The effect of digital leisure participation purposes on psychological well-being among Generation Y: the mediating role of flow experience

Efectos de los propósitos de participación en el ocio digital sobre el bienestar psicológico en la Generación Y: el papel mediador de la experiencia de flujo

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Abstract

Background: This study examines the mediating role of flow experience in the relationship between participation purposes in digital leisure activities and psychological well-being. Study also investigates the direct effects of participation purposes on flow experience and the effect of flow experience on psychological well-being.
Method: The sample consisted of 291 Generation Y individuals (aged 29–44) selected through purposive sampling, all of whom actively engage with digital platforms during their leisure time. Data were collected using three standardized instruments: the Digital Leisure Participation Purposes Scale (DLPPS), comprising four subdimensions (game, entertainment, socialization, and communication); the Digital Leisure Flow Experience Scale (DLFES), with three subdimensions (experience, activity, and time); and the Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWBS), which has a unidimensional positive structure.
Results: Data analysis was conducted in two stages. First, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to validate the measurement models. Second, structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to examine direct and mediating effects. The results indicate that participation purposes in digital leisure activities have significant positive effects on both flow experience ($\beta = 0.914$, $p < 0.001$) and psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.364$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, flow experience significantly and positively affects psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.405$, $p < 0.001$), confirming its mediating role.
Conclusions: The findings suggest that Generation Y individuals strongly integrate digital technologies into their daily lives, and that participation in digital leisure activities enhances psychological well-being through the mediating effect of flow experience. Future research should account for the duration and frequency of digital leisure engagement to mitigate potential risks such as addiction and negative health outcomes.

Keywords

Digital leisure; flow experience, psychological well-being; Y generation.

Resumen

Objetivo: Este estudio examina el papel mediador de la experiencia de flujo en la relación entre los propósitos de participación en actividades de ocio digital y el bienestar psicológico. Asimismo, investiga los efectos directos de dichos propósitos sobre la experiencia de flujo y el efecto de esta sobre el bienestar psicológico.
Metodología: La muestra estuvo compuesta por 291 individuos de la Generación Y (de 29 a 44 años), seleccionados mediante muestreo intencional, todos ellos usuarios activos de plataformas digitales durante su tiempo de ocio. Los datos se recopilaron mediante tres instrumentos estandarizados: la Escala de Propósitos de Participación en el Ocio Digital (DLPPS), compuesta por cuatro subdimensiones (juego, entretenimiento, socialización y comunicación); la Escala de Experiencia de Flujo en el Ocio Digital (DLFES), con tres subdimensiones (experiencia, actividad y tiempo); y la Escala de Bienestar Psicológico (PWBS), de estructura unidimensional positiva.
Resultados: El análisis de datos se realizó en dos etapas. En primer lugar, se llevó a cabo un análisis factorial confirmatorio (AFC) para validar los modelos de medida. En segundo lugar, se empleó el modelado de ecuaciones estructurales (SEM) para examinar los efectos directos y de mediación. Los resultados indican que los propósitos de participación en el ocio digital tienen efectos positivos y significativos tanto sobre la experiencia de flujo ($\beta = 0.914$, $p < 0.001$) como sobre el bienestar psicológico ($\beta = 0.364$, $p < 0.001$). Además, la experiencia de flujo ejerce un efecto positivo y significativo sobre el bienestar psicológico ($\beta = 0.405$, $p < 0.001$), lo que confirma su papel mediador.
Conclusiones: Los hallazgos sugieren que los individuos de la Generación Y integran de manera significativa las tecnologías digitales en su vida cotidiana, y que la participación en actividades de ocio digital mejora el bienestar psicológico a través del efecto mediador de la experiencia de flujo. Las investigaciones futuras deberían considerar la duración y la frecuencia del uso del ocio digital para prevenir posibles riesgos, como la adicción y efectos negativos en la salud.

Palabras clave

Ocio digital; experiencia de flujo, bienestar psicológico; generación Y.

