

DIGITAL WELLBEING RESEARCH PROJECT

A transformative 6-week research project aimed at fostering healthier digital habits for students, parents, and staff across International Schools in Dubai.

The first in the UAE with this focus and holistic approach to digital wellbeing .

March - May, 2025



Our Vision

Empowering Change

Our Mission

Empowering educational transformation through human-centred design, where technology sparks creativity, enriches every learner's journey, and enables communities worldwide to thrive in a connected world.

EdRuption's Guiding Principles

Empathy-Driven Innovation

We revolutionise learning by deeply understanding and addressing the needs of learners and educators, challenging norms to create future-ready solutions.

Inclusive Empowerment

We champion accessibility and equity, breaking down barriers to ensure everyone has the tools to succeed.

Radical Transparency and Bold Simplicity

We build trust through open collaboration and innovative ideas, transforming complexity into clear, intuitive solutions.

Ethical, Future-Forward Design

We lead with integrity, driving sustainable change through fair and adaptable innovations.

Connected Growth

We unite learners, educators, and communities, amplifying collective potential through collaboration.

DigitalBridge

Digital Bridge is passionate about empowering both parents and children to navigate the digital world with confidence, intention, and balance. We help bridge the gap between digital-native children and their families by providing the tools, knowledge, and support needed to make values-driven decisions around safe, age-appropriate tech use at home. Our programs aim to foster open communication, strengthen digital safety, and build tech-positive family values that support healthy growth in a connected world. At the same time, we empower children to improve their digital literacy, wellbeing, and balance - equipping them to become thoughtful, responsible digital citizens and leaders for the future.

Finally, we offer consultancy and strategic guidance to schools on how to embed digital citizenship, online safety, and wellbeing practices into everyday learning, school culture, and initiatives like BYOD.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research project, conducted by EdRuption and interpreted in collaboration with student researchers at NYU Abu Dhabi, investigates the complex relationship between children and digital technology, particularly smartphones, and its impact on mental wellbeing, and family dynamics.

The **core objective** of the project was to foster healthy digital habits within participating families. To support this aim, the initiative introduced a 21-day Digital Wellbeing Challenge. Before the challenge began, participants made personal pledges outlining their goals, creating a shared commitment to measurable behavioural change.

The outcomes were compelling. Students reported improved adherence to screen-related routines, greater self-regulation, and enhanced emotional wellbeing. Parents, in turn, experienced better sleep, stronger family bonds, and a renewed sense of pride in their screen use. ***In summary, the challenge successfully empowered parents to adopt healthier screen habits, increase mindfulness, and foster stronger connections within their households.*** These results suggest that structured, community-based interventions, particularly those that emphasise agency and reflection, can meaningfully shift digital behaviour.

The findings also emphasise the importance of a ***holistic, collaborative approach*** to digital wellbeing. Sustained impact requires alignment across home and school environments, with consistent policies, shared values, and active student involvement in shaping the digital ecosystems they navigate daily.

As digital technologies continue to shape the lives of young people, this research calls on educators, families, and policymakers to take unified, intentional steps. By embedding mindful digital practices into everyday routines and relationships, we can collectively support the healthy development of today's youth in an increasingly digital world.

CONTENTS

Executive Summary

Headline data

Research Project Overview

- Research Project Structure
- Timeline of the Research Project

Literature Review

Pre-Project Survey Findings

PART ONE: SLT, Parents, Students

- 1.1 Digital Mindfulness and Active Screen Time Management
- 1.2 Role Modelling Healthy Screen Habits
- 1.3 School Phone Policies
- 1.4 Screen Time Conflict
- 1.5 Alignment of Expectations (Home vs. School)
- 1.6 Perceived Impact of Social Media/Screens
- 1.7 Generational Divide in Digital Wellbeing Views
- 1.8 Educational Technology vs. Perceived Productivity

PART TWO: School-Specific Insights

- 2.1 Perception of Screen Time Negatively Impacting Children's Focus
- 2.2 SLT Perception of Parent-Teacher Alignment on Screen Time Expectations
- 2.3 Perceptions of Educational Technology's Impact
- 2.4 Modelling Healthy Habits
- 2.5 "Do you believe that banning phones in schools will have an overall benefit to the community and students' wellbeing?"
- 2.6 Influencing Screen Use Outside of School Hours
- 2.7 Schools Encouraging Healthy Digital Balance
- 2.8 Students' Perception of Social Media's Impact
- 2.9 Barriers to Implementing Balanced Screen Time to Society

Research Project Findings

Family Pledges

21-Day Challenge Findings

- Adherence to Screen-Related Routines and Personal Goals
- Perceived Control Over Screen Time
- Intentionality and Pride in Screen Time Management
- Family Dynamics: Disagreements & Screen-Free Time Together
- Overall Interpretation and Key Takeaways for Students
- Perceived Control Over Screen Time
- Sleep Quality
- Family Dynamics
- Intentionality and Pride in Screen Time Management
- Overall Interpretation and Key Takeaways for Parents

Limitations of the Project

Future Research Recommendations

Acknowledgments

Digital Wellbeing Research Project:

A **first of its kind** research project to foster healthier digital habits for families **in the UAE.**

School A

1100+ students
Primary and Secondary
88 Nationalities

Participating families: 8

School B

1200+ students
Primary and Secondary
60+ Nationalities

Participating families: 7

School C

2000 students
Primary and Secondary
100+ Nationalities

Participating families: 6

School D

1500+ students
Primary and Secondary
80+ Nationalities

Participating families: 4

School E

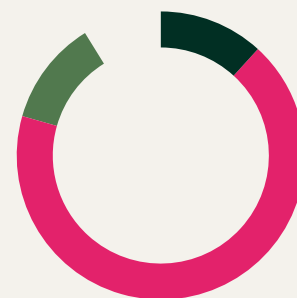
2500+ students
Primary and Secondary
100+ Nationalities

Participating families: 8

601

Total responses to surveys during the 21-day challenge period.

Student participants:



● Year/Grade 6 ● Year/Grade 7
● Year/Grade 8 ● Year/Grade 9

81%

of participating parents were aged between 41-50.

