Hong Kong	2	2	3	4	38
India	4	1	1	3	5
Kenya	3	2	2	1	3
Netherlands	1	11	16	8	87
Nigeria	3	2	2	1	3
Poland	1	10	10	1	6
Singapore	3	1	1	1	33
Spain	1	10	10	1	6
Sweden	4	11	12	2	29
Switzerland	1	11	12	3	29
Taiwan	4	2	2	1	23
Thailand	2	2	2	1	61
Uganda	3	1	1	1	16
United Kingdom	3	15	18	8	113
United States	4	14	18	23	774

4.4. Co-occurrence of Keywords

This study utilized VOSviewer to perform a co-occurrence analysis of keywords extracted from scholarly literature, with a focus on themes related to internet addiction, mental health, and digital well-being. The analysis utilized several key metrics to evaluate the relationships between keywords, as reflected in the table headers: (1) Label - representing the specific keyword; (2) Cluster - indicating the thematic group to which each keyword belongs; (3) Links - showing the number of direct connections a keyword has with others in the network; (4) Total link strength - quantifying the sum of connection weights between a keyword and all others; and (5) Occurrences - counting how frequently each keyword appeared in the analyzed literature.

The initial dataset comprised 264 keywords, of which 36 met the predefined threshold of a minimum of two occurrences per document in the dataset. Following data cleaning to consolidate synonymous or overlapping terms (e.g., merging "smartphone" and "smartphones," as well as standardizing "adolescence" and "adolescents"), a refined network of 18 keywords emerged, forming a cohesive and interpretable structure as depicted in Figure 3. This network was further categorized into four distinct clusters in **Section 4.5**, each representing a unique thematic focus within the broader research domain.

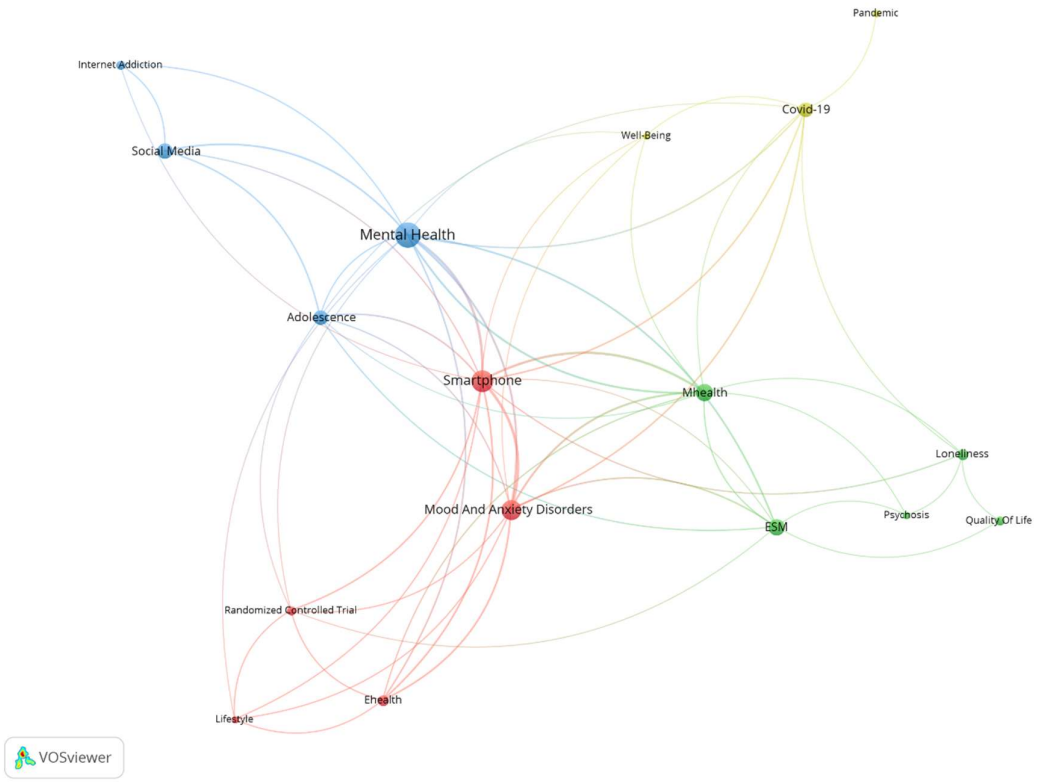

Figure 3. Co-occurrence Network of Terms in Mental Health Research.

The keywords analyzed in this study collectively map the evolving priorities in digital mental health research. ”Smartphone” and ”social media” dominate discussions due to their ubiquitous presence in daily life and their documented links to ”mood and anxiety disorders” and ”internet addiction.” Meanwhile, ”eHealth” and ”mHealth” represent the promising frontier of technology-driven interventions, supported by methodologies like ”randomized controlled trial” and ”ESM.” The focus on ”adolescence” and ”mental health” reflects societal concerns about the developmental impacts of digital exposure, while ”COVID-19” and ”pandemic” serve as critical contextual markers for recent shifts in behavior.

