

When Digital Needs Are Not Enough: Social Norms, Digital Consumption, and Well-Being through an Islamic Ethical Lens

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

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Background: Digital technology has become increasingly integral to contemporary society, raising questions about whether digital needs function as basic needs that directly contribute to well-being. However, existing studies have not fully explained whether digital need priority influences well-being directly or whether this relationship depends on digital consumption behavior and digital well-being.

Research Gap: Most previous research views the relationship between digital needs and well-being as straightforward, assuming increased digital priorities automatically impact individual well-being. This approach tends to ignore the possibility that digital consumption behavior may play a role in explaining the relationship between need orientation and psychological outcomes. Furthermore, social factors are often overlooked in explaining why digital needs become a priority.

Novelty: This study re-examines the role of digital need priority by integrating social norms, digital motivation, digital consumption behavior, and digital well-being. It conceptualizes digital need priority as a cognitive-evaluative orientation rather than as a proxy for access or use intensity, distinguishing instrumental and hedonic digital consumption behaviors.

Method: A quantitative cross-sectional design was employed. Data were collected through a survey of 156 urban respondents who actively used digital technology. The proposed model was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

Results: Digital need priority does not significantly influence digital well-being, either directly or indirectly through digital consumption behavior. Instead, both instrumental and hedonic digital consumption behaviors significantly enhance digital well-being. Digital well-being subsequently increases subjective well-being and reduces stress. Subjective norm, rather than digital motivation, significantly shapes digital need priority.

Conclusion: Digital needs may function more as socially influenced priorities than as direct determinants of well-being. Improving well-being in the digital era requires not only access to technology but also balanced, purposeful, and healthy digital consumption practices. From an Islamic ethical perspective, digital well-being requires purposeful and balanced use that advances *maslahah* while avoiding *israf*.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has changed the way individuals work, interact, and meet their daily needs (ragnedda, 2018; van dijk, 2020). Internet access, social media, and various digital platforms have become an integral part of modern life, often perceived as an inseparable necessity for social and economic activities. Popular discourse and several contemporary studies have sparked debate about whether digital needs are beginning to be perceived as increasingly important in everyday life. This view has sparked academic debate, particularly regarding the relevance of Maslow's hierarchy of needs in the context of digital society. Maslow (1943) placed physiological needs as the primary foundation of human well-being, which must be met before higher-level needs can function. However, in the contemporary digital context, a number of studies have argued that the need for connectivity, existence, and access to information has raised questions about the relevance of the classic hierarchy of needs in the context of a digital society (Kenrick et al., 2010). Some studies even suggest that individuals are willing to sacrifice physical needs in order to stay digitally connected, especially in highly digitalized societies (Kalia et al., 2025; Liang et al., 2024; M. M. P. Vanden Abeele, 2021). On the other hand, empirical literature shows more diverse findings and does not always align with Maslow's "reversal." Several studies confirm that despite the increasing importance of digital technology, basic needs such as food, safety, and health remain top priorities for most individuals, particularly in societies that are not yet fully digitally intensive. This indicates that the relevance of Maslow's hierarchy of needs is not a one-size-fits-all approach, but rather contextual, influenced by social, economic, and cultural conditions (Diener et al., 2018; Vanden Abeele, 2021).

This debate becomes even more complex when linked to the concept of digital well-being. The digital well-being literature emphasizes that individual well-being in the digital age is not determined solely by the intensity or priority of technology use, but rather by the quality of digital experiences, the balance of use, and the individual's ability to manage digital interactions healthily (Büchi et al., 2019; M. M. P. Vanden Abeele, 2021). Thus, prioritizing digital needs does not always lead to increased well-being and in some cases can potentially lead to stress, digital fatigue or psychological tension.

However, most previous research still views the relationship between digital needs and well-being as straightforward, as if increased digital priorities automatically impact an individual's well-being. This approach tends to ignore the possibility that digital consumption behavior may play a role in explaining the relationship between need orientation and psychological outcomes. However, behavioral and self-regulation theories suggest that internal needs and motivations only impact well-being when they are realized through actual behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Baumeister & Vohs, 2007). Furthermore, social factors are often overlooked in explaining why digital needs become a priority. In an increasingly connected society, social pressure to remain digitally responsive, present, and relevant can influence how individuals perceive the importance of digital needs, regardless of their intrinsic motivation (Lapinski & Rimal, 2005), which in some cases contributes to digital stress and fatigue (Dhir et al., 2018). This condition shows that the priority of digital needs does not always arise from functional needs or self-development, but rather from social norms that develop in the individual's environment.

Based on this gap, this study begins with the need to reexamine the position of digital needs within the hierarchy of needs framework, not simply by questioning whether digital needs have replaced basic needs, but also how digital needs operate within the context of well-being. Specifically, this study views digital need priority as a need orientation that does not necessarily translate directly into digital behavior or well-being, so this relationship needs to be tested empirically. By integrating Maslow's perspective, behavioral theory, and the digital well-being framework, this study aims to provide a more contextual understanding of the relationship between digital needs and individual well-being. The focus of this research is not on rejecting the classical hierarchy of needs, but rather on understanding how digital needs operate in the context of contemporary digital life. In this case, digital needs are viewed as enabling needs whose relationship to well-being is not always direct and can be influenced by the context of digital use.

In a Muslim-majority context such as Indonesia, this question also has an ethical dimension. Islamic economics does not assess consumption solely by intensity of use or individual utility, but by whether it promotes *maslahah* (benefit), maintains *tawazun* (balance), embodies *'adl* (justice), and avoids *israf* (excess). The principles of *wasatiyyah* and *maqasid al-Shariah* therefore provide a complementary lens for evaluating digital consumption: connectivity is valuable when it enhances knowledge, livelihoods,

social relations, and human well-being, but its prioritization becomes problematic when it encourages compulsion, neglect of essential needs, or harm. This reading is consistent with the Qur'anic injunction against excess and its emphasis on balanced consumption (Qur'an 7:31; 25:67), as well as contemporary scholarship that evaluates technology by its contribution to human flourishing and the prevention of harm (Chapra, 2008; Elmahjub, 2023; Raquib et al., 2022).

Accordingly, this study uses Islamic ethical principles as a contextual interpretive lens rather than as measured constructs. The empirical model tests digital need priority, digital consumption behavior, and well-being, while the Islamic lens clarifies what may constitute beneficial, balanced, and responsible digital consumption in the Indonesian context.