Introduction

Leisure experiences have undergone a significant transformation in recent decades. Technological developments and their impact on human life have led to the digitalization of leisure experiences (Bryce, 2001; Juniu, 2009; Syamsudin et al., 2025). Leisure activities have become significantly digitalized in indoor environments, independent of time and space (Nimrod & Adoni, 2012; Sintas et al., 2017). This situation is believed to have a more profound impact on Generations Y and Z, particularly given the chronology of technological advancements (Simsek, 2025). These changes created the concept of digital leisure, which is a new form of leisure (Blanco, 2015). Digital leisure allows individuals to experience leisure activities for different purposes and through digital technologies (Er & Cengiz, 2022).

The impact of digital technologies on daily life and therefore the transformation of leisure experience has been the subject of different studies (Sintas et al., 2015; Spracklen, 2015; Carnicelli et al., 2016; Schultz & McKeown, 2018; Gellmers & Yan, 2023). Although there are many different approaches from a conceptual perspective, the digitalization of the leisure experience is considered as "digital leisure". Sintas et al., (2015) consider digital leisure as a freely chosen activity that takes place with digital technologies in leisure activities. Digital leisure is a leisure experience in which individuals freely engage in digital environments for various purposes, without spatial limitations, using digital technologies. In this type of leisure, individuals use digital technologies for various purposes, such as game, entertainment, socializing, and communication (Er & Cengiz, 2023; 2025). Digital leisure activities have unique qualities such as interactivity, anonymity, asynchronous participation and virtual reality flow, allowing for different experiences (Nimrod & Ivan, 2022). Studies on motivation to participate in digital leisure activities include factors such as pleasure, relaxation, autonomy, and pride as positive emotions, while negative emotions include boredom, tension, shame, anxiety, and frustration (Guo et al., 2025, Stefanica et al., 2025).

Digital leisure participation purposes were categorized by Er & Cengiz (2022) as game, entertainment, socializing and communication. Individuals do not experience any limitations in participating in digital leisure activities for these purposes (Carnicelli et al., 2016). In terms of daily life, playing games on digital platforms stands out as a widespread leisure activity (Boudreau and Consalvo, 2014; Pizzo, 2023). Furthermore, digital leisure, as games, is seen as an activity where people can spend time together and socialize by communicating (Gonçalves et al. 2023). Digital leisure activities also include activities that provide participants with entertainment and relaxation outside of their daily routine (Sintas et al., 2017). This has led to the emergence of entertainment as another purpose of participation. Especially in times of increased leisure activities at home, indoors, entertainment represents a significant purpose of participation (Tiilikainen, 2013; Stollfuß, 2020). The activities through which humans, defined as social beings, socialize have recently undergone changes. The phenomenon of socialization has moved from the real world to the virtual world, and for Generations Y and Z, as discussed in this study, socialization has become a need met through digital platforms (Khang et al., 2024). The proliferation of social media as a leisure activity, especially through smartphones, has made the socialization factor an easily accessible way to participate in digital leisure (Rojas de Francisco et al., 2016). Ease of access and accessibility in interpersonal communication has created another dimension, communication, as a purpose for digital leisure participation. This dimension provides convenience for individuals by reducing barriers such as time and distance (Arora, 2011; Sharaievska, 2017; Meier et al., 2021). The most important reason for this is the freedom of choice, independent of location and time, provided by the development of information and communication technologies (Er & Cengiz, 2022). Participation in digital leisure activities is also closely related to the flow experience (Chang et al., 2023; Er & Cengiz, 2025).

Flow experience, developed by Csikszentmihalyi within the context of positive psychology, refers to a state of balance between challenges in leisure activities and the skills required to overcome them (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1992). During the flow experience, which represents a psychological process, individuals achieve a balance between their skills and abilities, forgetting about external factors such as time and fatigue (Elkington, 2011; Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Flow experience is inherently enjoyable (Hoffmann & Novak, 1996) and reflects a highly satisfying experience derived from the intensity of the activity (Clarke & Haworth, 1994; Ghani & Dehpande, 1994). Digital leisure flow experience was conceptualized by Er and Cengiz (2023). Based on the conceptual relationship between the

leisure experience and the flow experience (Cheng et al., 2016; Chang, 2017, Tao et al., 2022), the authors conceptualized the digital leisure flow experience. The concept refers to the content of the flow experience among the activities individuals participate in digital environments during their leisure (Er & Cengiz, 2023). There is evidence that the flow experience experienced by individuals in digital leisure activities is associated with psychological well-being (Roberts & David, 2023). Furthermore, flow significantly impacts psychological well-being (Tse et al., 2021; Mao et al., 2024).