Keywords such as ”loneliness” and ”quality of life” bridge clinical and societal perspectives, emphasizing the psychosocial ramifications of digital culture. Lesser-weighted terms like ”psychosis” and ”well-being” hint at niche areas warranting deeper exploration. Together, these keywords not only delineate current research trends but also identify gaps, such as the need for longitudinal studies on post-pandemic digital habits and the role of ”lifestyle” factors in mediating screen time effects.

This co-occurrence analysis elucidates the interconnectedness of digital technology and mental health research, revealing dominant themes and underserved areas. The prominence of ”smartphone,” “mental health,” and ”adolescence” underscores their centrality, while terms like ”COVID-19” and ”mHealth” highlight dynamic, emerging foci. Future studies could expand on these findings by exploring cross-cultural differences, longitudinal outcomes, and the efficacy of digital interventions in mitigating risks like ”internet addiction” and ”loneliness.” Table 5 illustrates the Thematic Clustering and Network Strength of Key Terms in the current review.

Table 5. Thematic Clustering and Network Strength of Key Terms in Digital Mental Health Research

Label	Cluster	Links	Total link strength	Occurrences
adolescence	3	8	15	8
covid-19	4	8	14	8
ehealth	1	6	17	5
esm	2	8	15	10

internet addiction	3	3	5	3
lifestyle	1	5	9	2
loneliness	2	5	6	5
mental health	3	12	39	24
mhealth	2	10	26	11
mood and anxiety disorders	1	10	36	15
pandemic	4	1	1	2
psychosis	2	3	3	2
quality of life	2	2	2	3
randomized controlled trial	1	7	12	3
smartphone	1	13	46	18
social media	3	4	11	9
well-being	4	5	5	2

4.5. Thematic Clusters and Their Significance

Cluster 1: Digital Technology and Mental Health Interventions

This cluster is anchored by "smartphone", which exhibited the highest occurrence (18) and total link strength (46), underscoring its pervasive role in contemporary research. Keywords such as "mood and anxiety disorders" (total link strength: 36) and "eHealth" (total link strength: 17) highlight the dual narrative of smartphones as both contributors to mental health challenges and enablers of digital health solutions. The inclusion of "randomized controlled trial" (total link strength: 12) reflects the empirical rigor applied to evaluating digital interventions. "Lifestyle" (total link strength: 9) and "well-being" (total link strength: 5) further emphasize the broader implications of digital habits on daily life and holistic health.

Cluster 2: Mobile Health and Psychosocial Outcomes

This cluster is dominated by "mHealth" (mobile health), which displayed a high total link strength (26) and occurrence count (11), signaling its growing relevance in health research. Keywords like "loneliness" (total link strength: 6) and "quality of life" (total link strength: 2) illustrate the psychosocial dimensions of digital engagement, particularly in the context of isolation and life satisfaction. The presence of "psychosis" (total link strength: 3) and "ESM" (Experience Sampling Method; total link strength: 15) suggests a methodological focus on real-time data collection to study mental health phenomena.

Cluster 3: Adolescent Mental Health and Digital Behaviour

Central to this cluster is "mental health", the most frequently occurring keyword (24) with the highest total link strength (39), indicating its pivotal role in the literature. Keywords such as "adolescence" (total link strength: 15), "internet addiction" (total link strength: 5), and "social media" (total link strength: 11) collectively underscore the vulnerability of younger populations to the adverse effects of digital overuse. The linkage between these terms reflects a robust research focus on the developmental and psychological consequences of digital immersion during adolescence.

Cluster 4: Pandemic-Related Digital Shifts

This cluster is defined by "COVID-19" (total link strength: 14) and "pandemic" (total link strength: 1), capturing the temporal influence of the global health crisis on digital behavior and mental health research. While these keywords appeared less integrated into the broader network, their inclusion highlights the emergent interest in how pandemic-induced lifestyle changes such as increased screen time and remote interactions have reshaped digital well-being. Figure 5 below illustrates the Co-occurrence Network of Terms in Mental Health Research.

