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The Effects of Digital Media on Juvenile Delinquency

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## ABSTRACT

Digital media is part of our everyday lives and has a prominent impact on the younger generation. The exposure to digital media and the frequency of its use likely has myriad effects on youth behavior. There is a question of whether digital media influences youth involvement in deviant behavior, either positively or negatively correlated. This thesis advances scientific knowledge by examining the impact of digital media exposure on substance use and criminal behavior. The multivariate analysis of national data collected from eighth and tenth-grade students in the Monitoring the Future (MTF) study depicts youth behavior regarding substance use, violent crime, and property crime. The study provides evidence that, though deviant behavior is positively associated with digital media exposure, this relationship appears to arise indirectly through unstructured socializing. When controlling for unstructured socializing, the initial observation of a prevalent positive relationship between digital media exposure and youth deviance attenuates, suggesting that greater digital media exposure increases substance use and crime by increasing unstructured socializing among youth. Implications for existing theoretical explanations of youth crime are discussed.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

In a world where social media is inescapable and at our fingertips it is necessary to examine what effects this has on the youth. An analysis of adolescent behaviors in relation to their time spent on digital media, such as YouTube, TV programs, video games, social media platforms, and online communication devices, will give additional insight into the potential effects. People are heavily influenced at a young age and greater exposure to digital media could be a contributing factor in why children and teens commit crimes and use illicit drugs, as well as why they may continue to engage in such behaviors later in life. The often rapid rise in digital media exposure during the teen years also may help to shed light on well well-documented age-crime curve, which shows that people become much more likely to commit crimes in their teen to early adulthood years. The goal of this study is to assess the consequences of the amount of time spent on digital media and how this impacts deviant behavior among adolescents. The research will specifically focus on whether time spent on digital media influences involvement in substance use, non-lethal violence, and property crime. This serves as the core research question of the study. Additionally, the study will explore whether any observed association between digital media exposure and youth deviance may be explained by differences in the frequency of unstructured socializing among youth.

## Expectations

Social learning theory, social bonding theory, and unstructured socialization theory suggest a potential connection between digital media exposure and youth criminal behavior and substance use. Albert Bandura's social learning theory considers how both environmental and cognitive factors interact to influence human learning and behavior. Mediating processes occur between stimuli and responses, and behavior is learned from the environment through the process of observational learning (Mcleod, 2024). Social learning theory suggests that greater exposure to digital media that involves deviant behaviors, such as substance use, and images that portray violence and property crime in ways that enhance status may lead to an increase in these behaviors since people tend to imitate observed behavior. This suggests that an increase in time spent on digital media may be positively associated with youth crime and substance use.

Conversely, Hirschi's social bond theory argues that those with strong and abiding attachments to a conventional society are less likely to deviate from the norm than those who have weak or shallow bonds (Chriss, 2007). Unstructured socializing encompasses youth peer interactions that have no agenda or plans that lack supervision by parents or other authority figures. Osgood's theory says that these activities are risky because it leaves time available for deviant activities and places youth in settings and situations in which peers may encourage deviance (Antunes, 2017). Social bonding theory and unstructured socialization theory propose that more time spent on social and digital media displaces the time used for unstructured socializing, and by doing so, this may translate into less deviance. Thus, these perspectives imply a negative association between digital media exposure and the frequency of youth crime.



## Previous Research

Prior research on the impacts of digital media exposure on youth criminal involvement is two-sided. On one hand, several studies suggest that spending more time on social media contributes to mental health issues (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2006). Since these conditions are positively associated with youth substance use and criminal behavior, these studies imply that greater exposure to digital media will increase these forms of youth deviance.

On the other hand, some research indicates that greater time spent on digital media increases loneliness and may reduce unstructured socializing among youth (Baumer, 2021; Osgood et al., 1996). Additionally, other studies have shown that youth who spend less time socializing with peers in unstructured environments are much less likely to engage in substance use and other forms of criminal behavior (Ball et al., 2023). The collective implication of these studies is that greater exposure to digital media may reduce youth involvement in substance use and crime.

To date, although some research has connected increased time on social media to higher levels of substance use (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2006), no studies of which I am aware have directly assessed the empirical relationship between youth exposure to digital media and their involvement in crime. The present research contributes to knowledge by examining this issue with a large nationally representative sample of middle- and high-school students in the United States. The research in this study builds on existing knowledge by providing further evidence and another perspective that looks at the general impact of digital media exposure on youth behavior on both substance use and crime.