Through this approach, this study offers conceptual and empirical contributions to understanding the position of digital needs within the hierarchy of needs and well-being in the digital era. First, this study provides a contextual reading of Maslow's hierarchy of needs by demonstrating that prioritizing digital needs does not necessarily directly improve individual well-being. Second, this study demonstrates that digital consumption behavior, both instrumental and hedonic, plays a greater role in explaining digital well-being than prioritizing digital needs themselves. Third, this study highlights the role of subjective norms as a more dominant antecedent than digital motivation in shaping digital need priorities, thus broadening the discourse on digital needs, which has previously been explained primarily through individual and utilitarian perspectives. Fourth, this study enriches the digital well-being literature by positioning digital well-being as an important psychological bridge related to increasing subjective well-being and reducing stress levels. Fifth, by interpreting the findings through *maslahah*, *tawazun*, *'adl*, *wasatiyyah*, and the avoidance of *israf*, this study connects digital well-being with Sharia-oriented debates on responsible consumption without claiming that Islamic values were directly measured.

The central novelty lies in conceptualizing digital need priority as a cognitive-evaluative orientation rather than as a proxy for access, screen time, use intensity, or technology adoption. This distinction makes it possible to test whether perceiving connectivity as important is sufficient to improve well-being; the proposed model shows that orientation, enacted consumption, and outcomes are analytically distinct. By positioning subjective norm before digital need priority and digital behavior after it, the study extends technology-adoption reasoning upstream from intention and use to the social construction of need priority, and downstream to the purpose and quality of use. It also refines contemporary readings of Maslow by proposing that digital connectivity may become salient across several need levels without thereby becoming a universally basic need or guaranteeing well-being (Ajzen, 1991; Ragnedda & Ruiu, 2017; Venkatesh et al., 2012).

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Reconsidering Human Needs in The Digital Era

A number of contemporary studies show that digital technology plays a significant role in fulfilling social needs, self-actualization, and achieving professional goals (Cook, 2023). However, empirical findings also show that digital needs do not always replace basic needs universally (Kushlev & Dunn, 2018; Przybylski & Weinstein, 2017; Viner et al., 2019). Cross-cultural studies in the last ten years confirm that the hierarchy of needs is contextual and influenced by the socioeconomic conditions and occupational characteristics of individuals (Benson & Dundis, 2003; Gambrel & Cianci, 2023; Tay & Diener, 2011). Thus, digital needs are more appropriately understood as needs that develop situationally, rather than as a direct substitute for physiological needs.

The Digital Need Priority (DNP) context emerged as a representation of an individual's orientation toward the importance of digital needs in their lives, such as internet access and online connectivity as needs that must be prioritized in daily life. The literature on psychology and consumer behavior indicates that need priorities are cognitive and evaluative, reflecting an individual's subjective perception of the importance of a need (Diener et al., 2010; Kenrick et al., 2010; Sheth et al., 1991). Recent research suggests that need orientations do not always directly lead to psychological outcomes. Instead, needs and priorities are often viewed as antecedents that can influence an individual's behavioral choices, although this relationship is not always consistent across contexts (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010; Jacoby, 2002; Kushlev & Dunn, 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Vallerand, 1997). In a digital context, individuals may prioritize digital needs without automatically experiencing increased well-being, as prioritizing digital

needs is not always related to how individuals use technology in their daily lives. These findings indicate that digital need priority is more accurately positioned as a cognitive orientation that does not necessarily translate directly into behavior or psychological outcomes.

Antecedent of Digital Need Priority: Digital Motivation and Subjective Norm

Motivation is the primary foundation for explaining individual behavior and need orientation. In the digital context, digital motivation refers to an individual's intrinsic drive to use technology as a means of self-development, work efficiency, and personal goal achievement. The Self-Determination Theory perspective asserts that individuals with intrinsic motivation tend to have higher self-control and use technology reflectively, rather than compulsively (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Recent research shows that intrinsic digital motivation doesn't necessarily lead to over-reliance on or prioritization of technology. Autonomously motivated individuals are more selective in their use of technology and view digital as a tool, rather than a primary need that must always be met (Chen & Nath, 2016; Turel et al., 2010). Other studies have also found that self-development-oriented motivation tends to be associated with more controlled and less impulsive technology use (Alalwan et al., 2017). However, most previous research still focuses the role of digital motivation on the intensity or frequency of technology use, rather than on prioritizing digital needs as a cognitive orientation. Therefore, the relationship between digital motivation and digital need priority still shows inconsistent findings and requires further empirical testing. Based on the literature and arguments above, this study proposes the following:

H1: Digital Motivation influences Digital Need Priority.

In the Theory of Planned Behavior, subjective norms are positioned as social factors that shape individual perceptions of social pressure or expectations regarding a behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Social norms have long been recognized as a key factor in shaping individual preferences, decisions, and orientations, particularly in the context of public and symbolic behavior. In the digital context, social norms are reflected in the demand to be constantly connected, responsive, and present online. Several studies have shown that technology and internet use are driven not only by functional needs but also by social expectations to stay connected, responsive, and appear digitally active (Bayer et al., 2022; Hall et al., 2021; Schlachter et al., 2025; Vorderer et al., 2018). The pressure to always be online, keep up with digital trends, and maintain a virtual presence fosters the perception that digital technology is an essential part of contemporary social life. As a result, individuals may prioritize digital needs not solely for their intrinsic benefits, but also because of inherent social expectations. Literature from the last ten years shows that digital social pressures—such as the need to respond quickly to messages, update social media activity, and avoid missing out on information—are closely related to the perceived importance of digital technology in everyday life (Dhir et al., 2018). Studies on fear of missing out (FoMO) also reveal that social norms reinforce the perception that digital connectivity is a need that must be prioritized (Elhai et al., 2020; Przybylski et al., 2013). However, most of these studies place subjective norms as a predictor of technology use, rather than prioritizing digital needs. Thus, there remains a research gap regarding the role of social norms in shaping individuals' digital needs orientations. Based on the literature and arguments above, this study proposes the following:

This positioning differs from the conventional use of social influence in technology-adoption models, where it is usually treated as a determinant of behavioral intention or use. Normative-behavior research shows that perceptions of what significant others expect and commonly do can change the perceived normality and urgency of remaining connected (Lapinski & Rimal, 2005). Treating subjective norm as an antecedent of digital need priority therefore shifts the analysis to an earlier cognitive stage: social influence may first define connectivity as a need before it shapes a specific adoption or usage decision. This framing also connects technology adoption with digital inequality, because equivalent access need not produce equivalent priorities, meaningful uses, or beneficial outcomes across different social environments (Ragnedda & Rui, 2017; Venkatesh et al., 2012).