Core objectives of the study:

- ☒ Foster healthier digital habits
- ☒ Develop improved family digital relationships
- ☒ Explore the impact of phone 'bans'
- ☒ Provide insights for digital strategy development

Surveys were conducted pre-challenge with Students, Parents and SLT.

During the 21-day challenge, study participants and non-participants from the school communities completed weekly surveys.

Key findings from both sets of data can be found below.

Families spent more time together without screens

Parents reported increased sense of family connection over the 21-day period peaking at **90%** by week 3.

75% of students reported the same improved sense of connection by week 2.

35% to 73% the increase in parents who reported regularly choosing screen-free activity options from Week 1 to Week 3.



Parents also reported a perceived increase in their **quality of sleep** over the 21-day period.

An improvement in frequency of device-related conflict.

66% of parents and **59%** of students reported time spent on device use as the main cause of conflicting prior to the 21-day challenge. Despite a reported spike in conflict in Week 1 of the challenge, **conflict frequency dropped** again over the rest of the challenge.

86% of parents and **78%** of members of SLT agree that there is a **significant generational divide** in approaches to digital wellbeing.

Students feel more in control of their screen use

Adherence to screen-related goals was **significantly higher** in those students who were participating in the challenge vs those who weren't.

There was an increased perception of self-management of screen time use in conjunction with **increased pride** in their efforts.

64% of SLT members believed phone bans would provide overall benefit to students. Conversely, **90%** of students were in favour of being able to use phones but with either 'some' or 'strict' rules in place.

Of interest is that students were able to **articulate a sophisticated understanding** of digital balance, yet they self-reported that they are **largely excluded** from processes in schools which have implemented phone bans.

RESEARCH PROJECT OVERVIEW

At EdRuption, we are committed to empowering change across school communities to ensure purposeful, inclusive, safe, and secure use of digital technologies. Alongside EdRuption, Digital Bridge focuses its work on empowering families to navigate the complexities of the digital world with confidence and clarity. Working through the lens of family relationships and digital wellbeing, Digital Bridge aims to foster open communication and align technology use with core family values, mutually agreed upon boundaries, and focused device settings and controls. Ultimately, we endeavour to build resilient and tech-positive communities.

Through much of EdRuption's work with schools, parents are often keen to learn more about how to leverage technology positively and how to minimise family disagreements that stem from conflict around the use of digital devices. With devices in school commonplace across the UAE, the differentiation between a learning device at school, learning device at home for homework and a recreational device at home, can often become blurred. In addition, much has been shared in the media in recent years regarding the role of smartphones in schools, and many schools are implementing strategies which look to limit the use of them in school time - whether that is consistently enforcing a school policy, or implementing a 'ban' on the devices in school.

This led the EdRuption and Digital Bridge teams to consider:

Would providing structured digital wellbeing strategies to families, alongside the strategies being implemented by schools, have a positive impact on families' awareness of, understanding around, and communication about the positive use of technology?

Could guidance and mutual agreements for students and parents help to instil more sustainable digital technology habits and provide more harmonious and tech-positive family environments?

These guiding questions led to the design and facilitation of the Digital Wellbeing Research Project - the results of which are shared in this report.

Research Project Structure

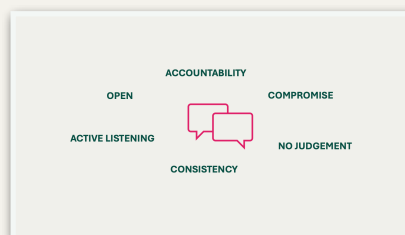
The overall aims of the Research Project were to:

- ✓ Foster healthier digital habits
- ✓ Develop improved family digital relationships
- ✓ Explore the impact of phone 'bans'
- ✓ Provide insights for digital strategy development

Through focused and structured workshop sessions, we provided:

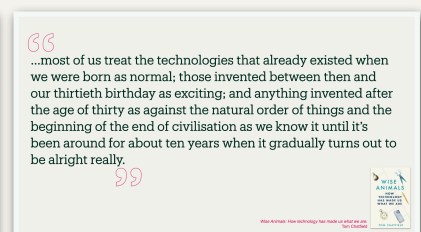
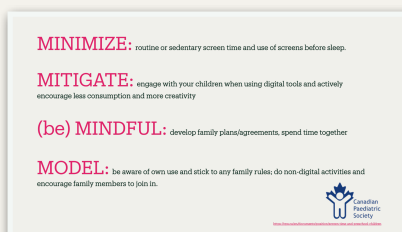
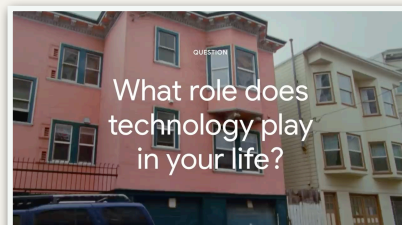
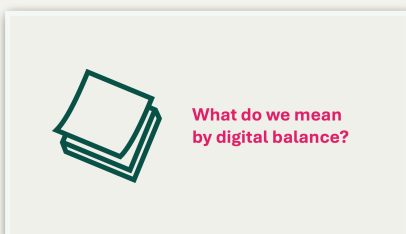
- Relevant, research-driven learning opportunities for all stakeholder groups involved
- A greater understanding of nuances associated with 'screen-time', 'parental controls', and 'digital balance'
- Empowerment for families to make decisions about technology use which are contextually relevant for their family and aligned with their values
- Safe and mutually respectful environments for open discussion
- Opportunities to both strengthen and challenge perspectives and perceptions held around the use of technology across different stakeholder groups.

A selection of slides used across the different workshop sessions.



Active listening is when you not only hear what someone is saying but also attune to their thoughts and feelings. It turns a conversation into an active, non-competitive, two-way interaction.

Cognitive: Paying attention to everything, comprehending, and using that information
Emotional: Staying calm and compassionate during the conversation,
Behavioral: Conveying interest and comprehension verbally and nonverbally



Timeline of the Research Project

Jan-Feb
2025

Recruiting Schools for the Project

Through direct communications, and promotion via LinkedIn posts, we invited schools to volunteer to be a part of the Digital Wellbeing Research Project. Five schools signed up to take part in the research project, all of whom are situated in Dubai. To ensure anonymity, these schools are referred to throughout the report as School A, School B, School C, School D, and School E.