## **Data and Methods**

To address the research questions examined in the study, the data used is a nationally representative sample of middle and high school students drawn from the Monitoring the Future (MTF) study. The sample includes youth enrolled in schools as 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders. Secondary survey data will be used that consists of crime rates among youths and research on how time spent on different forms of digital media (i.e., YouTube, TV programs, video games, etc.) affects children's behavior and whether this is related to substance use and criminal behavior. The MTF data used for the study was obtained from the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR). The study applies quantitative techniques to measure key variables and assess their relationships. As described later, the average daily time spent on digital media serves as the core explanatory variable in the study, and indicators of substance use and criminal involvement serve as the dependent variables. Several other variables that may be correlated with both digital media exposure and youth deviance (i.e., substance use and crime) also are included to account for potential confounders.

## **Summary**

In Chapter 2, the theoretical arguments linking social media exposure and youth substance use and crime are expanded, and prior empirical evidence is reviewed in more detail. Chapter 3 will describe the data in the study and methods used to assess the hypotheses. The results of the study will be depicted in Chapter 4. Lastly, Chapter 5 discusses the implications of the study, and offers concluding remarks about the role of digital media exposure on adolescent behavior.

## Chapter 2

### The Literature

#### Theoretical Arguments

There are several theoretical arguments to connect social media exposure and youth substance use and crime. One example is social learning theory, which argues that deviant behavior is acquired through social interaction and modeling (Bernard, 2024). Greater exposure to social media may increase the volume of images and messages people see that depict youth drug use and crime, such as fighting and stealing, as something positive for which one can gain status. The theory suggests that when children watch others behave in a certain way, they will model that behavior. TV programs and content consumed on social media platforms often exemplify negative behaviors, which may lead to youths indulging in these behaviors due to curiosity or imitation.

On the other hand, unstructured socialization theory suggests that greater exposure to social media may mean that youth have less idle time and spend less time with their peers in public unstructured activities that often facilitate crime. The decrease in unstructured socializing due to greater social media use could reduce youth crime. Unstructured socializing creates ample situations for exposure to deviance. There is a positive correlation between unstructured socializing and youth involvement in substance use and crime (Baumer, Cundiff, and Luo, 2021). Therefore, the time spent on social media displacing unstructured socializing suggests a decrease in youth crime. Social bonding theory relates to the attachments toward friends, family, and one's community. People who are able to form positive social bonds are less likely to engage in deviant behaviors (Intro to Psychology, 2023). Creating online communities that facilitate

emotional connections and positive interactions can deter people from partaking in criminal behavior. Additionally, the commitment and involvement in these online communities limit the time available to be spent on drug use and other delinquent acts and, if engaged, can jeopardize their standing with these online activities.

### **Literature Review**

According to previous literature on the topic, there are many negative effects associated with time spent on social and digital media. Some examples include cyberbullying, risk-taking behavior, and violent video games. A 2005 telephone survey in the United States of 10 to 17-year-olds who had used the Internet at least once per month in the past 6 months found that 9% reported having been a victim of online harassment at least once in the previous year (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2006). Bullying contributes to one's mental health causing feelings of low self-esteem, rejection, and possibly the development of depression and anxiety. In an attempt to deal with the emotional distress caused by bullying, some individuals may resort to delinquent behaviors as a way to cope or regain a sense of control. Additionally, adolescents who engage in social media are more prone to risk-taking behavior. Many adolescents' profiles include swear words, reference alcohol use, claim marijuana use and tobacco use, and include revealing photographs in underwear or swimsuits (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Pujazon-Zazik & Park, 2010).

Another study of 500 publicly viewable MySpace profiles of self-reported 18-year-olds reported that 54% contained risk behavior information: 24% referenced sexual behaviors, 41% referenced substance use, and 14% referenced violence (Pujazon-Zazik & Park, 2010). These deviant behaviors, such as substance use, violence, and criminal activities become more

normalized when portrayed on social media. When adolescents are desensitized to these risky behaviors, it could increase their likelihood of engaging in them and may contribute to more serious crimes. The consumption of violent media can be harmful to adolescents' health. In a survey of parents most reported to believe that television affects the way their children talk, dress, and behave (Browne & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2005). The US National Television Violence Study showed that a majority of programs watched by children involved violence and in almost half of these the offender went unpunished and associated with humor (Browne & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2005). There is a common theme of desensitization when it comes to violent films and other media like music videos and video games. Violent media results in a desensitization to violence, imitation, normalization, aggression, and reduced empathy which are all factors of delinquents. In a meta-analysis of violence in video and computer games, exposure resulted in subsequent aggressive and antisocial behavior. This effect size has risen over time since games have become more realistic and life-like, and games with human characters have more effect than abstract violence (Browne & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2005). As mentioned in social learning theory, adolescents mimic the behavior of the media around them and what media they consume. If these behaviors are commonly dispersed in digital media, it can lead to a greater chance of committing crime.