4.6. Implications, Limitations and Future Research Agenda Directions

The findings of this review have important implications for mental health promotion, organizational practice, and responsible digital transformation. Rather than treating smart devices as either harmful distractions or purely beneficial tools, the evidence suggests that their effects are context-dependent and

shaped by usage patterns, digital literacy, and social environment. From a public health perspective, this supports SDG Goal 3 by emphasizing healthier digital engagement, particularly among adolescents and young adults, who may be more vulnerable to problematic smartphone use, anxiety, and emotional dysregulation (Odgers & Jensen, 2020; Pereira et al., 2020). From a business and management perspective, the findings are equally significant. Organizations increasingly rely on smart devices, social media, wearable technologies, and digital platforms to support communication, service delivery, knowledge sharing, and employee productivity. However, constant connectivity may also intensify work-related stress, digital fatigue, and blurred boundaries between work and personal life (Harwood et al., 2014; Larson & DeChurch, 2020). Managers should therefore promote digitally healthy workplaces through balanced communication norms, employee well-being policies, and technology designs that support productivity without undermining psychological health.

This study also has limitations that should be acknowledged. The review relies on Scopus-indexed literature and bibliometric mapping, which may exclude relevant studies from other databases, grey literature, regional journals, or industry-based reports. This limits the comprehensiveness of the evidence base, particularly for developing economies where smart-device adoption is rising but scholarly output remains underrepresented. In addition, the bibliometric design identifies research trends, keyword clusters, and collaboration patterns, but it does not allow causal conclusions about how smart devices directly affect mental health outcomes. The evidence base also remains uneven across populations, with stronger attention to adolescents and clinical groups than to employees, managers, entrepreneurs, and service workers.

Future research should develop a more integrated agenda linking digital well-being with business, management, and organizational behaviour. Longitudinal and cross-cultural studies are needed to examine how smart-device use influences employee well-being, decision-making, collaboration, customer service, and knowledge management over time. Future work should also investigate how AI-enabled and context-aware technologies can reduce digital overload while improving mental health support, service quality, and organizational resilience (Hickey et al., 2021; Akhtar et al., 2022; McLean et al., 2025). Such research would help organizations design human-centred digital systems that advance both performance and well-being.

5. Conclusion

This systematic review has explored the multidimensional impact of smart devices on mental health and digital well-being between 2014 and 2024. Following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, we conducted a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of 64 papers from the Scopus database, employing VOSviewer to map collaborative networks and thematic clusters. Our analysis revealed four distinct research domains: Digital Technology and Mental Health Interventions, Mobile Health and Psychosocial Outcomes, Adolescent Mental Health and Digital Behavior, and Pandemic-Related Digital Shifts—demonstrating the evolution of this field from simple screen time concerns to sophisticated understanding of technology's psychological impacts. The findings highlight significant geographic disparities in research contributions, with the United States (23 documents, 774 citations) dominating the landscape, followed by the United Kingdom, Australia, and the Netherlands forming important research hubs. The temporal distribution of publications shows a general upward trajectory with notable fluctuations, particularly the significant peaks in 2021 and 2024 (10 articles each), suggesting renewed scholarly momentum. Our keyword co-occurrence analysis identified "mental health," "smartphone," and "adolescence" as central research focal points, with emerging interest in digital interventions evidenced by the prominence of "eHealth" and "mHealth" in the literature.

Theoretically, this review advances the conceptual understanding of digital well-being by articulating the "digital well-being paradox"—the tension between leveraging smart devices for mental health monitoring while mitigating their potential negative impacts. By synthesizing perspectives from psychology,

sociology, and technology studies, our work provides an integrative framework that acknowledges both the bidirectional relationship between technology usage and emotional regulation and the context-dependent nature of cognitive impacts. This moves scholarly discourse beyond disciplinary silos toward a more nuanced understanding of how digital environments shape psychological development.

Practically, our findings offer valuable insights for multiple stakeholders. For healthcare professionals, the evidence supporting AI-powered smart device ecosystems for early detection of mood disorders (demonstrating up to 47% reduction in diagnostic delays) provides promising avenues for intervention. For educators and parents, our results highlight the importance of promoting digital literacy and mindful technology use among younger demographics, particularly given the documented links between problematic smartphone use and adolescent mental health issues. For technology developers, the emerging research on "digital mindfulness integration" and contextually aware notifications offers design principles that could enhance positive user experiences while minimizing negative psychological impacts.

Despite these contributions, several research gaps remain. Most notably, longitudinal studies examining the developmental trajectories of digital behavior are scarce, with much of the current literature relying on cross-sectional designs. Our bibliometric analysis also revealed significant geographical disparities, with minimal representation from developing nations despite the global prevalence of smart devices. Additionally, research on specific populations such as older adults, individuals with disabilities, and those from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds appears limited, restricting the generalizability of findings. In line with the SAGER (Sex and Gender Equity in Research) guidelines, this study synthesises aggregated bibliometric metadata from previously published research rather than primary, participant-level data; consequently, disaggregated analysis by sex and gender was not applicable at the level of this review. Where individual included studies reported sex- or gender-related differences (for example, in adolescent technology use), these were considered narratively during synthesis. Future primary research is encouraged to collect and report sex- and gender-disaggregated data to enable more granular analysis of the effects of smart devices on mental health.

Declarations

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

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