Mar-Apr
2025

Multi-Stakeholder Workshops and pre-project surveys

Each of the participating schools received six workshops facilitated and designed by EdRuption specifically for this research project.

With the widest scope, a Whole-School Parent Coffee Morning and Workshop was promoted allowing parents from across all school ages to learn more about topics relevant to the research project. These were generally well attended across the five schools.

A session for just the SLT in each school was designed to explore the perceptions and perspectives of those members of the school community making the decisions around technology use in school. A pre-project survey was conducted, and then SLT were asked to reflect on various elements of the digital vision, strategy, and implementation.

A session aimed to help Tutors, and any other key staff members from the year groups included in the project, was delivered to help them understand the aims and expectations of the research project. A pre-project survey was also conducted for this stakeholder group. The content of these sessions focused on their perspectives of technology use in school and reflection of their digital habits and role modelling in school.

Enrolling families for the research project

Whilst the sessions detailed above were happening, the schools were also promoting the research project to families to recruit participants. Families with students in Year 6 to Year 9 were invited to join the project.

May
2025

Once the numbers from each school were confirmed, the following workshop sessions ran:

Parents workshop: Building on the content from the Coffee Morning and Workshop, these sessions delved deeper into:

- perceptions and perspectives of technology use
- Reflections on their motivations for joining the research project
- screen time
- ways to set controls and settings to help monitor technology use

There was also a pre-project survey.

Student workshop: In these sessions, students reflected on:

- their use of technology
- their understanding of being digitally balanced
- ways they can prepare and to have conversations with their parents.

Family Workshop: Bringing students and parents together, we facilitated a structured reflection process which then led to purposeful conversations. The aim of these sessions were for families to develop vision and values for their use of technology as a family and develop their Family Pledge, which would guide them through the 21-day challenge.

The 21-day Challenge

Using their Family Pledges as their guidance, families were then asked to complete a 21-day challenge. The elements in their pledge, the content from the sessions, and the Family Workshop were all designed so families could work to instil sustainable digital habits as a family.

This challenge formed the core of the data collection for the research project. Parents were sent a survey on each Friday of the 21-day challenge and students completed a survey at school. These were the same questions each week. Schools were also asked to share this survey with parents and students in the same year groups as those participating in order to gather comparative data.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The integration of smartphones and digital devices into children's lives has accelerated, raising urgent questions about their impact on academic outcomes, wellbeing, and social development. According to recent research conducted by NYU Abu Dhabi and funded by the Early Childhood Authority (ECA), examining digital media use among 10,000 parents of children aged 0-8 in Abu Dhabi, 86% of young children in the UAE regularly engage in digital activities, with those aged 5-8 seeing a 97% rate of usage across digital media (Khawaldeh, 2025). The study continues to share that children in Abu Dhabi receive their first digital device at the age of 3 years and 4 months. The primary device which young children use is a digital tablet (68%), followed by a smartphone (12%).

Policymakers and educators are responding with a variety of school-based restrictions and digital literacy initiatives, while parents express growing concern about screen time and its effects on family life and health. Recent large-scale studies and surveys provide quantitative insights into device usage trends, policy effectiveness, and stakeholder attitudes, offering a more nuanced understanding of the digital landscape facing today's youth (Rahali et al., 2024; Internet Matters, 2025).

Phone Use and Academic Performance

According to the U.S. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2025), 77% of public schools ban phone use during class, with elementary schools (86%) enforcing this more than high/secondary schools (55%). Additionally, 38% of schools restrict phone use outside class, and 30% prohibit it during all school activities. Over half (53%) of school leaders believe phones negatively impact academic performance, and even more cite effects on mental health and attention spans.

In Spain, a study showed that after two years of banning smartphones, students' PISA scores improved by 10 points in maths and 12 in science; this is the equivalent to 0.6–0.8 years of math learning and 0.72–1.0 years in science (Rahali et al., 2024). However, analysis of OECD PISA 2022 data revealed that when controlling for social class, gender, and behaviour, restricted-phone schools sometimes performed worse academically, showing the issue's complexity.

A 2023 study in England found that banning phones reduced in-school use by 40 minutes per day, but students used phones more at home, leading to no change in total screen time (4–6 hours daily). The same study found no major differences in academic performance or wellbeing between students at restrictive versus permissive schools.

Educational Uses of Digital Devices

In some contexts, digital devices improve learning. In Thailand, student use of smartphones boosted satisfaction and outcomes in English classes. In Indonesia, a smartphone e-learning tool improved math scores and learning behaviour (Rahali et al., 2024). Notably, 55% of parents who responded to the NYU Abu Dhabi Early Childhood study viewed digital media as beneficial for learning and development, particularly valuing early learning activities and Arabic language content (Abu Dhabi Media Office, 2025).

Khan Academy, with over 168 million registered users in 2024, found through their 2023-2024 efficacy research that spending 30+ minutes per week over the course of the school year (18+ hours total) leads to over 20% higher-than-expected learning gains, as measured by MAP Growth Assessments. Moreover, a significant portion of students using Khan Academy increase the number of skills they master year-over-year (Khan Academy, 2024). Perhaps most importantly, Khan Academy usage, particularly when integrated with teacher support, can positively impact math scores and attitudes toward math (Grimaldi, 2023).

However, not all uses of digital devices and platforms are beneficial for learning. An Italian study found that using Twitter for literature discussions hurt the performance of high-achieving students, likely due to shallow engagement. African schools benefited from smartphones for accessing resources, though they also caused classroom disruptions and bullying (Rahali et al., 2024).

Global Perceptions and Policy Implementation

Surveys from China, Sweden, and New Zealand show that most educators and students prefer regulating phone use in class rather than banning phones altogether. Smartphones are seen as both useful tools and potential distractions.