Other studies suggest that there are positive effects on adolescents from the media. Results from the meta-analysis of video game violence show an increase in visuospatial cognition (Ferguson, 2007). Players of action video games, which require quick reactions to a variety of visual cues, benefit from faster reaction times and increased performance in a range of visual-spatial cognitive tasks. Video games allow children to develop creativity, stronger memory, and problem-solving skills (Blanco-Herrera & Gentile, 2019). Social media also allows

for expression and engagement with like-minded people that otherwise would not be as easily assessable. This relates to social bonding theory when looking at how people find connections on the internet and a safe space for common ground. There are several communities that bring people together and being a part of a positive community decreases the chances of engaging in crime.

Further, studies show a connection between greater digital media exposure and time spent alone and decreased unstructured socialization. Unstructured time with peers is strongly associated with substance use and delinquency. The decline in face-to-face socializing is linked to decreases in adolescent risk behavior (Ball et al., 2023). In a mediation analysis done in North America and Europe, a recent study found that “adolescent risk behaviors and unstructured in-person socializing both fell by about 30% in the USA between 1999 and 2017, with declines in unstructured in-person socializing accounting for approximately 86% of declines in risk behaviors” as well as declines in substance use (Borodovsky et al., 2021). This trend in the decrease in unstructured socialization in relation to delinquent behavior is evident in the effects of more time spent on digital media.

### **Hypotheses**

After reviewing the literature and theoretical arguments there is evidence to predict that the more time spent consuming digital and/or social media the more likely it is to negatively affect adolescent behavior. These behavioral concerns like depression and risk-taking contribute to involvement in criminal activity and substance use. Social learning theory studied by Ron Akers supports this hypothesis—that greater digital media exposure will be associated with more

frequent substance use and criminal behavior—as well as others who have found a correlation between social media use and negative behaviors.

It can also be predicted that the more time spent on digital media, the less likely adolescents are to commit crimes. This is because of other obligations and commitments as discussed in Travis Hirschi's social bonding theory and Wayne Osgood's unstructured socialization theory. There is also evidence that certain forms of media have a positive effect on development that is beneficial to adolescents. Thus, the literature also supports the hypothesis that greater digital media exposure will be associated with less frequent substance use and criminal behavior.

The present study assesses both aforementioned hypotheses, which yield divergent predictions—one positive, one negative—about the direction of the relationship between digital media exposure and youth deviance. Additionally, given the underlying theoretical arguments, the study also examines whether digital media exposure may affect youth deviance indirectly by altering how much time they spend with peers in unstructured settings that may be conducive to deviance, often referenced as unstructured socializing. Unstructured socializing has been shown to be positively associated with youth substance use and criminal behavior—in other words, youth deviance tends to be higher when unstructured socializing is greater, and youth deviance tends to be lower when unstructured socializing is less frequent. The specific predictions for the present study are ambiguous, as greater digital media exposure could increase crime by increasing unstructured socializing, or it may reduce crime by decreasing unstructured socializing. The study will help to illuminate which of these processes is more accurately reflected in the data.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Data and Methods**

#### **Data**

The Monitoring the Future (MTF) survey consists of the lifestyles and values of youth in 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade in 2018. This is based on a repeated cross-sectional design which includes data on attitudes and behaviors of students from more than 100 public and private schools nationally. The sample for this study consists of 6,680 youth, which reflects the available cases after exclusion due to missing data. The MTF asks about the frequency of delinquent activity, including substance use and crime, during the last 12 months. The response options for frequency are calculated in ranges (i.e., 0, 1-2 3-4, or 5 times or more). When evaluating these trends, we look at how frequently youth report having committed a delinquent act one or more times in the past year.