H2: Subjective Norm has a positive effect on Digital Need Priority

Digital Need Priority and Digital Consumption Behavior.

Digital Need Priority reflects an individual's perception of how important digital needs are compared to other needs. Within the needs-to-behavior framework, need orientation is often viewed as a factor that can be related to consumption behavior choices, although this relationship is not always

consistent. The digital behavior literature over the past ten years has consistently distinguished digital consumption into two main forms: instrumental and hedonic. Instrumental Digital Consumption Behavior reflects the use of technology for productive purposes, such as acquiring information, improving skills, or supporting work. In contrast, Hedonic Digital Consumption Behavior relates to the use of technology for entertainment, relaxation, and distraction (Büchi, 2021; Kushlev et al., 2017). Previous research has shown that instrumental digital consumption is generally associated with positive outcomes, including work efficiency and functional satisfaction (Kushlev & Leita, 2020; Meier et al., 2016). However, recent findings suggest that hedonic digital consumption does not always have a negative impact on well-being (Eden et al., 2020; Reinecke & Rieger, 2021). Under controlled usage conditions, hedonic consumption can actually contribute to psychological relaxation and emotional balance. This literature confirms that digital consumption behavior is a crucial factor related to the well-being implications of technology use. Several studies have shown that perceptions of the importance of digital technology do not always correlate with productive usage patterns, particularly in social contexts that do not require intensive technology use (Reinecke et al., 2011). Previous research has rarely examined how digital need priorities relate to different forms of digital consumption behavior. Therefore, distinguishing between instrumental and hedonic digital consumption is crucial for understanding the relationship between digital need priorities and well-being experiences in a digital context. Based on arguments above, this study proposes the following:

H3a: Digital Need Priority influences Digital Consumption Behavior–Instrumental.

H3b: Digital Need Priority influences Digital Consumption Behavior–Hedonic.

Digital Consumption Behavior and Digital Well-Being

The concept of digital well-being developed in response to the limitations of approaches that assess the impact of technology solely based on the duration of use. Digital well-being emphasizes balance, self-control, and the quality of digital experiences (M. M. P. Vanden Abeele, 2021). Previous research has shown that instrumental digital consumption generally contributes positively to digital well-being through increased efficiency, sense of competence, and control over technology (Büchi et al., 2019; Salanova et al., 2013). On the other hand, hedonic digital consumption is often associated with negative impacts, but recent findings suggest that controlled hedonic consumption can be restorative and support psychological well-being (Meier & Krause, 2023). However, previous literature still shows mixed findings and tends to generalize forms of digital consumption behavior. This study views both forms of behavior as important factors related to digital well-being. Therefore, this study proposes the following:

H4a: Digital Consumption Behavior–Instrumental has a positive influence on Digital Well-Being.

H4b: Digital Consumption Behavior–Hedonic has a positive influence on Digital Well-Being

Digital Need Priority and Digital Well-Being

As the discourse on “internet as a basic need” increases, the assumption arises that prioritizing digital needs will directly improve individual well-being (Rotondi et al., 2020; Vuorre & Przybylski, 2024). However, some studies question this assumption by showing that orientation towards needs does not always result in well-being if it is not manifested in healthy and meaningful behavior (Martela & Sheldon, 2019; Ryan & Deci, 2017). In this context, digital need priority is seen as a cognitive orientation that does not necessarily have a direct impact on well-being, as prioritizing digital needs is not always related to how individuals use technology in their daily lives. Therefore, a direct relationship between digital need priority and digital well-being needs to be empirically tested. Based on the literature and arguments above, this study proposes the following:

H5: Digital Need Priority has a positive influence on Digital Well-Being

The Mediating Role of Digital Consumption Behavior

Based on the stimulus–organism–response framework and consumer behavior literature, the relationship between need orientation and well-being is often related to how individuals realize these needs in their daily behavior. In the digital context, this suggests that the relationship between digital need priority and digital well-being is likely influenced by how individuals use technology in their daily lives. By distinguishing between hedonic and instrumental behavior, this study explores the possibility

that both forms of behavior are related to the relationship between digital need priority and digital well-being. Therefore, the hypothesis to be proven is:

H6a: Instrumental digital consumption behavior mediates the relationship between digital need priority and digital well-being.

H6b: Hedonic digital consumption behavior mediates the relationship between digital need priority and digital well-being.

Digital Well-Being, Subjective Well-Being and Stress

In the well-being literature, the domain-specific well-being approach states that well-being in one life domain can influence overall subjective well-being through spillover mechanisms (Diener et al., 2018). Digital well-being as a specific domain is becoming increasingly relevant as technology plays an increasing role in everyday life. Research over the past ten years has shown that individuals with high levels of digital well-being tend to have better life satisfaction and higher positive affect (Gugushvili et al., 2025; Verduyn et al., 2017). These findings indicate that balanced and controlled digital experiences can promote more positive evaluations of life well-being. However, there is still limited research that positions digital well-being as a factor directly related to subjective well-being, rather than simply a consequential variable. Based on the literature and arguments above, this study proposes the following:

H7: Digital Well-Being has a positive influence on Subjective Well-Being.

Technostress literature suggests that uncontrolled use of digital technology can trigger stress, burnout, and psychological distress (Tarafdar et al., 2019). In contrast, digital well-being is seen as a protective condition related to an individual's ability to manage digital demands more adaptively. Recent empirical studies have found that individuals with higher levels of digital well-being report lower levels of stress, although this relationship is often contextual and influenced by job characteristics and social demands (Ayyagary et al., 2017). Therefore, the relationship between digital well-being and stress needs further examination to understand the extent to which digital well-being has the potential to act as a protective factor against psychological distress. Based on the literature and arguments above, this study proposes the following:

H8: Digital Well-Being has a negative impact on Stress.