Psychological well-being refers to a component of the human experience that lacks the negative aspects such as depression, anxiety, anger, and fear, yet possesses positive dimensions such as positive emotions, meaning, healthy relationships, environmental mastery, participation, and self-actualization (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman, 2011). Seligman's (2011) Wellbeing Theory identifies five life domains that individuals maintain for their own well-being: positive emotion, engagement or flow, positive relationships, meaning or purpose, and achievement (PERMA). Well-being cannot be defined by a single component of this theory, and all components that make up the model contribute to well-being. Each component in the PERMA model contributes to well-being; attainment is not for the sake of achieving the component, but for its own sake, and each component is measured independently of the others. Various aspects of psychological well-being have positive effects on individuals' lives. Individuals with high life satisfaction are reported to be physically healthier, achieve greater success, have stronger social relationships, and contribute more to society (Howell et al. 2007; Lyubomirsky et al. 2005; Pressman & Cohen, 2005). Today, individuals spend a significant part of their daily leisure time on digital platforms. These preferences, which give rise to the concept of digital leisure, also require an examination of participation purposes, individuals' flow experiences, and the closely related state of psychological well-being.

The purpose of this study is to test the mediating role of digital leisure flow experience in the impact of digital leisure participation purposes on psychological well-being. In line with the research model, the impact of digital leisure participation purposes on the flow experience and the impact of flow experience on psychological well-being are also examined. Questions regarding the research model are as follows:

H1: Digital leisure participation purposes have an impact on psychological well-being.

H2: Digital leisure participation purposes have an impact on the digital leisure flow experience.

H3: Digital leisure flow experience has a mediating role in the effect of digital leisure participation purposes on psychological well-being.

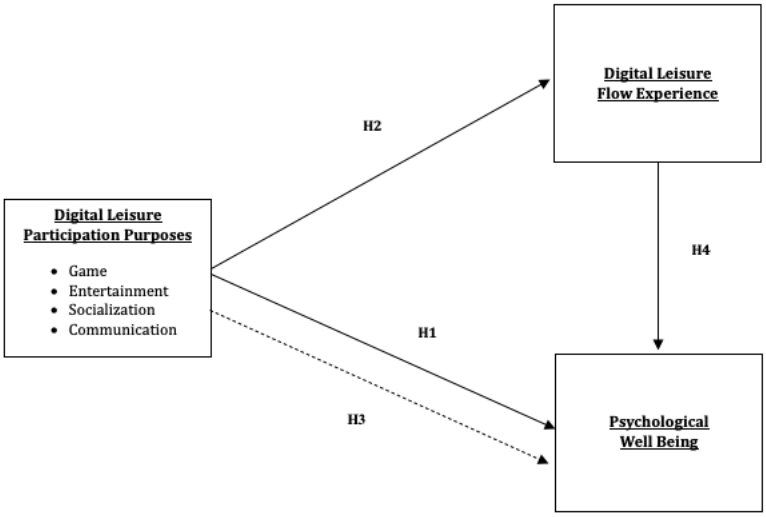
H4: Digital leisure flow experience has an impact on psychological well-being.

Method

Study Design and Procedures

This study utilized a cross-sectional design. An online survey (Google Forms) was used as the data collection tool. This approach was chosen to facilitate access to the target population. Based on the analyzed literature, we built the model presented in Figure 1 to test four hypotheses, mentioned in the Introduction section, regarding the relationship between the purposes of participating in digital leisure activities and psychological well-being, as well as the mediating role of the digital leisure flow experience in this relationship.

Figure 1. Hypothetical model of the current study. Solid lines represent direct effects. Dashed lines represent indirect effects of digital leisure participation purposes on psychological well-being via flow experience.