#### **Measures**

The explanatory variable, digital media exposure, includes hours spent talking/texting on the cellphone, video chatting, on social networking apps, and watching videos in an average week. The dependent variable substance use is the index of substance use and alcohol. Other dependent variables are the frequency of violence and the frequency of property crime. These variables measure youth deviance and delinquency.

To account for other differences that may affect digital media exposure and the frequency of substance use, violent crime, and property crime, several control variables are included. The



full list of variables included in the study is provided in Table 1. As the table shows, the control variables include sex coded 0 for female, 1 for male, and 2 for unknown. Race and ethnicity are represented by four variables indicating whether the respondent is White, the

Table 1

<b>Table 1. Definitions and Metrics for Variables Included in Analysis of Digital Media Exposure and Youth Deviance</b>	
<b>Variable</b>	<b>Variable Definition</b>
<b>Dependent Variables</b>	
Substance Use	Index of alcohol and substance use
Violence	Frequency of violence
Property Crime	Frequency of property crime
<b>Explanatory Variables</b>	
Digital Media Exposure	Hours talk/text on cell, video chatting, on social network apps, and watching videos in an average week.
<b>Control Variables</b>	
Sex	Binary indicator of respondent's sex (0=female, 1=male, 2=unknown).
Race-Ethnicity	Four variables indicating race of respondent (1=white, 2=black, 3=hispanic, 4=unknown).
Hours Gaming	Seven point scale indicating the frequency of hours per day spent gaming on a device. (1=none, 2=less than one hour, 3=one to two hours, 4=three to four hours, 5=five to six hours, 6=seven to eight hours, 7=nine hours or more).
Community Type	Three binary variables indicating size of community. (0=non-MSA, 1=MSA, 2=large MSA).
Grade	A binary variable indicating grade level. (8=eighth grade, 10=tenth grade).
Parental Education	Maximum educational attainment of the youth's parents.
Two Parent Family	Whether youth lives in a two parent family household (1=yes, 0=no)
Cut Class	Frequency of cutting class/skipping school.
Friends Dropout	Four point scale indicating how many friends one has that have dropped out of school. (1=none, 2=a few, 3=some, 4=most/all).
Held Back	A binary variable indicating if a student has been held back. (0=No, 1=Yes).
Suspended	A binary variable indicating whether a student has ever been suspended. (0=No, 1=Yes).
Expecting College	A binary variable indicating whether the students definitely expects to finish college. (0=No, 1=Yes).
Work	Three point scale indicating how much a student works. (0=does not work, 1= works less than 15 hours per week, 2= works more than 15 hours per week).
After School Alone	Six point scale indicating how many hours students spend after school alone. (1=none, 2=less than one hour, 3=one to two hours, 4=two to three hours, 5=four to five hours, 6=more than five hours).
Drugs Risky	Scale that indicates the degree to which youth considers marijuana and alcohol as risky.
Unstructured Socializing	Index of how often youth spend time with peers without adult supervision.

reference group, Black, Hispanic, or unknown. A youth's community type is based on the population size of their community measured as "non-MSA", "MSA", or "large MSA." Grade level is a binary variable indicating either 8<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Variables related to family are the maximum educational attainment of the youth's parents and whether the youth lives in a two-parent family household. Other variables include behavior in school such as the frequency of cutting class, and how many friends one has who have dropped out of school represented by 1=none, 2=a few, 3=some, and 4=most/all. Binary variables answering 1=yes or 0=no for whether a student has been suspended, held back, and expects to finish college. Another indicator that is controlled for is how long a student spends after school alone measured on a six-point scale from "none" (coded 1) to "more than five hours" (coded 6), as well as how much a student works on a three-point scale that includes 0=does not work, 1=works less than 15 hours per week, and 2=works more than 15 hours per week. The variable "Drug Risky" indicated the degree to which youth consider marijuana and alcohol as risky.

In addition to considering the control variables, the study includes an indicator of unstructured socializing, which gauges how often youth spend time out and about with peers in unstructured settings that may be conducive to substance use and crime. This variable is incorporated as a potential mediator to test if any observed association between digital media exposure and youth deviance can be explained by differences in unstructured socializing

### **Analysis Strategy**

After presenting descriptive information about the sample, the analysis proceeds by first examining whether there is a bivariate relationship between digital media exposure and youth

deviance. Next, because bivariate relationships can reflect spuriousness, whereby other factors related to digital media exposure and youth deviance could be driving the results, the next step will be a multivariate regression assessment that integrates the control variables discussed above. The multivariable analysis offers a more stringent and comprehensive assessment of the core hypotheses about whether digital media exposure increases or decreases youth deviance. Finally, because digital media exposure may affect deviance indirectly by altering unstructured socializing, the study integrates this variable in a final multivariable regression model.