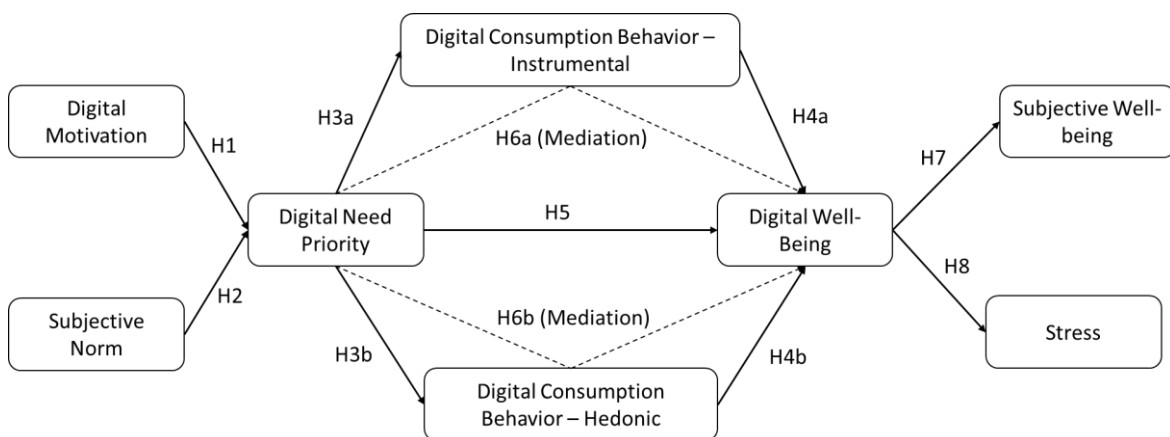


Figure 1. Research Framework

METHOD

This study used a cross-sectional survey of a population of active digital technology users, specifically adults who regularly use the internet and digital media in their daily lives, whether for work, information, or entertainment. The sample was determined using non-probability sampling with a purposive sampling approach based on the following criteria: (1) At least 18 years old; (2) Use the internet or digital devices daily; (3) Have direct experience in digital activities, both instrumental and hedonic. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on the subjective experiences and actual behavior of digital users, rather than on broad statistical generalizations of the population. The number of respondents analyzed in this study was 156. This selection of respondents was based on

several methodological considerations, namely the "10-times rule," which requires ten times the maximum number of structural paths leading to a single construct (J. F. Hair et al., 2019). Thus, the sample size used is considered adequate for exploratory and theory-refining SEM-PLS analysis.

The respondents to this study were predominantly individuals living in urban areas with diverse occupational backgrounds, but not all of them were intensively dependent on digital technology. This characteristic is relevant to the research objective, which sought to understand the position of digital needs in the context of a society exposed to technology but not yet fully digital-intensive. This context is important because it allows the research to understand how digital needs are perceived in the daily lives of a society that is not yet fully digital-intensive. Data collection was conducted online using a digital questionnaire platform. Respondents were given a brief explanation of the research objectives and were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Participation was voluntary, and respondents could stop completing the questionnaire at any time. The data were then analyzed using SEM-PLS, considering that SEM-PLS is used to handle relatively complex models, accommodate non-normal data distributions, and is oriented towards prediction and theory development. This approach aligns with the exploratory research objective of understanding the relationship between digital needs, digital behavior, and well-being. Because it uses a self-report-based cross-sectional design, the results of this study need to be interpreted as an associative relationship rather than a causal relationship.

RESULTS

Demographic Profile

Respondents in this study represented varied age groups, educational backgrounds, occupations, daily internet-use levels, and monthly internet expenditures. As shown in Table 1, respondents aged 26–35 years constituted the largest group (46%), followed by those aged 18–25 years (31%), 36–45 years (13%), over 55 years (5%), and 46–55 years (4%). In terms of education, 40% held a bachelor's degree, 31% held a postgraduate degree, and 29% were senior high school graduates.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents According to Demography

Demography aspect	frequency	N (%)
Age		
18 - 25	49	31
26 - 35	72	46
36 - 45	21	13
46 - 55	6	4
> 55	8	5
Education level		
Senior high School	45	29
Bachelor	63	40
Postgraduate	48	31
Occupation		
Student	47	30
Worker	25	16
Civil Servants	51	33
Entrepreneur	4	3
Others	29	19
Average daily internet usage (hours)		
<1	3	2
1-3	29	19
4-6	44	28
7-9	37	24
>10	43	28
Average internet spending per month		
< 50.000	22	14
50.000 - 100.000	73	47
101.000 - 200.000	42	27
> 200.000	19	12

Source: Data Processed (2026)

Respondents came from diverse occupational backgrounds, with civil servants accounting for 33%, students 30%, workers 16%, other occupations 19%, and entrepreneurs 3%. Regarding daily internet use, 28% reported 4–6 hours per day, 28% more than 10 hours, 24% 7–9 hours, 19% 1–3 hours, and 2% less than 1 hour. Monthly internet expenditure was concentrated in the Rp 50,000–Rp 100,000 category (47%), followed by Rp 101,000–Rp 200,000 (27%), below Rp 50,000 (14%), and above Rp 200,000 (12%).

Validity and Reliability

The measurement model was evaluated through validity, reliability, and multicollinearity tests. Convergent validity was assessed using outer loading, Composite Reliability (CR), Cronbach's Alpha (CA), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), while discriminant validity was examined to ensure that each construct was empirically distinct. Following Hair et al. (2010), outer loading values above 0.50 were considered acceptable. In addition, AVE values of 0.50 or higher indicate adequate convergent validity, showing that the construct explains more than half of the variance of its indicators (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 2. Loading Factor and Validity Test of The Components in the Model

Variabel	Item	Loading	CR	AVE
Digital Motivation (DM)	DM1	0.898	0.838	0.570
	DM2	0.597		
	DM3	0.799		
	DM4	0.692		
Subjective Norm (SN)	SN1	0.702	0.836	0.563
	SN2	0.646		
	SN3	0.792		
	SN4	0.846		
Digital Need Priority (DNP)	DNP1	0.730	0.907	0.619
	DNP2	0.775		
	DNP3	0.797		
	DNP4	0.868		
	DNP5	0.755		
	DNP6	0.788		
Digital Consumption Behavior – Instrumental (DCBI)	DCBI1	0.820	0.866	0.618
	DCBI2	0.814		
	DCBI3	0.760		
	DCBI4	0.749		
Digital Consumption Behavior – Hedonist (DCBH)	DCBH1	0.645	0.782	0.475
	DCBH2	0.605		
	DCBH3	0.801		
	DCBH4	0.691		
Digital Well-Being (DWB)	DWB1	0.769	0.859	0.604
	DWB2	0.709		
	DWB3	0.807		
	DWB4	0.820		
Subjective Well-Being (SWB)	SWB1	0.879	0.885	0.794
	SWB2	0.904		
Stress (STR)	STR1	0.605	0.842	0.575
	STR3	0.783		
	STR4	0.805		
	STR5	0.819		

Source: Data Processed (2026)

As shown in Table 2, most indicators had outer loading values above the recommended threshold, indicating that they adequately represented their latent constructs. Several indicators showed moderate loadings between 0.60 and 0.70, which are still acceptable in behavioral research, particularly for

heterogeneous and contextual constructs. Indicators with low loadings or empirical inconsistencies were removed during model refinement, while theoretically relevant indicators were retained.