Participants

The study sample consisted of 126 women and 165 men with an average age of 31.91±2.54 years. Participants were selected using purposive sampling from individuals who use digital platforms for various purposes in their leisure. Inclusion criteria were that individuals were born within the Y Generation, 29-44 years (Bencsik et al. 2016) and participated in digital leisure activities (Er and Cengiz, 2022). Participation in the study was voluntary and conducted in accordance with the principles stated in the Helsinki Declaration. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee, İstanbul Aydın University with decision number 2026/01.

The required sample size for sample adequacy was calculated using the JAMOVI program. Based on an effect size of .15, a 1% margin of error, and 95% power, the required sample size was determined to be 137. Although the recommended sample size for structural equation modeling studies is 150, sample sizes of 200 or less are considered problematic (Barrett, 2007, Soper, 2024).

Assessment Tools

The Digital Leisure Participation Purposes Scale (DLPPS), the Digital Leisure Flow Experience Scale (DLFES), and the Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWBS) were used as data collection tools in this study.

Digital leisure participation purposes scale (DLPPS)

Developed by Er and Cengiz (2022), the DLPPS is designed to measure individuals' digital leisure participation purposes. Consisting of 24 items, the scale comprises four sub-dimensions: game, entertainment, socialization, and communication. Each item uses a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Er and Cengiz (2022) found the internal consistency coefficients of the scale to be α=.82 for the game dimension, α=.85 for the entertainment dimension, α=.80 for the socialization dimension, and α=.80 for the communication dimension.

Digital leisure flow experience scale (DLFES)

DLFES developed by Er and Cengiz (2023) to measure the flow experience in participation in digital leisure activities. The scale consists of 17 items and 3 sub-dimensions: experience, activity, and time. The scale also provides a measurement of the flow experienced in digital leisure participation based on a total score. Higher scores represent a higher level of digital leisure flow experience. The scale has a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Er and Cengiz (2023) determined the internal consistency coefficients of the scale as α=.87 for the experience dimension, α=.80 for the activity dimension, and .74 for the time dimension.

Psychological well-being scale (PWBS)

The Psychological Well-being Scale, developed by Diener et al. (2009), is a measurement tool that identifies important elements of human functioning, from positive relationships to feelings of competence, and having a meaningful and purposeful life. The scale, whose validity and reliability for Turkish culture were tested by Telef (2013), consists of 8 items and a single factor and the internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be α=.87. The answer options are on a scale from 1 (total disagreement) to 7 (total agreement). A high arithmetic mean of the responses represents a person with many psychological resources and strengths, thus 4.6 represents a perception of 50%, 80% is associated with an average of 5.0, and above 5.2 the perception of psychological well-being is greater than 90%.

Data analysis

The SPSS 25 and JAMOVI software package was used for all analysis of the study. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used in the analysis of the data. In the model, which was based on a literature review, independent (digital leisure participation purposes), dependent (psychological well-being), and mediating (digital leisure flow experience) variables were identified. Before the analyses, the data were examined for missing values and multivariate outliers. The variables were also checked for normal distribution and multi-collinearity. The analyses were carried out in two stages. In the first stage, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was applied to the three scales: DLLPS, DLPFES, and PWBS. In the second stage, structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the research hypotheses. Model fit in the CFA and SEM analyses was tested using the comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis's index (TLI), good fit index (GFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). CFI, TLI and GFI values of .90 and above, RMSEA and SRMR values of 0.08 and below are considered as acceptable model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2011; Schumacker ve Lomax, 2016). All analyses for the study were performed using the SPSS 25 and JAMOVI software package with a sample size of 10,000 bootstrap samples and a 95% confidence interval. (George & Mallery, 2010; Sadenova et al. 2025).

Results

Preliminary Analysis

Table 1 presents the arithmetic mean, standard deviation, Skewness, Kurtosis and reliability values of the variables. Multivariate outliers were examined based on Mahalanobis distances and 14 cases were removed from the data. It showed a normal distribution according to the Skewness (ranging from -.537 to -.870) and Kurtosis (ranging from -.391 to .531) values of 291 participants (George & Mallery, 2010). Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficients have a very reliable structure between .83 and .96 (Hair Jr et al., 2014).