In the UK, secondary schools use various strategies: “Effective ban” (11%), “Ban, but phone present” (52%), and “Partial ban” (36%). No schools reported having no policy. Schools rated “Outstanding” by Ofsted were more likely to enforce comprehensive restrictions, while those rated “Require Improvement” often had looser policies (Rahali et al., 2024).

The Yondr pouch system, which locks phones during the school day, is gaining popularity. Meanwhile, Singapore plans to give every student a digital device by

2028, with government support and software to prevent misuse—part of a \$75 million strategy to boost digital literacy.

Smartphone Ownership, Social Media and AI Usage

By preschool, U.S. children aged 2–4 already average 2.5 hours a day on digital media (Digital Wellness Lab, 2024). By age 10, many own smartphones; by age 12, 71% do. Among 8–12-year-olds, 43% have a smartphone, and 61% say they enjoy online videos “a lot.”

A 2024 global report (Qustodio, 2025) analysing data from over 400,000 family homes found that children spent an average of 2 hours a day on TikTok, with UK and US kids averaging 134 and 132 minutes. Instagram use rose 25% to 79 minutes per day globally, and US children watched YouTube for 86 minutes daily.

AI is becoming part of children’s digital life. In the US, 29% of parents of children under 9 said their child used AI to learn school material, and 26% said AI helps develop critical thinking. Among 5–8-year-olds, 39% used AI for schoolwork, 33% for thinking skills, and 24% for creativity. Despite concerns, 75% of parents are positive about screen media’s educational and social benefits (Common Sense Media, 2025).

Children’s Experiences and Digital Wellbeing

A 2024 UK survey (Internet Matters, 2025) of 1,054 children found that 75% of children aged 9–16 see technology as vital for independence. Sixty-nine percent use the internet to participate in events (up from 63% in 2023), 56% for meeting friends (up from 50%), and 50% to find supportive communities (up from 44%).

However, children also reported increased distress: 67% of children had experienced harm online. The number of children feeling safe online dropped from 81% to 77% in one year. One in five children (20%) reported feeling upset by online cruelty (up from 13%), and 26% avoided certain platforms because of it.

Parents are responding. Eighty-two percent say they know what their child does online (up from 78%), and 43% set time limits (up from 38%). Yet, 87% of parents feel children are safer when contactable by smartphone, and 78% of children agree.

Teens’ Experiences and Digital Wellbeing

In the UK, 44% of 16–17-year-olds feel their screen time is too high, compared to 31% of 8–11s. Almost half (46%) of 8–17-year-olds have used AI—most commonly for fun (45%), school (37%), and learning (35%).

Fifty-four percent of parents believe online information gathering is more beneficial than risky, but only 40% say the same about gaming. Among parents of 16–17s, 79% have at least one rule for online behaviour, especially around money (52%) (Ofcom, 2024).

The Role of Schools and Parents in Supporting Digital Wellbeing

Schools teach digital citizenship and media literacy to keep up with changing online habits. Children often consume algorithm-driven content passively (especially on TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram) and rarely follow news or create content. Socialising happens more on apps like Snapchat and WhatsApp, and some children even use AI chatbots for social connection, valuing their constant availability (Children's Media Lives, 2025).

Parents play a fundamental role in shaping their children's habits through both direct actions and the example they set in daily life. About 29% of parents gave their child their first phone at age 12, and 16% did so by age 10 or younger. Nearly half (49%) would reconsider this decision. Some 17% of parents use phones to calm children when upset.

Research consistently shows that children often mirror their parents' behaviours, especially in areas such as eating, physical activity, and general lifestyle choices. For instance, a recent study demonstrated that parents' characteristics and habits when their children were around ten years old explained between 31% and 78% of those children's health outcomes in adulthood, highlighting the lasting influence of parental behaviour.

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PRE-PROJECT SURVEY FINDINGS

Prior to the 21-day challenge, we held workshop sessions with SLT, teachers, students, and parents. At the beginning of these workshops, we asked participants to complete a survey which explored their perceptions and behaviours related to technology use both at home and at work/at school.

The analysis below is split into two parts. Part One explores key areas of alignment and divergence prior to the project between the SLT, Parents, and Students surveys. Part Two goes on to explore school-specific comparisons and conflicts.

All data throughout this section is anonymised.

PART ONE: SLT, Parents, Students

1. Digital Mindfulness and Active Screen Time Management

Digital Mindfulness refers to a more intentional use of digital technologies, aligning it with values, goals and an awareness of individual's well-being. This can involve creating boundaries, enacting self-regulation practices, and regular reflection.

There's a noticeable gradient in perceived digital mindfulness and active screen time management across the three groups pre-challenge:

Parents exhibited the highest self-reported confidence in their mindful technology use, with 51.7% "often" and 17.2% "always" doing so. This confidence translated into action, as 37.9% regularly monitored or limited their screen time, and another 37.9% did so "sometimes". This means over three-quarters actively engaged in managing their own usage.

Students showed moderate self-perception of mindfulness, with 47% claiming to use technology mindfully "most of the time" and 41% "sometimes." However, their active management lagged behind parents; only 20.6% regularly monitored, and a substantial 41.2% admitted they did not actively monitor or limit their screen time at all.

SLT presented the most self-critical perspective on their own digital mindfulness. Only 8.3% "strongly agree" and 33.3% "agree" that they are digitally mindful, with nearly 28% disagreeing and 31% neutral. This self-awareness appeared to translate into a struggle: while 58.3% "try but struggle" to limit screen time, and 22.2% actively limited it, a combined 19.4% did not monitor or were unsure.

Parents were the most confident and proactive in managing their own digital habits during pre-project. SLT members, despite acknowledging the importance of mindfulness, showed a significant gap between awareness and consistent self-

Parents and **SLT** both agreed that role modelling was important, with 100% or **parents** agreeing that teachers and leaders should model healthy habits, and 94% of **SLT** agreeing that teachers, leaders, and parents should model.

Students, however, perceived a significant gap in this model. Only 27% say teachers and school staff model good screen habits. The majority (56%) report that teachers "sometimes" set a good example, while 18% feel they do not at all.

management. Students were less engaged in active self-management compared to parents, indicating a need for greater practical skills or motivation.

