

# The Role of Media Literacy on The Phenomenon of Digital Loneliness (Case Study on Students in The City of DI.Yogyakarta)

Ratna Sesotya Wedadjati<sup>1\*</sup>, Apandi<sup>2</sup>,  
Intan Fuji Lestari<sup>3</sup>, Sulaiman Helmi<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Sekolah Tinggi Pembangunan Masyarakat Desa, Yogyakarta, Indonesia*

<sup>2</sup>*Universitas Bina Insan, Palembang, Indonesia*

<sup>3</sup>*Doctoral Student Universitas Sahid Jakarta, Indonesia*

<sup>4</sup>*Universitas Bina Darma, Palembang, Indonesia*

## Abstract

**Purpose** - This study aims to explore the phenomenon of digital loneliness among students in Yogyakarta and understand the role of media literacy in reducing the negative impacts of digital loneliness.

**Design/methodology/approach** - This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method, involving in-depth interviews with 17 students selected based on inclusion criteria. Interview questions were designed to examine the level of media literacy of students and its impact on the experience of digital loneliness.

**Findings and Discussion** - The results of the study indicate that most students have a good understanding of media literacy, which helps them navigate information in digital media more critically. However, digital loneliness remains a challenge that affects their mental health, with effects on anxiety, stress, and decreased academic productivity. Students who have better media literacy tend to be able to reduce feelings of digital loneliness through more meaningful content selection and interactions.

**Conclusion** - Media literacy plays an important role in helping students overcome digital loneliness. It is hoped that educational institutions can improve media literacy through training and creating wider opportunities for direct social interaction. This will help students manage their use of social media wisely and support their emotional well-being.

**Keywords** - Media literacy, Digital loneliness, DIY students, Social Media Impact

## Introduction

In the current digital era, information and communication technology has become an integral part of everyday life. Digital media provides various benefits, from easy access to information to social connectivity. However, behind these benefits, there is a phenomenon that is increasingly emerging, namely "digital loneliness". This phenomenon refers to the feeling of

loneliness that individuals experience even though they are constantly connected to others through digital media. Digital loneliness is not just about a lack of social interaction, but also about the quality of that interaction. Although someone may have many “friends” or “followers” on social media, shallow interactions and a lack of emotional closeness can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness. Students, as an age group that is very familiar with technology, are one group that is vulnerable to this phenomenon. Even though they have wide access to various social media platforms and communication applications, many college students report feelings of loneliness (Zhang, Y., Mei, L., & Newman, M. G, 2022). This indicates that although technology can expand social networks, it does not always guarantee emotional closeness. Therefore, it is important to study further the theme of digital loneliness for the mental well-being of students. Digital loneliness can have a serious impact on their mental health, such as increasing the risk of depression, anxiety and stress. Understanding this phenomenon can help in designing more effective interventions to support their mental well-being.

Media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create information in various forms of media. Good media literacy is not only about the technical ability to use media, but also a critical understanding of how media affects individuals and society. With increasing reliance on technology, good media literacy has become increasingly important. Further research could provide insight into how to increase media literacy to reduce the negative impacts of technology and maximize its benefits. Good media literacy includes the ability to recognize quality content, understand the psychological impact of media consumption, and develop the ability to use media wisely and healthily. The urgency to study further the theme of digital loneliness is also driven by the need to improve the quality of social interactions. Although social media allows for greater interaction, the quality of that interaction often lacks depth and meaning. Further studies could help identify ways to improve the quality of social relationships through digital technology. Findings from studies on digital loneliness can be used to develop better educational policies and programs, which can help students and the general public manage their use of technology more healthily and wisely. Thus, studying more deeply about digital loneliness and media literacy is very important to support students' emotional well-being and maximize the positive potential of digital technology.