Table 1. Mean, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis and Cronbach alpha values

Dimensions	X	Sd.	Skewness	Kurtosis	α
DLPPS					
Game	4.59	1.30	-.633	.531	.83
Entertainment	4.71	1.34	-.752	.388	.94
Socialization	4.53	1.51	-.537	-.391	.93
Communication	4.73	1.32	-.695	.493	.90
DLFES					
Experience	4.61	1.34	-.554	.229	.93
Activity	4.69	1.45	-.650	.029	.92
Time	4.64	1.39	-.568	.231	.89
Flow Total	4.64	1.30	-.558	.296	.96
PWBS					
PWB	5.37	1.02	-.870	1.033	.90

Structural Equation Modelling

As shown Table 2, the CFA results indicated that all scales had acceptable fit indices: DLPPS (x2=724, df=280 CFI=.910, TLI=.914, GFI=.912 RMSEA=.071, SRMR=.051 p<.01), DLFES (x2=456, df=163, CFI=.922, TLI=.929, GFI=.921, RMSEA=.076, SRMR=.039, p<.01) and PWBS (x2=121, df=32, CFI=.934,

TLI=.931, GFI=.932, RMSEA=.074, SRMR=.037, p<.01). The SEM used to test the hypothetical model had also acceptable fit indices (x2=146, df=24, CFI=.955, TLI=.915, GFI=.919, RMSEA=.063, SRMR=.029, p<.01).

Table 2. Fit indices of the confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling

	X^2	df	CFI	TLI	GFI	RMSEA	SRMR	p
CFA Models								
DLPPS	724	280	.910	.914	.912	.071	.051	<.01
DLFES	456	163	.922	.929	.921	.076	.039	<.01
PWBS	121	32	.934	.931	.932	.074	.037	<.01
Structural Model	146	24	.955	.915	.919	.063	.029	<.01

*Significant differences, p< .05.

DPPLS: Digital Leisure Participation Purposes Scale; DLFES: Digital Leisure Flow Experience Scale; PWBS: Psychological Well Being Scale

Table 3 and Figure 2 present the direct effects of the hypothetical model. The direct effects of digital leisure participation purposes on digital leisure flow experience (β=.914, p<.01) and psychological well-being (β=.364, p<.01) were significant. Likewise, the direct effect on psychological well-being of digital leisure flow experience (β=.405, p<.01) were significant.

Table 3. Direct effect of the hypothetical model

Independent Variable		Dependent Variable	Estimate	SE	95% C.I. Lower	95% C.I. Upper	β	z	p
DLPP	⇒	DLFE	.954	.117	.900	1.367	.914	9.52	<.01
DLPP	⇒	PWB	.361	.062	.233	.496	.364	5.43	<.01
DLFE	⇒	PWB	.515	.080	.362	.697	.405	6.20	<.01

*Significant differences, p< .05.

Figure 2. Structural equation model results

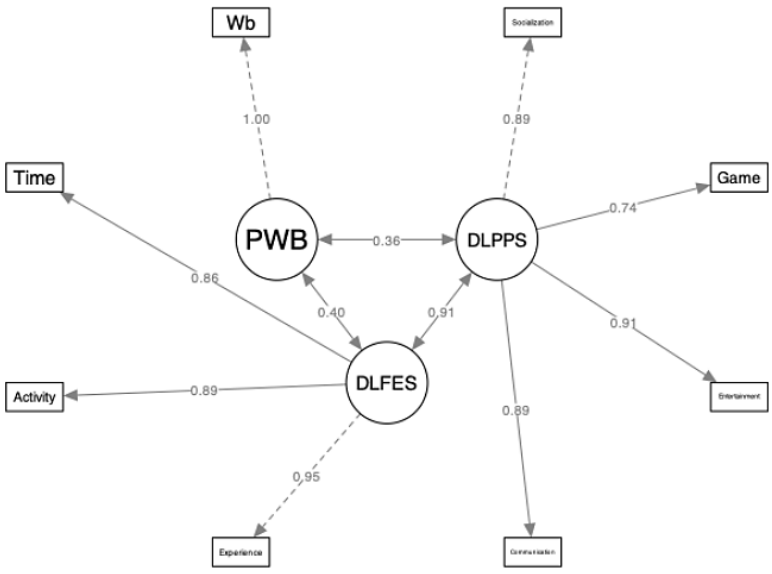


Table 4 shows the results of the Pearson correlation test between the variables. Pearson product-moment correlations indicated that digital leisure participation purposes, digital leisure flow experience and psychological well-being correlated positively. The correlation coefficients ranged between .291 and .740.