## Chapter 4

### Results

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of each variable which can be deduced to how frequent one variable is to another. Perhaps most notably, the table reveals that both the indicators of youth deviance (substance use and crime) and the measure of digital media exposure exhibit considerable variation in the sample. Some youth spend very little time on digital media, while others do so many hours per day. Similarly, while most youths do not use drugs or engage in violence or property crime, some do so quite often. The study's focus is on assessing whether variation in digital media exposure is related to variation in youth deviance.

Table 2 also reveals other useful details about the sample, which is approximately half male and half female and includes youth from the most prevalent racial-ethnic group in the country. Additionally, the sample is drawn from a mix of different types of communities and social classes.

To offer an initial assessment of whether digital media exposure is associated with youth deviance, bivariate regression models were estimated that regressed the three dependent variables—substance use, violence, and property crime—on digital media exposure. The results of these regressions (not shown in table form) were used to compute predicted levels of youth deviance at different levels of digital media exposure, ranging from very low (10<sup>th</sup> percentile) to average (50<sup>th</sup> percentile) to very high (90<sup>th</sup> percentile). The results of these calculations are summarized in Figures 1a (substance use), 1b (property crime), and 1c (violence).

Table 2

Table 2. Descriptive statistics

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
<b>Dependent Variable</b>				
Substance Use	0.005	0.651	-0.38	5.984
Violence	0.470	1.273	0	1
Property Crime	1.110	2.45	0	2
<b>Explanatory Variables</b>				
Digital Media Exposure	-0.002	0.715	-1.417	2.645
<b>Control Variables</b>				
Sex				
female	0.509	0.499	0	1
male	0.478	0.499	0	1
unknown	0.013	0.112	0	1
Race-Ethnicity				
white	0.509	0.499	0	1
black	0.103	0.303	0	1
hispanic	0.199	0.399	0	1
unknown	0.189	0.392	0	1
Hours Gaming	3.719	1.641	1	7
Community Type				
non-MSA	0.219	0.413	0	1
MSA	0.439	0.50	0	1
large-MSA	0.343	0.48	0	1
Grade				
Eighth	0.456	0.498	0	1
Tenth	0.544	0.498	0	1
Parental Education	4.982	1.515	1	7
Two Parent Family				
No	0.257	0.437	0	1
Yes	0.743	0.437	0	1
Cut Class	-0.010	0.835	-0.302	6.849
Friends Dropout	1.244	0.518	1	4
Held Back				
No	0.923	0.266	0	1
Yes	0.077	0.266	0	1
Suspended				
No	0.923	0.391	0	1
Yes	0.768	0.391	0	1
Expecting College				
No	0.434	0.496	0	1
Yes	0.566	0.496	0	1
Work				
Does not work	0.784	0.411	0	1
Works less than 15 hrs/week	0.161	0.367	0	1
Works more than 15 hrs/wee	0.055	0.228	0	1
After School Alone	2.789	1.47	1	6
Drugs Risky	-0.003	0.852	-1.327	3.925
Unstructured Socializing	-0.003	0.602	-1.634	3.308

Figure 1a depicts the mean substance use frequency compared to the frequency of digital media exposure at very low, average, and very high digital media exposure. The figure shows that as digital media exposure increases, so does the frequency of substance use. At very low levels of digital media exposure, the frequency is -0.131 and 0.143 at very high levels of media exposure, meaning there is a vast difference in the effects of digital media and how youths use substances. Similar findings are shown in Figure 1b which reveals the mean property crime frequency compared to the frequency of digital media exposure. As digital media exposure goes from very low to very high, the frequency of property crime increases. Figure 1c demonstrates similar results concerning digital media and violent crime. There is a noticeable shift from very low exposure to very high exposure concerning violent crime.