2. Role Modelling Healthy Screen Habits

All three groups broadly supported the idea of modelling healthy screen behaviour, but perceptions of who should lead and how well it's executed differed in the period of pre-project.

While there was a universal agreement on the importance of modelling healthy screen habits, students' perception of actual role modelling by school staff fell short as seen in the pre-project survey. This discrepancy was further amplified by SLT's significant opposition (58.33%) to a "No Phones for Staff" policy, contrasting with their support for student phone bans. This suggests a potential "do as I say, not as I do" dynamic that could have undermined the credibility of digital wellbeing initiatives pre-project.

3. School Phone Policies

A clear tension existed between SLT's inclination towards stricter control (bans for students) and students' desire for controlled access during the pre-challenge period.

This divergence is particularly insightful when considering students' understanding of digital balance, which was observed during student sessions at schools. Across

schools, students consistently defined digital balance as the ability to exercise self-control in technology use. They articulated this as:

- being in control of your device and not the device being in control of you
- having control over your screen time
- knowing when to stop and
- keeping control over yourself

This demonstrates that students fundamentally understand digital balance as a form of self-control.

However, a significant disconnect emerged regarding student involvement in shaping these policies. Across schools, a striking number of students reported having no control over tech use policies at school and were not involved in any related conversations. They were either simply informed of policies or teachers discussed them among themselves.

This creates a paradox: students articulated a sophisticated understanding of digital balance as self-control, yet they were largely excluded from the very conversations and policy-making processes that aim to foster this control. SLT's inclination towards stricter control through bans, while perhaps well-intentioned, directly

SLT largely favoured phone bans for students, with 64% supporting the idea that bans would have an overall benefit. A substantial 47% supported the belief that bans could positively impact student screen use.

Students overwhelmingly preferred continued access to phones with rules, rather than outright bans. Only 9% supported complete bans, while 50% advocated for phones with "some rules" and 41% for "strict rules."

contrasted with students' desire for controlled access and their demonstrated capacity to define and understand self-regulation in the digital realm. This approach of complete tech ban may bypass student agency and their inherent understanding of digital balance as a personal responsibility, potentially undermining the very goal of fostering responsible tech use.

4. Screen Time Conflict

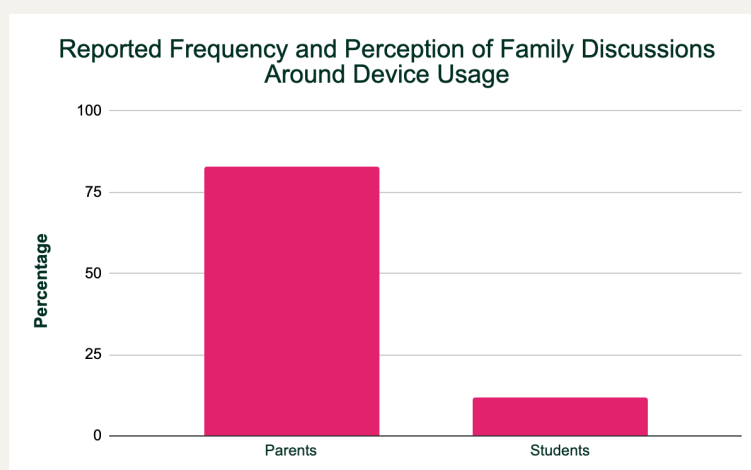
Both parents and students widely acknowledged screen time as a significant source of household conflict:

Parents: A high 62.1% reported that screen use "often" led to conflict, with another 34.5% saying "sometimes." The primary cause of this conflict for 65.5% was the amount of time children spend on devices.

Students: Similar to parents, 67.6% reported "sometimes" or "often" having conflicts with parents over screen time. The main causes, for 58.8%, are also centred on time spent on devices. Students also reported that only 26.5% of parents are "fair" about screen time rules, with 55.9% saying "sometimes fair" and 17.7% "too strict," and 58.8% have experienced device confiscation.

There is strong consensus between parents and students that screen time is a frequent trigger for conflict, primarily due to the duration of device use. However, students' perception of parental fairness in rule-setting suggested that while parents were actively enforcing limits (as evidenced by high confiscation rates), their methods might be perceived as inconsistent or overly strict by children, potentially exacerbating tension.

This could be explained by the reported frequency and perception of family discussions around device usage. Parents reported active general discussion, with 44.83% "often" and 37.93% "sometimes" discussing what their child does online. However, in contrast to parental self-reporting, only 11.76% of students said they talked about what they do online and how much time they spend pre-project.



61% of **SLT** members saw social media's impact on their own mood/self-esteem as "a mix of both" (positive and negative).

However, their perception dramatically shifts for **students**, with an overwhelming 61% believing it impacts students negatively.

5. Alignment of Expectations (Home vs. School)

SLT: A large majority, **72.2%**, believed parents and teachers are "not well aligned" or "not at all aligned" regarding screen time expectations. Only **27.8%** see some or complete alignment.

Students: Largely concurred with the SLT's view, with **55.9%** feeling parents and teachers have "completely" or "mostly different" expectations. Only a mere **2.9%** felt expectations are the same.

This shared perception of misalignment between home and school expectations may have presented a major challenge for consistent digital wellbeing initiatives. It suggests that students receive mixed signals (from schools and parents), which can hinder their ability to develop and adhere to healthy screen habits.

6. Perceived Impact of Social Media/Screens

Perceptions of social media's impact on mood and self-esteem varied between adults' self-assessment and their views on students:

SLT (Personal vs. Students): While 61.11% of SLT members saw social media's impact on their own mood/self-esteem as "a mix of both" (positive and negative) their perception dramatically shifts for students, with an overwhelming 61.11% believing it impacts students negatively.

Parents (Personal): Similar to SLT's personal view, 62.07% of parents report a "mix of both" impact on their own mood/self-esteem from social media. A slightly higher percentage of parents (17.24%) report a solely "Negative" impact on themselves compared to SLT (2.78%).

Students (Personal): Even though not asked directly regarding social media, 52.95% of students acknowledged that too much screen time made them "tired or affected them". Moreover, a substantial 76.47% used screens to avoid feeling bored or lonely pre-project.