Table 4. Bivariate correlations of the variables.

Correlations	Game	Entertainment	Socialization	Communication	Experience	Activity	Time	Psychological Well Being
Game	-	.691**	.522**	.534**	.571**	.599**	.541**	.291**
Entertainment		-	.688**	.670**	.714**	.683**	.659**	.302**
Socialization			-	.643**	.723**	.622**	.611**	.288**
Communication				-	.740**	.644**	.614**	.391**
Experience					-	.721**	.709**	.354**
Activity						-	.704**	.381**
Time							-	.340**
Psychological Well Being								-

*Significant differences, p< .05.

In addition, Figure 3 shows the results regarding the partial mediating role of digital leisure flow experience in the effect of digital leisure activity participation purposes on psychological well-being.

Figure 3. The partial mediating role of digital leisure flow experience in the effects of digital leisure participation purposes on psychological well-being.

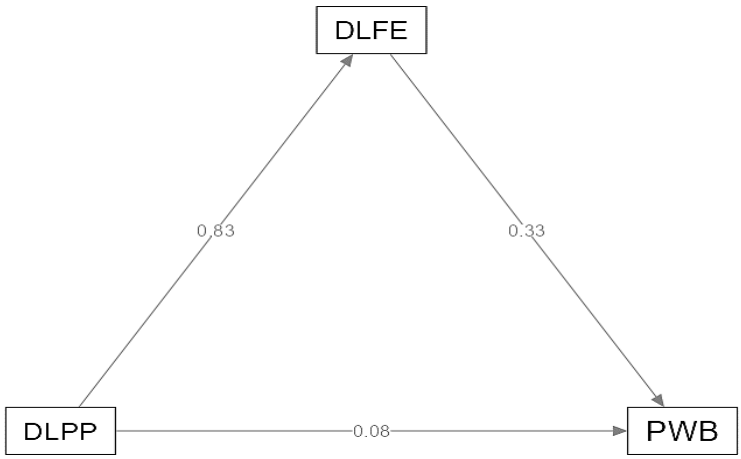


Table 5 presents the total and indirect effects of the hypothetical model. The direct effect of DLPP on DLFE (β=.8266 95% CI [=3.0110- =3.464]; p<.01) were significant. Likewise direct effect of DLFE on PWB (β=.3321 95% CI [=.0257- =.153]; p<.01) were significant. On the other hand, the direct effect of DLPP on PWB (β=.0787 95% CI [=-.1520- =.322]; p<.410) were not significant. The total effect of DLPP on PWB (β=.3532 95% CI [=.22021- =.530]; p<.01) were significant. Likewise, the indirect effects on PWB via DLFES (β =.2745 95% CI [–.0870 – –.499]) were significant.

Table 5. Indirect and total effects of the hypothetical model

				95% C.I. (a)				
Type	Effect	Estimate	SE	Lower	Upper	β	z	p
Indirect	DLPP ⇒ DLFE ⇒ PWB	.2826	.0820	.0870	.499	.2745	3.445	<.01
	DLPP ⇒ DLFE	.2542	.1299	3.0110	3.464	.8266	25.051	<.01
Direct	DLFE ⇒ PWB	.0868	.0250	.0257	.153	.3321	3.479	<.01
	DLPP ⇒ PWB	.0810	.0983	-.1520	.322	.0787	.824	.410
Total	DLPP ⇒ PWB	.3636	.0566	.2201	.530	.3532	6.429	<.01

*Significant differences, p< .05.

Discussion

The main purpose of this study is to examine the mediating role of digital leisure flow experience in the relationship between digital leisure participation purposes and psychological well-being. To our knowledge, this study is the first SEM analysis on this subject in terms of the relationship between digital leisure, flow experience and psychological well-being.