**Figure 1a.**

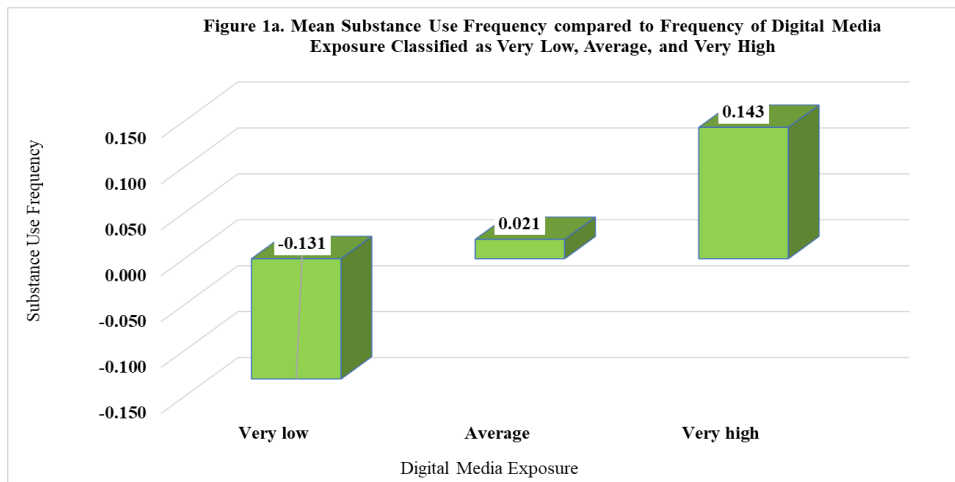


Figure 1b.

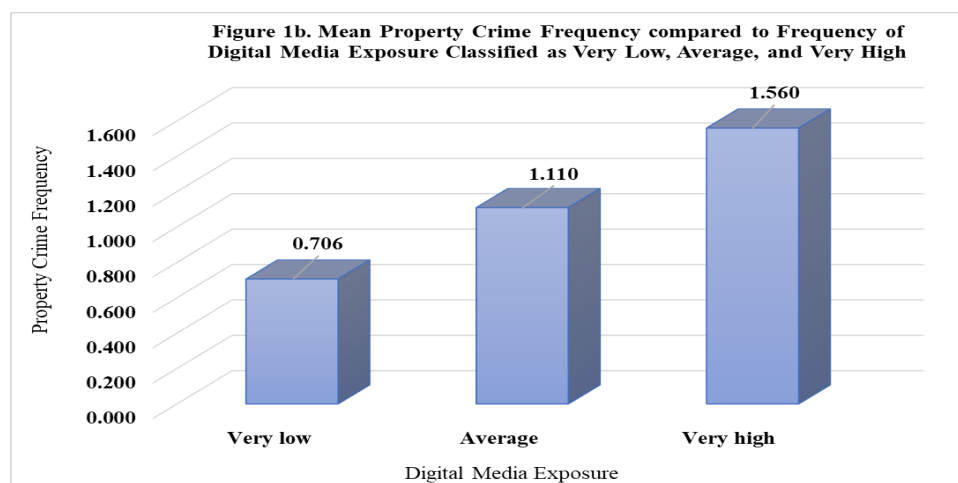
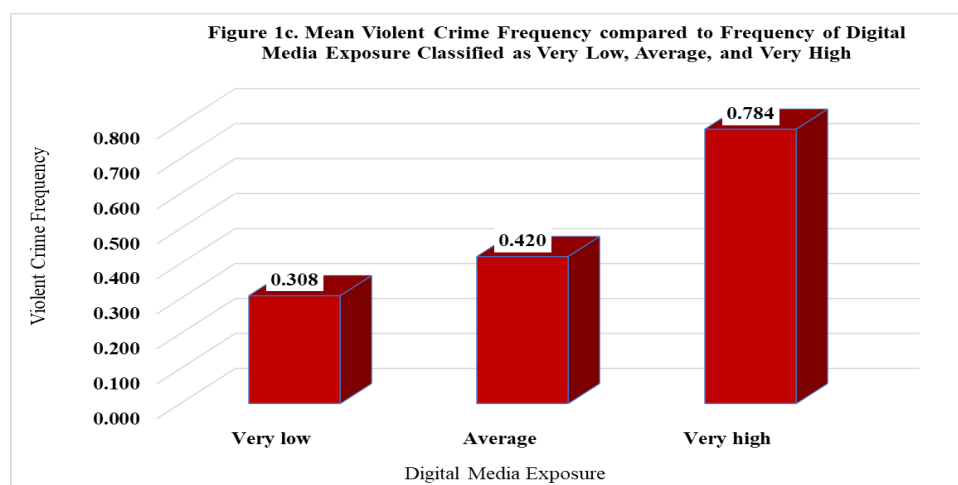


Figure 1c.