The DCBH construct showed varied loading values, reflecting the heterogeneous nature of hedonic digital behavior, including entertainment, relaxation, and distraction. Therefore, indicators with moderate loadings were retained to preserve content validity. All constructs demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, with Composite Reliability (CR) values above 0.70. Most constructs also achieved AVE values above 0.50. Although the AVE of DCBH was slightly below the recommended threshold, its CR exceeded 0.70, and its indicators remained theoretically relevant. Following Hair et al. (2017; 2019) and Fornell & Larcker (1981) this condition is still acceptable when theoretical justification and construct reliability are adequate. Overall, the measurement model met the required reliability and validity criteria, indicating that the retained indicators were suitable for structural model testing.

Discriminant validity in this study was evaluated using the Heterotrait-Monotrait correlation ratio (HTMT). The test results showed that all HTMT values were below the recommended threshold. Most HTMT values were well below 0.85, indicating that each construct in the model had an adequate level of differentiation and did not exhibit conceptual overlap issues. The highest HTMT value was found in the relationship between digital well-being and subjective well-being (HTMT = 0.867). Although approaching the conservative threshold, this value is still within acceptable limits.

Table 3. Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio

	DCBH	DCBI	DM	DNP	DWB	SN	STR	SWB
DCBH								
DCBI	0.423							
DM	0.426	0.751						
DNP	0.518	0.128	0.140					
DWB	0.610	0.665	0.398	0.112				
SN	0.433	0.431	0.468	0.487	0.342			
STR	0.287	0.211	0.234	0.430	0.319	0.331		
SWB	0.271	0.569	0.32	0.188	0.867	0.331	0.256	

Source: Data Processed (2026)

To ensure the absence of multicollinearity issues between indicators in the measurement model, this study evaluated the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for all indicators used. Multicollinearity testing in the structural model was conducted by examining the inner VIF values. The test results showed that all inner VIF values ranged from 1,000 to 1,285. These values are well below the recommended limit of 3.3 or 5.0. The highest VIF value was found in the hedonic digital consumption behavior construct in predicting digital well-being, namely 1.285. Meanwhile, the VIF values for the instrumental digital consumption behavior construct and digital need priority in predicting digital well-being were 1.159 and 1.131, respectively. Furthermore, digital motivation and subjective norms as predictors of digital need priority had a VIF value of 1.063. Thus, it can be concluded that there is no multicollinearity problem between the predictor constructs in the structural model. Therefore, the model can proceed to the stage of evaluating path coefficients, R-square values, effect sizes, and predictive relevance.

Table 4. Collinearity Testing (Inner VIF)

Endogenous Construct	Predictor Construct	Inner VIF
DCBH	DNP	1.000
DCBI	DNP	1.000
DNP	DM, SN	1.063
DWB	DCBH, DCBI, DNP	1.285; 1.159; 1.131
STR	DWB	1.000
SWB	DWB	1.000

Source: Data Processed (2026)

The structural model was evaluated by examining path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R²), effect size (f²), and predictive relevance (Q²). This evaluation aimed to assess the strength of the relationship between constructs and the model's ability to explain and predict endogenous variables. Hair et al (2019) classified R² values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 as substantial, moderate, and weak,

respectively. Chin (1998) and Henseler et al (2009) defined R2 values of 0.67, 0.33, and 0.19 as indicators of substantial, moderate, and weak explanatory power, respectively. The R2 values in the study indicated that the model was able to explain 45.4% of the variation in DWB and 44.9% of the variation in SWB, which falls into the moderate to strong category for social research. Meanwhile, DNP was explained by 19.7% by DM and SN. The effect size (f^2) indicated that the contribution of DCBH ($f^2=0.311$) and DCBI ($f^2=0.214$) to DWB was at a moderate to near-large level. The effect of DWB on SWB was very strong ($f^2=0.815$), confirming the central role of DWB in the model.

This study assessed predictive relevance using a blindfolding procedure through the Q statistic. The Q2 values in this study indicate that the model has good predictive relevance for most endogenous constructs, especially DWB (Q2=0.246) and SWB (Q2=0.349). This indicates that the model is not only able to explain the relationship between variables but also has adequate predictive ability. Hair et al. (2019) stated that Q2 values of 0, 0.25, and 0.50 represent low, medium, and high predictive accuracy, respectively.

Hypothesis Testing

This study considers an effect to be significant if the t-statistic exceeds 1.96 and the p-value is below 0.05 at the 5% significance level. Furthermore, the coefficient parameter (original sample value, β) also indicates the direction and magnitude of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables Hair et al. (2017). This study used the bootstrapping method in SMART PLS 3 to examine the direct and indirect effects, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Hypothesis Test Result

Hypothesis	Relationship	Std Beta	t-statistic	p-value	Result
H1	DM $\rightarrow$ DNP	0.01	0.066	0.948	Rejected
H2	SN $\rightarrow$ DNP	0.441	6.391	0.000	Accepted
H3a	DNP $\rightarrow$ DCBI	-0.018	0.194	0.846	Rejected
H3b	DNP $\rightarrow$ DCBH	0.313	1.874	0.061	Rejected
H4a	DCBI $\rightarrow$ DWB	0.368	4.519	0.000	Accepted
H4b	DCBH $\rightarrow$ DWB	0.467	3.062	0.002	Accepted
H5	DNP $\rightarrow$ DWB	-0.114	1.536	0.125	Rejected
H6a	DNP $\rightarrow$ DCBI $\rightarrow$ DWB	-0.007	0.190	0.850	Rejected
H6b	DNP $\rightarrow$ DCBH $\rightarrow$ DWB	0.146	1.720	0.086	Rejected
H7	DWB $\rightarrow$ SWB	0.670	11.984	0.000	Accepted
H8	DWB $\rightarrow$ STR	-0.257	3.477	0.001	Accepted