SLT harboured a profound concern for the negative impact of social media on students' mental wellbeing, a concern that far outweighs their perception of its negative impact on themselves. Parents also experience screen tiredness personally and acknowledge their modelling role, but students' reliance on screens for emotional coping highlights a deeper, often overlooked, driver for screen time that mere restrictions might not address.

7. Generational Divide in Digital Wellbeing Views

Both adult groups largely agreed that a generational divide exists in understanding digital wellbeing:

Parents: An overwhelming 86.21% believed different generations view digital wellbeing significantly differently.

SLT: Also largely agreed, with 77.78% believing there's a significant difference. Interestingly, SLT is almost twice as likely as parents (19.44% vs. 10.34%) to perceive the difference as only "slight," perhaps due to more direct daily interaction with students.

This widespread adult recognition of a generational gap provides crucial common ground for intervention.

8. Educational Technology vs. Perceived Productivity

A notable divergence existed in how SLT viewed the educational potential of technology versus parents' assessment of their child's actual screen time productivity:

SLT: A strong 69.44% believed that educational technology positively impacts children's learning.

Overall Pre-Challenge Dynamic:

The pre-challenge data reveals an interplay of perceptions and behaviours. Parents were generally presented as the most confident and proactive in their own digital wellbeing, while also being highly concerned and engaged in managing their children's screen time, often leading to conflict. SLT members were deeply concerned about the negative impacts of digital media on students and largely supported school-based restrictions, but they exhibited a significant gap in their own active self-management and were reluctant to apply similar restrictions to themselves. Students, while open to learning about digital wellbeing, demonstrated lower active self-management and often relied on screens for emotional coping. Critical misalignments existed in expectations and perceptions between home and school, particularly regarding consistent role modelling and the perceived productivity of screen time.

Parents: In contrast, 58.62% believed that most of their child's screen time is not focused on productive activities. Only a small 10.34% believed it is "Yes, mostly" productive.

This disconnect could lead to friction, as parents may not support technology integration if they don't see tangible benefits in their child's overall digital engagement.

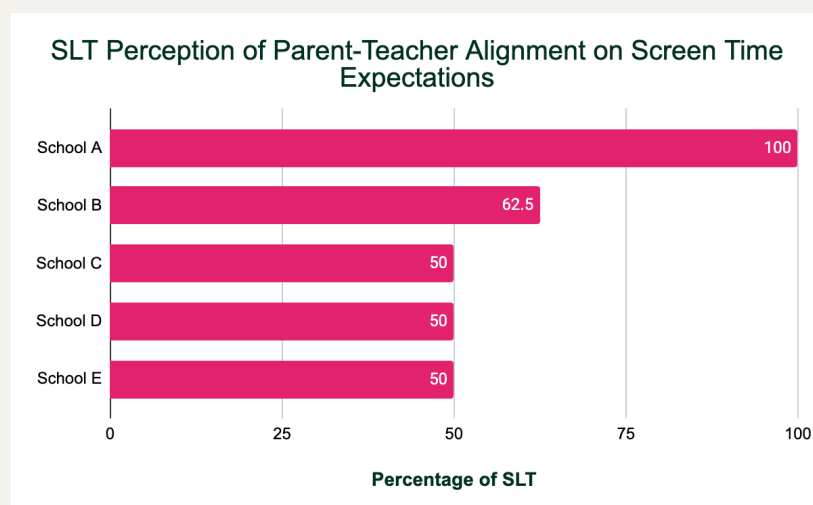
PART TWO: School-Specific Insights

1. Perception of Screen Time Negatively Impacting Children's Focus

Across all surveyed schools, a vast majority of SLT members perceived that screen time frequently or always negatively impacts children's ability to focus.

There are no "Never" responses, indicating a universal concern.

School A, School E, and School D show the most intense perception, with 100% of SLT members feeling that screen time negatively impacted students' ability to focus. School B and School C: These two schools, with larger sample sizes, also show a strong majority expressing that screen time *often* or *always* negatively impacts focus (50% and 66.67% respectively).



The overarching theme across all SLT teams in these schools is a strong and consistent perception that screen time negatively affects children's ability to focus. This suggests a shared concern among school leadership that could serve as a powerful motivator for implementing digital wellbeing initiatives aimed at addressing this perceived impact and further identifies the reason why schools should be more aware and more purposeful with technology use - to ensure students use it effectively and don't lose focus.

2. SLT Perception of Parent-Teacher Alignment on Screen Time Expectations

Across all schools, the prevailing notion among SLT members was that parental and teacher expectations regarding screen time are not well aligned. In School A, this perception is 100%, and in most other schools (School C, School B, School D), over half of the SLT members reported a lack of alignment.

While misalignment was common, its intensity varied. School A showed 100% "Not well aligned." School C and School B had a significant combined "Not well aligned" and "Not at all aligned" percentage (50% and 62.5% respectively). School E showed 50% "Not well aligned."

Despite the dominant negative perception, a notable percentage of SLT members in most schools remained neutral. Furthermore, a portion in most schools perceived "somewhat aligned" expectations. This indicates that while disconnect is common, it's not always perceived as absolute, and some level of partial understanding or agreement exists.

Unique "Completely Aligned"

Response: Only School B (12.5%) had any SLT member who felt expectations were "completely aligned," which is a notable outlier among the responses.

The majority of **SLT** members across most schools (School A, School C, School E, School D) perceived that staff either "Yes, overuse" or "Sometimes" overuse mobile devices. This may have aligned with earlier findings where students felt teachers weren't always modelling good habits.

School A (100% "Yes"), School C (67% "Yes"), and School E (75% "Yes") showed the strongest perception of staff actively overusing devices.

School B was a significant outlier with no SLT member stating "Yes, overuse."

3. Perceptions of Educational Technology's Impact

During the pre-project period there were differences observed that highlight varying levels of agreement, neutrality, and even disagreement towards educational technology in regards to students' learning.