The bivariate relationships summarized in Figures 1a-1c suggest a meaningful positive association between digital media exposure and youth deviance that is also statistically significant. The question that remains, however, is whether these relationships persist after accounting for other individual differences, which is assessed by estimating multivariable regression models that integrate the control variables.

Tables 3 (substance use), 4 (property crime), and 5 (violence) present the results of the multivariable regression analysis. In each case, two models were estimated. The first includes the control variables, and the second also integrates unstructured socializing to examine whether this



variable can explain any link between digital media exposure and youth deviance. For each of the dependent variables, the results for the first model show that there is a statistically significant positive effect of time spent on digital media. Table 3 illustrates a positive relationship between substance abuse and digital media exposure. Some other variables that show a significant effect are hours gaming and negative school behavior, such as cutting class, being suspended, and being held back. Table 4 further supports these findings, demonstrating similar results regarding the frequency of property crime. Negative school behavior, large MSA, and perceiving drug use as risky, along with digital media exposure, are a few variables that have a correlation with increased property crime. In Table 5, we observe much of the same results regarding violent crime. Working and variables associated with negative school behavior are positively correlated with the frequency of violent crime. Additionally, expecting college decreases as violent crime increases and youths who view drugs as risky commit less frequent to no violent crime. Thus, net of a wide variety of other factors, the study reveals that youth who spend more time exposed to digital media tend to engage in more frequent substance use, property crime, and violence.

Table 3

Table 3. Ordinary least squares regression models of substance use

	Model 1	Model 2
Digital Media Exposure	0.067 ** (.012)	0.019 (.013)
Hours Gaming	-0.018 ** -0.005	-0.01 * (.005)
Sex		
male	.071 (.015)	-0.004 (.015)
unknown	0.009 (-0.064)	0.013 (-0.063)
Race-Ethnicity		
black	-.223 ** (.0256)	-0.195 ** (0.025)
hispanic	-0.026 (-0.02)	-0.020 (0.019)
unknown	-0.030 (0.019)	-0.012 (0.019)
Community Type		
MSA	0.006 (0.019)	0.003 (0.018)
large-MSA	0.049 ** (0.020)	0.041 * (0.020)
Tenth grade	0.143 ** (0.015)	0.121 ** (0.014)
Parental Education	-0.006 (0.005)	-0.006 (0.005)
Two Parent Family	-0.008 (0.017)	-0.016 (0.017)
Cut Class	0.153 ** (0.009)	0.143 ** (0.009)
Friends Dropout	0.171 ** (0.015)	0.154 ** (0.015)
Held Back	(0.095) ** (0.027)	-0.902 ** (0.027)
Suspended	0.220 ** (0.020)	0.207 ** (0.020)
Expecting College	-0.031 * (0.015)	-0.056 ** (0.015)
Work		
Works less than 15 hrs/week	0.063 ** (0.020)	0.030 (0.020)
Works more than 15 hrs/week	0.302 ** (0.032)	0.261 ** (0.032)
After School Alone	0.014 ** (0.005)	0.011 * (0.005)
Drugs Risky	-0.119 ** (0.008)	-0.114 ** (0.008)
Unstructured Socializing		0.167 ** (0.123)

\*p &lt;= .05, \*\*p &lt;= .01, based on two-tailed t-test

Table 4

Table 4. Ordinary least squares regression models of property crime

	Model 1	Model 2
Digital Media Exposure	0.136 ** (0.046)	0.075 (0.048)
Hours Gaming	-0.022 (0.019)	-0.012 (0.019)
Sex		
male	0.177 ** (0.060)	0.15 * (0.060)
unknown	0.256 (0.246)	0.261 (0.246)
Race-Ethnicity		
black	-0.167 (0.099)	-0.131 (0.099)
hispanic	-0.179 (0.076)	-0.172 * (0.076)
unknown	0.095 (75.000)	0.118 (0.075)
Community Type		
MSA	0.142 * (0.072)	0.137 (0.072)
large-MSA	0.338 ** (0.077)	0.327 ** (0.077)
Tenth grade	-0.177 ** (0.057)	-0.180 ** (0.057)
Parental Education	0.008 (0.019)	0.008 (0.019)
Two Parent Family	-0.053 (0.065)	-0.064 (0.065)
Cut Class	0.663 ** (0.035)	0.650 ** (0.035)
Friends Dropout	0.726 ** (0.057)	0.704 ** (0.057)
Held Back	-0.233 * (0.105)	-0.227 * (0.105)
Suspended	0.829 ** (0.076)	0.812 ** (0.076)
Expecting College	-0.250 ** (0.057)	-0.282 ** (0.058)
Work		
Works less than 15 hrs/week	0.003 (0.076)	-0.041 (0.076)
Works more than 15 hrs/week	0.093 (0.019)	0.041 (0.124)
After School Alone	0.095 ** (0.019)	0.091 ** (0.019)
Drugs Risky	-0.288 ** (0.032)	-0.283 ** (0.032)
Unstructured Socializing		0.213 ** (0.050)