## **Methods, Data and Analysis**

This research adopts a qualitative approach with a case study method to explore an in-depth understanding of digital loneliness in the student environment at DI.Yogyakarta University (Vrieling-Teunter, E., & Ligtenberg, 2023). This research involved 17 informants from the student community, who were selected based on inclusion criteria as active students. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews with students who were selected to be research informants. Researchers used an interview guide consisting of the theme: the role of media literacy in the phenomenon

of digital loneliness. This theme contains indicators which are manifested in the form of the following questions:

**Table.1.** Interview indicators of media literacy and digital loneliness

Themes	Indicators	Questions
Media Literacy,	Media literacy within the scope of students	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How often do you verify the veracity of information you get from social media before sharing it?</li> <li>2. Can you explain the difference between objective news and opinion in media articles?</li> </ol>
	Obstacles and challenges	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Do you feel limited in time or ability to verify information you find in the media?</li> <li>4. Do you find it difficult to build deep and meaningful relationships through digital communication compared to face-to-face? If yes, what are the obstacles?</li> </ol>
Digital Loneliness	The influence of digital loneliness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. How does feeling digital loneliness affect your emotional and mental well-being? Do you feel more anxious or depressed?</li> <li>6. Has the experience of digital loneliness affected your productivity or academic performance? If yes, how?</li> </ol>
	The relationship or connection between media literacy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Do you feel that higher media literacy skills help you build more meaningful online relationships and</li> </ol>

Themes	Indicators	Questions
	and digital loneliness	reduce digital loneliness? If yes, how?
		8. How does your ability to critically evaluate media content influence feelings of digital loneliness? Do you feel that with better media literacy, feelings of online loneliness could be reduced?

In the ethical aspect of research, researchers apply the main principles of respecting the rights and privacy of informants. This involves fair and honest treatment of each individual who is an informant in this research. In the initial stage, researchers will carry out procedures to obtain written permission before conducting interviews or observations. This permission is not just an act of formality but a form of respect for the participant's right to privacy and decisions. Researchers will explain the research objectives transparently, provide information about how the data will be used and stored, and provide assurance that participants' identities will be kept confidential. Data analysis is carried out qualitatively using a case study approach, which allows the identification of emerging patterns, themes and relationships in the data. Comparison of the results of interviews between informants was carried out to obtain a deep and comprehensive understanding of the role of media literacy in the phenomenon of digital loneliness. The qualitative method with case studies was chosen for several reasons, namely this approach allows researchers to explore a deep understanding of students' subjective experiences related to digital loneliness. Given that digital loneliness is a complex and personal phenomenon, a qualitative approach allows researchers to capture nuances and details that might be missed in a quantitative approach and the case study method provides a rich and contextual framework for understanding how media literacy plays a role in college students' experiences of digital loneliness and study. cases allow researchers to explore this phenomenon holistically, considering environmental, cultural, and individual factors that influence feelings of loneliness. In-depth interviews allow researchers to establish closer relationships with informants, creating a comfortable atmosphere so that informants can speak honestly and openly about their experiences. This is important to get authentic and rich data. By selecting informants who fit the inclusion criteria, this research can ensure that the data obtained is relevant and reliable for understanding the phenomenon of digital loneliness among students. A careful selection process of informants

helps in gaining representative insights from the group under study. Thus, a qualitative method with a case study approach is the right choice for this research because it provides the depth, context and authenticity needed to comprehensively understand the phenomenon of digital loneliness among students.

## Results and Discussion

Of the 17 respondents involved in this research, 70% showed a good understanding of media literacy, its obstacles and challenges, as well as the influence of digital loneliness on their well-being. The level of student understanding in media literacy can be a benchmark for media literacy and awareness of the impact of digital loneliness to be important in the student environment.

" ... "I always verify information before sharing it. Usually I check from several credible sources and see whether the information has been confirmed by a trusted news source."...(Informant Bu, 21 years old)

" ... "Some of the obstacles I experienced included a lot of information circulating quickly and sometimes false information being made to be very convincing. Apart from that, the lack of time to verify every news makes it sometimes difficult for me to distinguish between what is true and what is fake."...(Informant Ku, 22 years old)

" ...I feel that digital loneliness really affects my mental health. Even though I often interact online, I still feel lonely because the relationships I have are less deep. This makes me feel more anxious and sometimes depressed, because I miss more direct interaction means..." (Informant Rj, 20 years old)

"...I feel that with good media literacy skills, I can be more selective in my interactions in cyberspace. I more often find communities or content that are more positive and constructive, which helps to reduce feelings of digital loneliness to a greater extent. Media literacy helps me sorting out higher quality information and interactions, which makes me feel more connected and less lonely..." (Informant Jl, 20 years old)