Source: Data Processed (2026)

Hypothesis testing showed that subjective norm (SN) had a positive and significant effect on digital need priority (DNP) ($\beta = 0.441$; $t = 6.391$; $p < 0.001$), supporting H2. Digital motivation (DM) did not significantly affect DNP ($\beta = 0.010$; $t = 0.066$; $p = 0.948$), so H1 was rejected. DNP did not significantly affect instrumental digital consumption behavior (DCBI) ($\beta = -0.018$; $t = 0.194$; $p = 0.846$), resulting in rejection of H3a. The effect of DNP on hedonic digital consumption behavior (DCBH) was positive but not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.313$; $t = 1.874$; $p = 0.061$), so H3b was also rejected.

Instrumental digital consumption behavior (DCBI) had a positive and significant effect on digital well-being (DWB) ($\beta = 0.368$; $t = 4.519$; $p < 0.001$), supporting H4a. Hedonic digital consumption behavior (DCBH) also had a positive and significant effect on DWB ($\beta = 0.467$; $t = 3.062$; $p = 0.002$), supporting H4b. In contrast, DNP did not have a significant direct effect on DWB ($\beta = -0.114$; $t = 1.536$; $p = 0.125$), so H5 was rejected.

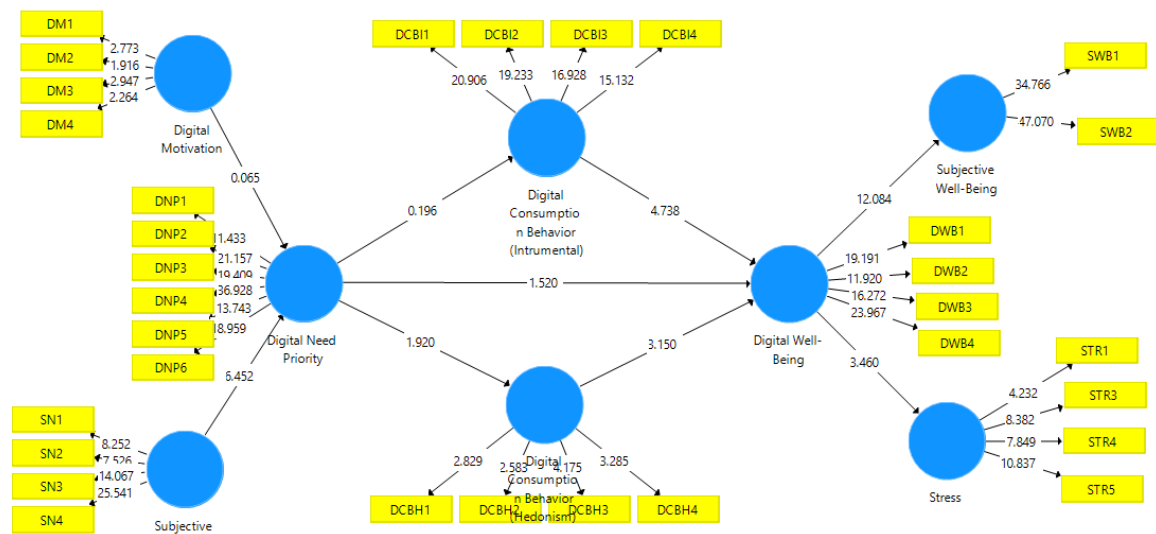


Figure 2. Bootstrapping Result

Source: Data Processed (2026)

The indirect-effect tests showed that DCBI did not significantly mediate the relationship between DNP and DWB ($\beta = -0.007$; $t = 0.190$; $p = 0.850$), so H6a was rejected. The indirect path through DCBH was also not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.146$; $t = 1.720$; $p = 0.086$), resulting in rejection of H6b. DWB had a positive and significant effect on subjective well-being (SWB) ($\beta = 0.670$; $t = 11.984$; $p < 0.001$), supporting H7, and a negative and significant effect on stress ($\beta = -0.257$; $t = 3.477$; $p = 0.001$), supporting H8.

DISCUSSION

This study aims to re-explore the position of digital needs in modern life, specifically to understand how digital needs are perceived and prioritized in the daily lives of people exposed to digital technology. Overall, the results indicate that digital needs do not show a significant direct relationship with well-being, while digital behavior and digital well-being show a stronger relationship with psychological outcomes. These findings provide an initial indication that the popular narrative that equates internet access with basic human needs needs to be reviewed more carefully and contextually, especially in societies that are not yet fully economically and professionally dependent on digital technology (Ragnedda & Muschert, 2024). The nonsignificant findings should not be interpreted as evidence that digital need priority is irrelevant. Instead, the results suggest that prioritizing digital needs may represent a cognitive perception that is socially constructed but insufficient to explain digital behavior and well-being outcomes. This finding is theoretically valuable because it challenges the assumption that perceived importance of digital access automatically translates into meaningful technology use or psychological benefits.

The study revealed that DNP did not significantly influence DWB, either directly or through the mediation of digital behavior. This finding empirically critiques the assumption that the higher an individual's priority on digital needs, the higher their well-being. This finding aligns with criticisms of the literal application of Maslow's hierarchy of needs in the digital context. Maslow (1943) placing basic needs as needs whose fulfillment is urgent and universal, however the results of this study show that the findings suggest that digital need priority functions more as a socially shaped cognitive orientation than as a direct predictor of well-being within the context examined in this study. These findings are consistent with the research of Schaller et al (2017) which emphasized that new needs in modern society do not always have uniform well-being effects across social and economic contexts. Furthermore, the weak relationship between DNP and DCBI suggests that prioritizing digital needs is not synonymous with productive digital use. These findings support Ragnedda & Ruiu (2017) argument regarding digital inequality, where access and orientation to technology do not automatically lead to meaningful use.