\*p &lt;= .05, \*\*p &lt;= .01, based on two-tailed t-test

Table 5

Table 5. Ordinary least squares regression models of violent crime

	Model 1	Model 2
Digital Media Exposure	0.092 ** (0.024)	0.031 (0.025)
Hours Gaming	-0.016 (0.010)	-0.006 -0.01
Sex		
male	0.096 ** (0.031)	0.069 * -0.031
unknown	0.047 (0.127)	0.052 (0.126)
Race-Ethnicity		
black	0.007 ** (0.051)	0.043 (0.051)
hispanic	-0.027 (0.039)	-0.019 (0.039)
unknown	0.094 * (0.039)	0.117 (0.039)
Community Type		
MSA	0.013 (0.037)	0.009 (0.037)
large-MSA	0.053 (0.040)	0.042 (0.039)
Tenth grade	-0.241 ** (0.029)	-0.244 ** (0.029)
Parental Education	-0.011 (0.010)	-0.011 (0.010)
Two Parent Family	0.056 (0.033)	0.045 (0.033)
Cut Class	0.245 ** (0.018)	0.232 ** (0.018)
Friends Dropout	0.496 ** (0.029)	0.474 ** (0.029)
Held Back	0.126 * (0.054)	0.131 * (0.054)
Suspended	0.595 ** (0.039)	0.579 ** (0.039)
Expecting College	-0.087 ** (0.030)	-0.118 ** (0.030)
Work		
Works less than 15 hrs/week	0.114 ** (0.039)	0.071 (0.039)
Works more than 15 hrs/week	0.160 * (0.064)	0.109 (0.064)
After School Alone	0.047 ** (0.010)	0.043 ** (0.010)
Drugs Risky	-0.071 ** (0.017)	-0.065 ** (0.017)
Unstructured Socializing		0.212 ** (0.089)

\*p &lt;= .05, \*\*p &lt;= .01, based on two-tailed t-test

As noted previously, one reason why digital media exposure could increase youth deviance is by facilitating more unstructured socializing among youth. If that is the case, the relationship between digital media exposure and youth deviance should be attenuated after considering differences in unstructured socializing. The second model in Tables 3-5 examines that possibility, and in each case, the results reveal that after controlling for unstructured socializing, the relationship between digital media exposure and youth deviance remains positive but is now much weaker and is no longer statistically significant. Thus, after controlling for unstructured socializing and other control variables, it can be concluded that digital media exposure is correlated with an increase in unstructured socializing, which in turn leads to an increase in youth crime

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

The analysis of digital media exposure focuses on whether time spent on digital media influences involvement in substance use, non-lethal violence, and property crime. In addition to whether the correlation between exposure to digital media and youth violence can be explained by a difference in frequencies of unstructured socializing. When discussing Osgood's unstructured socialization theory, we expected that the lack of supervision leaves time for youth to take part in deviant activities where peers may influence deviant behavior. In relation to digital media exposure, it was predicted that greater exposure to digital media may suggest youth have less time to spend with peers in unstructured environments. Since previous research shows a positive relationship between unstructured socializing and youth crime, it was predicted that digital media may displace this time and therefore decrease youth crime. This hypothesis is refuted by the analysis of digital media exposure after accounting for frequency in unstructured socializing. Though there is a positive relationship between media exposure and youth deviance this relationship becomes miniscule when unstructured socialization is controlled for. This finding suggests support for the hypothesis that the more time spent on digital media the more likely it is to negatively affect adolescent behavior. Rather than digital media exposure displacing unstructured socializing, it is shown that youth media exposure increases unstructured socializing which increases the frequency of deviant behavior.

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