In line with the first hypothesis of our study, it was determined that the purposes of digital leisure participation have a direct effect on psychological well-being in the model established for SEM. In this case, first hypothesis (H1) was accepted. However, in the model of the partial mediating role of digital leisure flow experience in the effects of digital leisure participation purposes on psychological well-being, it was found that the purposes of digital leisure participation do not have a direct effect on psychological well-being, but rather the flow experience has a mediating role. This is an important finding regarding the relationship between digital leisure participation purposes and psychological well-being. Previous studies on the relationship between digital leisure participation purposes and psychological well-being have yielded varying results. Goh et al. (2019) concluded that as the duration of gaming as a digital leisure activity increased psychological well-being decreased. However, they also found that the purpose of escapism mediated this relationship. Liu et al. (2025) addressed the entertainment dimension of digital technology use in leisure in relation to mental health and depression. In their study, they stated that increased participation time increased depression, while moderate durations reflected a temporary coping mechanism. In another study on the entertainment dimension, Aziz et al. (2018) emphasized that entertainment as a digital leisure participation purpose is a widespread area of use affecting human life at different levels and scopes. However, their study showed that a large majority of participants described the entertainment dimension as a positive experience. Studies focusing on the relationship between socialization, particularly through social media, and psychological well-being are numerous. Zhang et al. (2023) concluded that social media use is directly related to psychological well-being. Twenge (2019) argues that digital media use, particularly among adolescents, is associated with low psychological well-being. Ostic et al. (2021) point out that social media use has an indirect effect on psychological well-being through socialization purposes such as bonding. Regarding the communication dimension, the last of the digital leisure participation purposes, Chen & Li (2017) also found a positive relationship between use for communication purposes and psychological well-being. In their study on recreation department students, Asan & Zwiegelaar (2025) stated that digital leisure participation positively affects psychological well-being. However, the dimensions of digital leisure participation purposes game, entertainment, socialization, and communication were found not to have a direct impact on psychological well-being in this study. This confirms that the dimensions representing positive participation purposes do not have a direct mental impact on Y Generation's daily lives. The absence of a direct effect of digital leisure participation purposes on psychological well-being stems from the fact that this relationship is critically mediated by the digital leisure flow experience. Participation purposes do not determine well-being per se; rather, they produce meaningful outcomes to the extent that they elicit core components of flow during the activity, such as deep concentration, temporal dissociation, and intrinsic enjoyment. Accordingly, when flow experience is high, participation purposes can positively influence psychological well-being, whereas when flow is weak or disrupted, the same purposes may yield neutral or even negative outcomes. Thus, the relationship between digital leisure participation purposes and psychological well-being is not direct but reflects a conditional and indirect causal pathway operating through the digital leisure flow experience.

Consistent with our second hypothesis (H2), we concluded that the digital leisure participation purposes have a direct impact on the digital leisure flow experience. Digital leisure participation purposes dimensions of game (Takatalo et al., 2015; Kaye, 2016), entertainment (Boyle et al., 2012), socialization (Kaur et al., 2016), and communication (Pelet et al., 2017) are positively related to the flow experience. In their study on digital leisure, flow experience, and leisure satisfaction, Er and Cengiz (2023) concluded that participation purposes are related to the flow experience and emphasized that participation purposes are a significant predictor of the flow experience. In another study, Er and Cengiz (2025) concluded that internet use in digital leisure affects the flow experience. Chang et al. (2023), in their study on elderly individuals, stated that a balance between high levels of skills and challenges is necessary for experiencing flow during digital leisure activities. In another study, Leung (2020) stated that individuals use smartphones for entertainment, socialization, or information seeking when they are bored and feel

a significant lack of participation. Digital leisure, representing the most preferred form of leisure in the new century, leads to an increase in flow experiences for individuals in line with their participation purposes. Individuals can experience flow in their leisure through digital technologies in all areas of their daily lives, regardless of time and place, for varying durations and frequencies. This situation has not changed for Generation Y individuals, who deeply experience digital technologies, in the present study. The study results show that this generation experiences flow significantly in digital leisure.