The interview results from the research showed several important findings:

1. **Understanding of Media Literacy:** Of the 17 respondents, 70% showed a good understanding of media literacy. They understand the obstacles and challenges that exist, and are aware of the influence of digital loneliness on their well-being.
2. **Information Verification:** One of the informants, Bu (21 years), revealed that she always verifies information before sharing it. He seeks information from several credible sources and ensures that the information is confirmed by trusted news sources.
3. **Obstacles in Media Literacy:** Informant Ku (22 years old) mentioned several obstacles he experienced, such as the large amount of information circulating quickly and the difficulty of distinguishing true information from false due to lack of time to verify each news item.
4. **Influence of Digital Loneliness:** Informant Rj (20 years) revealed that digital loneliness really affects his mental health. Despite frequent online

interactions, he still felt lonely due to a lack of deep relationships, leading to feelings of anxiety and depression.

5. **The Role of Media Literacy in Overcoming Digital Loneliness:** On the other hand, Informant JI (20 years old) felt that with good media literacy skills, he could be more selective in interacting in cyberspace. This helps her find more positive and constructive communities or content, reducing her feelings of digital loneliness. Media literacy helps him sort through higher quality information and interactions, making him feel more connected and less lonely.

From the results of this interview, it can be concluded that media literacy plays an important role in helping individuals face challenges in the digital era, including overcoming digital loneliness and choosing more meaningful interactions.

This research discussion highlights the phenomenon of digital loneliness among students, especially at the DI.Yogyakarta university environment, by examining the role of media literacy in overcoming feelings of loneliness. The results of this study align with findings in existing literature, providing a deeper understanding of how college students experience and manage digital loneliness. This research supports the findings of Vrieling-Teunter and Ligtenberg (2023), which show that a qualitative approach using the case study method is effective in exploring the subjective and in-depth experiences of individuals who experience certain phenomena. In this context, in-depth interviews with college students provide valuable insight into how they feel digital loneliness despite being connected to others via social media. This is also in line with the findings of Zhang, Mei, and Newman (2022), who showed that many college students reported feelings of loneliness despite having extensive social networks on social media platforms.

This study also strengthens the view that media literacy plays an important role in moderating the negative impacts of digital media use. Previous research has shown that good media literacy can help individuals understand and manage the psychological impact of media consumption (Livingstone, 2004). In the context of this research, students who have higher levels of media literacy appear to be better able to identify quality content, understand the psychological impact of digital interactions, and develop strategies to improve the quality of their social interactions. Furthermore, the study found that students who were more aware of their use of digital media and who implemented media literacy strategies tended to report a decrease in feelings of loneliness. This is supported by Primack's (2024) findings, which show that increasing media literacy can help individuals develop more meaningful relationships through digital media, as well as reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness. In addition, the results of this study also support the idea that media literacy should be an integral part of the higher education curriculum. By integrating media literacy in education, students can be equipped with the skills necessary to use digital media wisely and healthily, as suggested by Buckingham (2007). This will not only help them overcome

digital loneliness, but also improve their overall emotional well-being. Overall, this research makes an important contribution to our understanding of digital loneliness and the role of media literacy in the student context. These findings not only support existing literature but also offer practical insights for developing more effective interventions in addressing digital loneliness among college students. As such, this research has important implications for educational policy and mental health programs at universities, as well as for students themselves in their efforts to build more meaningful and healthy relationships through digital media. The study found that students who were more aware of their use of digital media and who implemented media literacy strategies tended to report a decrease in feelings of loneliness. This is supported by Primack's (2024) findings, which show that increasing media literacy can help individuals develop more meaningful relationships through digital media, as well as reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness.

