

The Goldilocks Hypothesis alludes to Goldilocks, who is a character in "The Three Bears" fairy tale. For Goldilocks (and for findings about adolescents' amount of screen time and their mental well-being), something that is too big (as in too much screen time) is not very good. Similarly, something that is too small (as in too little screen time) is also not very good. But something that is neither too big or too little (a moderate amount of screen time) is "just right."

A Large-Scale Test of the Goldilocks Hypothesis

Quantifying the Relations Between Digital-Screen Use and the Mental Well-Being of Adolescents

Andrew K. Przybylski, Netta Weinstein

These badges mean that the research reported in this article was conducted transparently, which ensure that the findings are reproducible. The first and second badges mean all the studies data and research materials are available to anyone who wants to inspect them. The third badge means the study's analyses and hypotheses were pre-registered, which helps avoid after-the-fact story telling (and what's known as p-hacking, or cherry picking, results).



Abstract

Although the time adolescents spend with digital technologies has sparked widespread concerns that their use might be negatively associated with mental well-being, these potential deleterious influences have not been rigorously studied. Using a preregistered plan for analyzing data collected from a representative sample of English adolescents ($n = 120,115$), we obtained evidence that the links between digital-screen time and mental well-being are described by quadratic functions. Further, our results showed that these links vary as a function of when digital technologies are used (i.e., weekday vs. weekend), suggesting that a full understanding of the impact of these recreational activities will require examining their functionality among other daily pursuits. Overall, the evidence indicated that moderate use of digital technology is not intrinsically harmful and may be advantageous in a connected world. The findings inform recommendations for limiting adolescents' technology use and provide a template for conducting rigorous investigations into the relations between digital technology and children's and adolescents' health.

This is a very large sample!