Three theoretical implications follow. First, the results distinguish need salience from need fulfilment: connectivity can be cognitively important without functioning like an urgent and universal physiological need. Maslow's hierarchy is therefore better read here as a context-sensitive architecture of needs than as a sequence that digital access simply overturns. Second, the model separates access and perceived priority from enacted behavior and well-being outcomes, adding a process explanation to the technology-adoption and digital-inequality literatures. Third, the significant role of subjective norm, together with the non-significant role of digital motivation, shifts the explanation of digital need priority from an individual-motivation account toward a socially constructed orientation. Collectively, the findings contribute to the wider technology-and-well-being debate by showing that the purpose and quality of use are more informative than the perceived importance of connectivity alone (Büchi, 2021; Tausch et al., 2011; M. M. P. Vanden Abeele, 2021).

From an Islamic economics perspective, this non-significant relationship does not mean that digital access lacks value. Rather, it indicates that benefit cannot be inferred from priority alone. *Maslahah* evaluates consumption by the benefit it produces and the harm it prevents, whereas *wasatiyyah* and *tawazun* require proportion between digital and non-digital needs. The finding therefore supports a distinction between recognizing a need and realizing it beneficially: digital access may serve *maqasid al-Shariah* by supporting knowledge, livelihoods, and social connection, but excessive or compulsive prioritization can approach *israf* when it displaces essential obligations or creates harm (Biplob & Abdullah, 2021; Chapra, 2008; Elmahjub, 2023).

Based on the analysis, SN was the only antecedent that significantly influenced DNP, while DM showed no significant effect. This finding underscores that prioritizing digital needs is driven more by social expectations, environmental pressures, and the need to stay socially connected, rather than by an intrinsic drive to thrive digitally. This finding aligns with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) which positions social norms as the primary determinant of behavior in public and symbolic contexts. In the digital context, pressure to always be online, responsive, and appear socially active fosters the perception that technology is essential to everyday social life, even though it does not always provide direct well-being benefits. These results also support findings Boursier et al. (2020), Büchi et al. (2019), Dhir et al. (2018), dan Yang et al. (2018) that suggest that the intensity and orientation of digital use are often more influenced by social factors than individual needs.

This result extends social-influence reasoning in a specific way. TPB and UTAUT commonly place subjective norm or social influence immediately before intention or use; in this study, its effect appears one stage earlier, in the construction of what counts as a priority. Normative environments may therefore confer urgency and necessity on connectivity even when an individual's intrinsic digital motivation is weak. This mechanism also helps explain why DNP did not predict actual consumption behavior: socially learned importance and enacted use are distinct processes (Ajzen, 1991; Lapinski & Rimal, 2005; Venkatesh et al., 2012).

In Indonesia's Muslim-majority setting, the significant effect of subjective norm also suggests a possible social pathway through which Islamic values may shape digital choices. Families, educational institutions, religious communities, and peer groups may normalize purposeful use, ethical communication, privacy protection, and self-restraint. Prior work showing that *wasatiyyah* can shape financial decisions illustrates how religiously framed moderation may translate values into consumption choices (Ramlee et al., 2019). However, the present study did not measure religiosity or the internalization of Islamic values; this interpretation is therefore theoretically grounded rather than an empirical conclusion.

The most consistent finding in this study is the significant influence of Digital Consumption Behavior, both instrumental and hedonic, on DWB. These results confirm that the quality and purpose of technology use are more closely related to DWB than digital needs orientation itself. Instrumental digital use, such as for work and skill development, is associated with increased DWB through increased feelings of control, competence, and effectiveness. This finding aligns with Venkatesh et al (2012), Turel et al (2011), Sun et al (2017) dan Turel et al (2019) which emphasizes that purposeful and meaningful technology use contributes positively to individual well-being. Interestingly, hedonic digital use also showed a positive influence on DWB. This finding supports the argument that digital use for entertainment is not always dysfunctional but can serve as a psychological recovery mechanism when

done moderately and managed. This is consistent with Li et al (2021) which emphasizes the hedonic value of the consumption experience.

The positive effects of both instrumental and hedonic digital behavior are also compatible with Islamic consumption ethics when use remains purposeful and proportionate. Islamic ethics does not require the rejection of permissible recreation; it regulates consumption through moderation and the avoidance of harm and excess. Hedonic digital use may therefore support recovery and well-being when bounded by *wasatiyyah*, while the same activity becomes ethically problematic when it is compulsive, wasteful, or interferes with obligations. Likewise, instrumental use contributes to *maslahah* when it enhances knowledge, productivity, and social benefit rather than merely increasing screen exposure (Biplob & Abdullah, 2021; Pusparini et al., 2024; Sholihin, 2024).

Digital Well-Being (DWB) has been shown to have a very strong influence on SWB and a negative effect on stress. These findings confirm the role of DWB as an important psychological factor linking everyday digital practices to broader psychological well-being (Büchi, 2021; Reinecke & Rieger, 2021; Vanden Abeele & Nguyen, 2024). These results align with the DWB framework proposed by Vanden Abeele, (2021) which views DWB as a dynamic state reflecting an individual's sense of balance, control, and comfort in interacting with technology. Furthermore, these findings support the technostress literature, which suggests that unmanaged digital use can increase stress, while healthier use is associated with lower stress levels (Fischer & Riedl, 2017; Tarafdar et al., 2019).

Digital well-being also has a conceptual parallel with Islamic accounts of holistic well-being insofar as both emphasize balance, self-regulation, beneficial functioning, and protection from harm across worldly responsibilities. Nevertheless, digital well-being should not be equated with Islamic spiritual well-being, which was not measured in this study. The Islamic lens is used to specify ethical criteria for evaluating digital practices, while DWB remains the empirically tested domain-specific psychological construct (Chapra, 2008; Pusparini et al., 2024).

These relationships extend ethical responsibility beyond individual self-control. The principle of 'adl requires fair digital access and protection from exploitative design, whereas *hisbah*-oriented public accountability supports transparent platform practices, safe learning environments, and safeguards against manipulative or addictive features. Digital well-being should therefore be treated as a shared responsibility among users, families, educators, platforms, and policymakers rather than solely as an individual's ability to disconnect (Elmahjub, 2023; Raquib et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

This study re-examines the position of digital needs in modern life by integrating the hierarchy of needs perspective, digital consumption behavior, and the digital well-being framework. The findings show that digital need priority does not directly influence digital well-being. Instead, digital well-being is more strongly related to how individuals use technology, particularly through instrumental and hedonic digital consumption behavior. Subjective norm also emerges as the most consistent factor related to digital need priority, while digital motivation does not show a significant effect. These findings suggest that, in a society that is not yet fully digital-intensive, digital needs may function more as socially influenced priorities than as direct determinants of well-being.