As expected, in line with the third hypothesis (H3) we assumed in the research design and our main objective, we found that the digital leisure flow experience plays a mediating role in the effect of digital leisure participation purposes on psychological well-being. Another important finding and achievement of the study is that the digital leisure flow experience plays a mediating role in the effect of digital leisure participation purposes on psychological well-being. While digital leisure participation purposes do not have a direct impact on psychological well-being, they do have an indirect effect. This is due to the mediating role of the flow experience. In the field of leisure studies, the mediating role of flow experience in leisure participation is important in explaining the positive outcomes obtained (Cheng & Lu, 2015; Lisheng et al., 2020; Tao et al., 2022; Tian et al., 2022; Lin, 2023; Ayhan & Eskiler, 2024; Wang & Tian, 2024).

Similarly, according to our fourth hypothesis (H4), we found that the digital leisure flow experience also has a direct effect on psychological well-being. This study also revealed the relationship between the flow experience in digital leisure and psychological well-being. Bassi et al. (2022), in their recent study, concluded that the flow experience is associated with high psychological well-being. According to the results of another important study conducted on adolescents by Shao et al. (2024), the use of digital technologies has a significant and positive effect on the psychological well-being of individuals. In particular, the use of digital technology significantly and positively affects the psychological well-being of adolescents through the flow experience. Roberts & David (2023) examined the relationship between the use of social media applications and the flow experience and psychological well-being and obtained noteworthy results. They stated that users experienced high levels of flow, but that high flow experience led to low psychological well-being, depression, and anxiety. Chou et al. (2016) examined the relationship between flow experiences and psychological well-being among undergraduate students and found a strong correlation. In another study, Cheng and Lu (2015) investigated the causal relationship between recreational participation, flow experience, and psychological well-being. The study found that high levels of recreational participation were associated with high levels of psychological well-being. Additionally, it highlighted that the flow experience in the activity played a mediating role between recreational participation and psychological well-being.

Limitations and Future Research Direction

This study has several limitations. Therefore, the results should be interpreted taking these limitations into account. First, a cross-sectional design was used in this study. Future studies addressing this limitation could be conducted using longitudinal designs. Another limitation is that the study was conducted on Y Generation. Studies could be conducted on different generations or age groups. Finally, the study was conducted in a metropolitan area. These limitations could be overcome by conducting studies on digital leisure in different geographical regions or cultures. Longitudinal studies can be conducted to observe the long term and track trends over time. This can provide a more comprehensive understanding of digital leisure experiences. Future research could utilize different sample groups. This would make the findings more generalizable and applicable to a wider population. This study is observational in nature. Experimental studies or controlled experiments designed specifically for digital leisure could provide strong evidence of cause-and-effect relationships. From a cultural context, designing research in different cultural settings could help identify cultural factors influencing digital leisure. To examine digital leisure experiences in more detail, comparative studies can be conducted across different groups, conditions, or time periods. This can be achieved by employing a mixed-methods approach, supporting quantitative methods with qualitative methods.

Practical Implications

Future research on digital leisure suggests that the flow experience and psychological well-being associated with it may lead to addiction in terms of duration and frequency, creating physical and mental

health problems. In this case, interest in digital leisure experiences can be curbed by controlling their duration and frequency, starting with individuals' own lives and continuing within society.

Conclusions

This study extends existing approaches in literature by presenting an integrated model that examines the relationship between digital leisure participation purposes and psychological well-being within the framework of Flow Theory. The findings demonstrate that flow experience plays a critical mediating role in this relationship, offering a process-based explanation of how digital participation influences well-being. Moreover, by accounting for the multidimensional motivational structure of digital leisure, the study provides a more comprehensive conceptual and empirical contribution to the literature. To our knowledge, this study is the first to examine the mediating role of flow experience in the effect of digital leisure participation purposes on psychological well-being. The fact that digital leisure participation purposes do not directly affect psychological well-being, and the mediating role of flow experience, is particularly important. Today, leisure activities are driven by changes in the daily lives of individuals and society. In recent years, the integration of technology into human life during leisure, regardless of time and space, has increased the need for research on the concept of digital leisure. Individuals can experience positive emotions such as flow in activities where they participate intensively in terms of duration and frequency. Flow experiences obtained through different participation purposes also lead to positive outcomes such as psychological well-being. This study is considered to make a significant contribution by demonstrating that different participation purposes in digital leisure affect psychological well-being through the flow experience.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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The authors confirm that no artificial intelligence tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

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