School A (100%) and School C (91.67%) stood out with the highest combined positive sentiment, indicating a very strong belief in educational technology's positive impact. School D (60%) showed a solid majority with a positive view. School B (37.50%) also showed a strong segment of "Strongly Agree" responses. School E (75%) had a remarkably high proportion of neutral responses. This may suggest a significant segment of their staff is undecided, had mixed feelings, or perceived the impact as neither strongly positive nor negative.

4. Modelling Healthy Habits

The data overwhelmingly indicated a strong belief across most surveyed schools that teachers, leaders, and parents should model healthy screen time.

5. "Do you believe that banning phones in schools will have an overall benefit to the community and students' wellbeing?"

Unlike previous questions, there was no universal consensus on banning phones for the sake of students' and community's wellbeing. Opinions range from nearly unanimous support to strong opposition.

School A and School D showed absolute support for a phone ban. School E (75%) also mostly believed a ban would have an overall benefit. School C was somewhat divided, with a clear majority supporting the ban, but a significant portion opposing it. School B (12.5% Pro-Ban, 87.5% Anti-Ban/Neutral) was a clear outlier and the only one where the vast majority of respondents were either neutral or explicitly opposed to a phone ban as a beneficial practice.

6. Influencing Screen Use Outside of School Hours

There was a significant divergence in opinion on whether banning phones actually impacts screen use. This varied greatly from school to school.

School D stood out with unanimous and strong conviction that banning phones will impact screen use. School E (75%) also shows strong belief in the effectiveness of a ban for this purpose. However, School A (100% Oppose) was the starkest contrast, indicating a complete disbelief in the effectiveness of a ban to influence screen use. School C (66.66% Doubts/Opposes) and School B (62.50% Doubts/Opposes) were either neutral or opposed to the idea that a ban would impact screen use. This suggests significant skepticism or uncertainty.

It's important to differentiate this question from the previous one (banning phones for students' wellbeing). A school might support a ban for overall benefit (e.g., focus, social interaction) but not necessarily believe it will significantly reduce overall screen time, especially outside of school hours. For example, School C, which had a majority supporting a ban for overall benefit, now has a majority who are neutral or oppose the idea that it impacts screen use. This suggests they might see other benefits to a ban besides direct screen time reduction. Conversely, School B, which opposed a ban for overall benefit, also largely doubts its impact on screen use.

7. Schools Encouraging Healthy Digital Balance

Unlike the previously reported data responses, where some schools had near-unanimous strong opinions, the question *Do you feel that your school encourages healthy digital balance and screen breaks?* showed a more mixed and often divided picture across most schools.

School D (60%) and School C (58.33%) had a slight majority of respondents who feel their school encourages healthy digital balance and screen breaks. This suggests these schools might have more explicit policies or practices in place, or that their efforts are more widely recognised. School D also had the only "Yes, Strongly" response.

School B and School E were perfectly split. This could imply inconsistent implementation, varying awareness among staff, or different interpretations of what "encouraging" healthy digital balance means.

School A had respondents feeling that their school does not encourage healthy digital balance.

8. Students' Perception of Social Media's Impact

Across almost all schools, there was a dominant perception that students generally do *not* understand the impact of social media on their wellbeing. This was a highly consistent finding during pre-project period.

School D and School A showed unanimous belief that students lack understanding. This was a very concerning finding for these schools. School E and School C had large majorities who felt that students didn't understand the impact. School B was the only school where opinions are evenly split, indicating that some staff there believe students do have some understanding. Notably, no school had respondents who answered "Yes, strongly", which may suggest that even where some understanding is perceived, it's rarely seen as profound or comprehensive.

In the light of previous questions, the perceived lack of student understanding appears to be a strong driver for schools that support phone bans (like School E, and School D) and believe these bans will impact screen use. They likely view the ban as a necessary external control to protect students from something they don't fully comprehend.

9. Barriers to Implementing Balanced Screen Time to Society

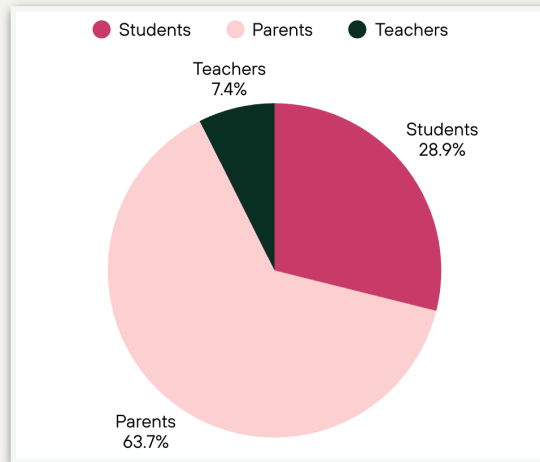
Across all schools, "Habits" (likely referring to ingrained user behaviour, ease of access, and routine) were consistently cited as the single biggest barrier. This suggests that the daily, automatic nature of screen use is seen as the hardest

Prior to the 21-day challenge, we held workshop sessions with SLT, teachers, students, and parents. At the beginning of these workshops, we asked participants to complete a survey which explored their perceptions and behaviours related to technology use both at home and at work/at school.

The analysis below is split into two parts. Part One explores key areas of alignment and divergence prior to the project between the SLT, Parents, and Students surveys. Part Two goes on to explore school-specific comparisons and conflicts.

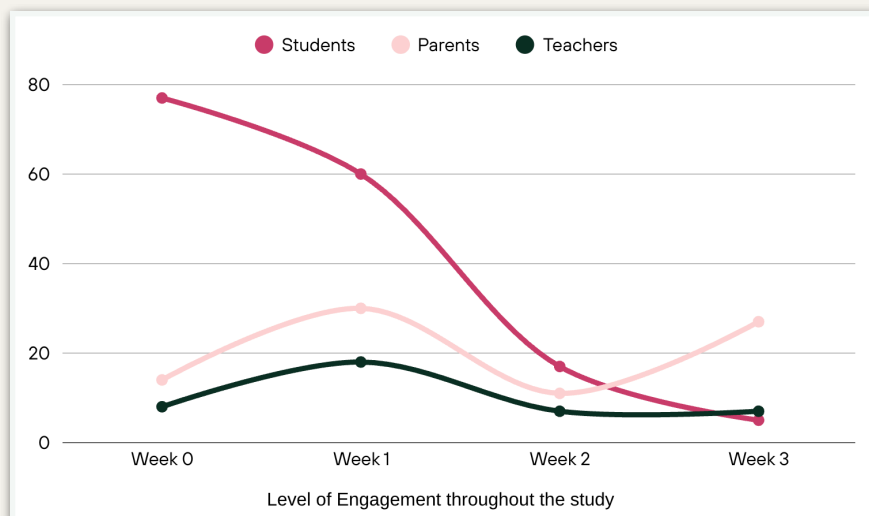
All data throughout this section is anonymised.