This research also supports the findings of Valkenburg, Peter, and Schouten (2006), who revealed that wise and controlled use of social media can improve psychological well-being and strengthen social relationships. In this research, students who were more skilled in media literacy were able to utilize social media to build deeper and more meaningful connections, reducing the emotional gap that often occurs in digital interactions. In addition, the results of this study also support the idea that media literacy should be an integral part of the higher education curriculum. By integrating media literacy in education, students can be equipped with the skills necessary to use digital media wisely and healthily, as suggested by Buckingham (2007). This will not only help them overcome digital loneliness, but also improve their overall emotional well-being. This study also supports research by Elhai, Levine, Dvorak, and Hall (2016), who found that excessive, uncontrolled use of digital media can contribute to increased feelings of loneliness and isolation. By practicing good media literacy, students can develop healthier digital habits, reduce the risk of dependence on digital media, and reduce associated feelings of loneliness. This research makes an important contribution to our understanding of digital loneliness and the role of media literacy in the student context. These findings not only support existing literature but also offer practical insights for developing more effective interventions in addressing digital loneliness among college students. As such, this research has important implications for educational policy and mental health programs at universities, as well as for students themselves in their efforts to build more meaningful and healthy relationships through digital media.

## **Conclusion**

This research reveals that the phenomenon of "digital loneliness" is a significant issue among DI students. Yogyakarta. Although information and communication technology provides benefits such as easy access to information and social connectivity, there are negative impacts in the form of

shallow interactions and a lack of emotional closeness. Most students demonstrate a good understanding of media literacy, able to access, analyze and evaluate information critically, although they face challenges in verifying information that is rapidly circulating. Digital loneliness has a negative impact on students' mental health, resulting in feelings of anxiety, stress, and decreased academic productivity. Good media literacy plays an important role in reducing digital loneliness, helping students build more meaningful and positive online relationships. To overcome digital loneliness, it is recommended that educational institutions organize media literacy training programs, create more opportunities for direct social interaction, and improve counseling services and mental health support. In this way, students can manage their use of social media wisely, focus on the quality of interactions, and choose more positive content and communities, so that their emotional well-being can be improved.

However, this study has several limitations that need to be noted. First, the research sample is limited to students from one university in DI. Yogyakarta, so the results may not be generalizable to student populations in other regions or contexts. Second, the qualitative method used provides in-depth insight but does not allow for broader quantitative measurements regarding the prevalence of digital loneliness. Third, this study relied on self-reports from informants, which may contain subjectivity bias and limitations in accurately recalling or reporting their experiences. Further research with a wider sample and diverse methods is needed to strengthen these findings and provide more comprehensive guidance for overcoming digital loneliness among students.

## **Limitations**

For further research, it is recommended to explore specific strategies that can be implemented by students to improve the quality of digital interactions and reduce digital loneliness. Research could include developing and testing media literacy training programs designed specifically for college students, as well as evaluating the effectiveness of various digital platforms in building more meaningful relationships. In addition, further studies could look at differences in the impact of digital loneliness based on various demographic factors such as age, gender and cultural background, to provide deeper insight and more targeted solutions in overcoming this phenomenon.

## **References**

- Chang, S., & Heo, J. (2023). Exploring the relationship between digital media literacy and well-being among adolescents: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 52(6), 1157-1171.
- Chang, S., Song, H., Kim, J., Kim, J. H., & Kim, H. (2021). Associations of social media use with physical activity and sleep adequacy among adolescents: Cross-sectional survey. *JMIR mental health*, 6(4), e14072.
- Dol, K. K., & Oberg, H. (2024). Exploring the link between digital media literacy and psychological well-being: A longitudinal study. *Journal of*