Theoretically, this study offers a contextual reading of Maslow's hierarchy of needs in the digital era by showing that not all emerging digital needs can be positioned as basic needs. It also enriches digital behavior literature by distinguishing instrumental and hedonic digital consumption as important factors associated with digital well-being. Furthermore, the study supports the importance of digital well-being as a key construct linking digital practices with subjective well-being and stress, suggesting that the quality of technology use is more important than merely prioritizing digital access. An Islamic ethical reading further clarifies that digital access is not an end in itself; its value depends on whether it produces *maslahah*, preserves *tawazun*, and prevents harm and *israf*. The study's distinctive contribution is therefore to separate digital access or intensity, cognitive need priority, enacted consumption behavior, and well-being outcomes within one process model, while moving social influence upstream from adoption to the formation of need priority.

Practically, the findings imply that improving digital well-being requires more than expanding internet access or encouraging digital adoption. A well-being-oriented digital literacy program should

combine five components: intentional goal-setting before going online; management of notifications, attention, and time; critical information verification and privacy protection; healthy sleep, rest, and relationship boundaries; and reflective evaluation of whether instrumental and recreational use produces the intended benefit. These components can be delivered through school and university modules, workplace microlearning, peer-led workshops, and family or religious-community sessions. Evaluation should combine validated DWB, stress, and SWB measures with behavioral indicators such as task completion, boundary adherence, notification management, and balance between instrumental and recreational use. Screen time alone should not be treated as the success criterion because the findings indicate that purpose and quality matter; recent cross-country evidence likewise emphasizes the contextual and non-linear relationship between digital engagement and well-being.

Organizations and employers can translate these principles into explicit response-time norms, protected non-work periods or right-to-disconnect arrangements, asynchronous communication channels, default quiet hours, manager training, and periodic employee digital-well-being pulse checks. The evaluation criteria should include stress, recovery, work-life boundary control, perceived communication pressure, and work effectiveness, rather than online availability alone. These measures are consistent with WHO and ILO guidance on safe telework, which emphasizes agreed availability signals, adequate rest, manager training, and shared responsibility among governments, employers, workers, and occupational health services.

Technology developers and platform designers should provide user-controlled notification bundling and quiet modes, meaningful-use dashboards, friction after prolonged use, transparent recommendation and autoplay controls, and safeguards against manipulative attention capture. Product evaluation should therefore include user well-being, safety, and perceived control alongside engagement and retention. Policymakers can support implementation through public-procurement standards, transparency requirements, independent impact evaluation, and incentives for well-being-oriented design. These mechanisms are especially important where commercial interests create resistance to reducing excessive engagement.

For Islamic banks, halal businesses, Islamic social enterprises, and digital marketers, the significant role of subjective norm creates both an opportunity and an ethical responsibility. Social proof and community influence can be used to normalize purposeful consumption, trustworthy information, privacy protection, and moderate digital routines, but should not be used to manufacture fear of missing out, artificial urgency, or compulsive engagement. In this way, Islamic digital-economy initiatives can align marketing and platform practices with *maslahah*, *wasatiyyah*, 'adl, and transparent consumer treatment.

Implementation must balance digital inclusion with protection from overuse. Access expansion should continue for underserved groups, while well-being safeguards should be tailored to purpose, age, work demands, and digital dependence rather than imposed as blanket restrictions. A scalable sequence is to pilot individual-level routines, embed successful practices in school and workplace policies, and then incorporate independently evaluated components into national digital-literacy and platform-governance strategies. Funding can be integrated into existing education, workforce-development, occupational-health, and digital-inclusion budgets, supplemented by transparent industry contributions that do not compromise independent evaluation. Coordination among educators, employers, religious and community organizations, policymakers, and technology developers is essential because no single stakeholder controls the full pathway from social expectations to digital behavior and well-being.

This study has several limitations. Its cross-sectional design limits the ability to capture changes in digital needs and well-being over time. In addition, the respondents were mainly from urban communities with moderate digital dependence, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to more digitally intensive contexts. Future studies are encouraged to use longitudinal or mixed-method approaches and compare different regions or levels of digital development to better understand how digital needs and well-being evolve across social and technological contexts. Because Islamic values, religiosity, and Muslim identity were not measured, the Islamic interpretation should not be read as an observed mechanism among the respondents. Future research should directly examine *wasatiyyah*, *maslahah* orientation, and Islamic ethical internalization as antecedents, mediators, or moderators of the relationships among subjective norm, digital need priority, digital consumption behavior, and digital well-being.

To support cumulative knowledge building, future research can test three boundary propositions. Proposition 1: the positive relationship between subjective norm and digital need priority will be stronger in collectivist or high-normative-pressure settings and among younger users. Proposition 2: digital need priority will be more likely to translate into instrumental or hedonic behavior when digital dependence, skills, and opportunity are high. Proposition 3: the purpose and quality of use will explain digital well-being more consistently than need priority or aggregate use intensity, while self-regulation and Islamic ethical internalization may condition these relationships in Muslim contexts.

These propositions should be examined through multi-country and multi-age comparisons, longitudinal designs, and experiments that manipulate normative cues or usage purposes. Measurement invariance should be established across cultural groups, and future models should distinguish access, perceived priority, use intensity, instrumental and hedonic purpose, digital dependence, and digital well-being. Such designs would test the generalizability and causal ordering of the present findings rather than assuming that a single hierarchy or pathway applies across contexts.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Conceptualization, methodology development, and the formulation of the research framework were carried out by Intan Kusuma Pratiwi and Ulfatun Hasanah. Data collection, formal analysis, and investigation were conducted by Intan Kusuma Pratiwi and Nur Awwalunnisa. Original draft preparation and writing were performed by Intan Kusuma Pratiwi and Nur Awwalunnisa, while review, editing, and supervision were carried out by Ulfatun Hasanah. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of this work.

AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used AI-assisted tools, such as grammar checkers and language enhancement software, solely for the purpose of improving readability and refining the language of the manuscript. No generative AI tools were used for data analysis, statistical modeling, interpretation of results, conceptual development, or core scientific writing. The authors take full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of the research findings and the final content of this article.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper. The research was conducted independently, and the results are presented objectively and without bias. The authors have no affiliation with or financial interest in any commercial digital platform or technology company that could be perceived as influencing the analysis or conclusions of this study.

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