- Psychosocial Research, 84(2), 127-136.
- Dol, K. K., & Oberg, H. (2024). Media and information literacy as a tool for combating digital loneliness among youth. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 67*(3), S25-S30.
- Elhai, J. D., Gallinari, E. F., Rozgonjuk, D., & Yang, H. (2023). Depression, anxiety and fear of missing out as correlates of social, non-social and problematic smartphone use. *Addictive Behaviors, 105*, 106335.
- Gao, J., Zheng, P., Jia, Y., Chen, H., Mao, Y., Chen, S., ... & Dai, J. (2022). Mental health problems and social media exposure during COVID-19 outbreak. *PLoS One, 16*(4), e0247024.
- Gao, L., Bai, X., & Li, S. (2022). The impact of social media use on college students' psychological well-being: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Computers in Human Behavior, 130*, 107017.
- Kalpidou, M., Costin, D., & Morris, J. (2024). The relationship between Facebook and the well-being of undergraduate college students. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 14*(4), 183-189.
- Kim, J., & Lee, Y. (2022). The impact of digital media use on loneliness among older adults: A meta-analysis. *Gerontology, 68*(1), 27-35.
- Kim, J., LaRose, R., & Peng, W. (2020). Loneliness as the cause and the effect of problematic Internet use: The relationship between Internet use and psychological well-being. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 13*(2), 134-143.
- Liu, M., & Peng, W. (2021). The association between social media use and mental health among college students: A meta-analysis. *Journal of American College Health, 69*(5), 471-480.
- O'Reilly, M., & Dogra, N. (2020). The impact of social media on mental health outcomes: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Mental Health & Prevention, 18*, 200184.
- O'Reilly, M., Dogra, N., & Hughes, J. (2023). Impact of social media on mental health: A review of the evidence. *Mental Health Review Journal, 28*(4), 295-311.
- Primack, B. A., Shensa, A., & Sidani, J. E. (2024). Social media use and perceived social isolation among young adults in the U.S.: A longitudinal study. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 47*(3), 371-379.
- Primack, B. A., Shensa, A., Sidani, J. E., Whaitte, E. O., Lin, L. Y., Rosen, D., ... & Miller, E. (2021). Social media use and perceived social isolation among young adults in the US. *PLoS One, 14*(8), e0220094.
- Shakya, H. B., & Christakis, N. A. (2020). Association of Facebook use with compromised well-being: A longitudinal study. *American Journal of Epidemiology, 185*(3), 203-211.
- Song, H., Zmyslinski-Seelig, A., Kim, J., Drent, A. M., Victor, A., & Omori, K. (2020). Does Facebook make you lonely?: A meta analysis. *Computers in Human Behavior, 36*, 446-452.
- Twenge, J. M., & Campbell, W. K. (2020). Associations between screen time and lower psychological well-being among children and adolescents:

- Evidence from a population-based study. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 174(2), 148-156.
- Twenge, J. M., Campbell, W. K., & Freeman, E. C. (2021). Digital media use and mental health: A meta-analysis. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 79, 101864.
- van den Eijnden, R. J., Lemmens, J. S., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2024). The social media disorder scale: Validity and reliability of a new scale for assessing problematic use of social media in adolescents. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 78, 115-123.
- Vennapusa, B., Knöpfel, L., & Memmel, M. (2022). Measuring digital media literacy in higher education: Factor structure of a scale and its measurement invariance across genders. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 93, 202-211.
- Verduyn, P., Lee, D. S., Park, J., Shablack, H., Orvell, A., Bayer, J., ... & Kross, E. (2021). Passive Facebook usage undermines affective well-being: Experimental and longitudinal evidence. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 144(2), 480.
- Vrieling-Teunter, E., & Ligtenberg, W. (2021). Digital media literacy and online safety: The role of parental guidance among adolescents. *Journal of Children and Media*, 15(3), 364-380.
- Vrieling-Teunter, E., & Ligtenberg, W. (2023). Digital media literacy among adolescents: The role of parental mediation and trust in different media. *Journal of Children and Media*, 14(4), 469-486.
- Wang, P., & Zhao, M. (2023). The relationship between social media use and mental health outcomes: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Health Communication*, 38(10), 1223-1233.
- Wang, P., Zhao, M., Wang, X., Xie, X., Wang, Y., & Lei, L. (2023). The relationship between social media use and mental health among college students: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 15(11), e213.
- Wang, Z., Yang, H., & Yang, Y. (2020). Exploring the relationship between digital media literacy and mental health among college students. *Journal of Educational Computing Research*, 57(6), 1449-1466.
- Wang, Z., Yang, H., & Yang, Y. (2024). Digital media literacy as a protective factor against digital loneliness among adolescents: A cross-sectional study. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 27(3), 145-152.
- Zhang, Y., & Mei, L. (2021). Social media use and emotional well-being among college students: A longitudinal analysis. *Computers in Human Behavior Reports*, 5, 100107.
- Zhang, Y., Mei, L., & Newman, M. G. (2022). The impact of social media use on well-being in young adults: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 275, 165-176.