RESEARCH PROJECT FINDINGS



The chart to the left demonstrates the ratio of study participants.

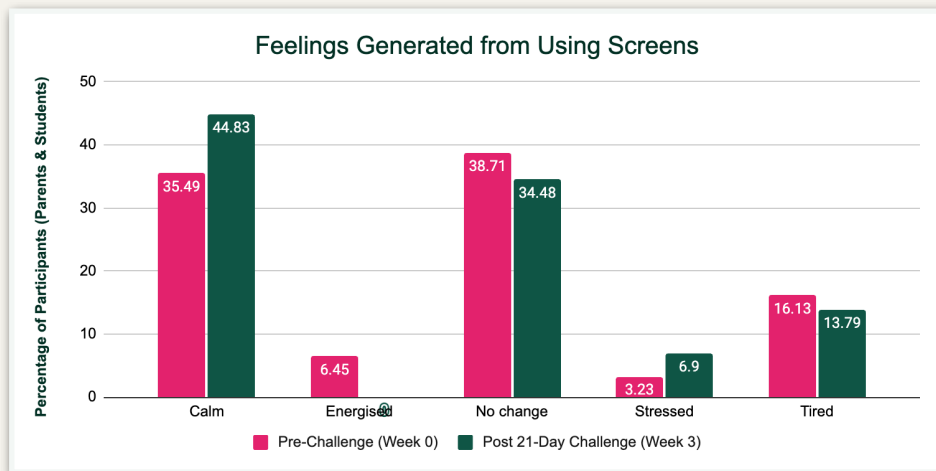
This includes all survey responders, including those who answered 'No' to the question "Are you currently taking part in the digital wellbeing challenge, following a digital routine or plan?"



Engagement levels were initially strong during Week 0 and Week 1 but declined gradually, reaching their lowest point by Week 3.

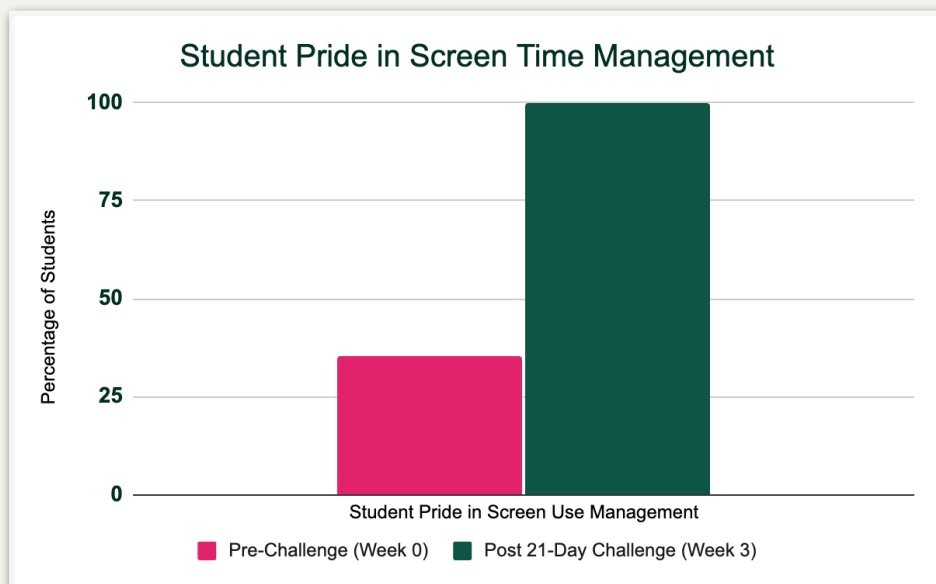
*Week 0 indicates the pre-challenge survey

How did you feel most of the time after using screens this week?



The overall mood of participants was measured before and after participation in the study. It is evident from the data gathered that participation in the challenge resulted in about 9% more participants feeling calm after using screens. Alternatively, by the end of the challenge, less participants generally felt tired after using screens. This could be due to participants making more mindful choices on how to use their limited screen time, having less conflicts with family members regarding screen time use or even spending more screen-free time with family members.

How proud do you feel about how you managed screen use this week?



One of the most significant and striking findings of this study is the amount of pride students felt about managing their own screen use. Before the 21-Day Challenge, 35.29% of students felt extremely proud or somewhat proud of how they managed their own screen time that week. By Week 3, a significant 100% of students who were participating in the challenge were extremely or somewhat proud of how they managed their screen time use.

Family Pledges

The core objective of this project is to foster healthy digital habits within participating families. Prior to beginning the challenge, participants were asked to make personal pledges outlining their intended approach to digital wellbeing, establishing commitment and measurable goals.

The majority of families prioritised reducing screen time during crucial family interactions, including mealtimes, outdoor activities, board game nights, and sporting events. Additionally, participants committed to implementing specific screen-free periods, particularly during early morning hours, before bedtime, and on weekends.

A key component of the initiative was promoting open dialogue about digital habits and their emotional impact. Families were encouraged to celebrate positive changes in their digital behaviour and develop mutual respect regarding device usage. This included practicing mindful habits such as avoiding phone checks during conversations and maintaining engaging interactions during family meals. The pledges reflected a collective understanding that improving digital wellbeing requires consistent family-wide effort and cooperation.

Family Digital Balance Pledge	
Technology can be an incredible tool for connection, learning, and entertainment. As a family, we recognise the importance of finding balance—using devices in ways that support our wellbeing, relationships, and routines. We understand that sometimes more screen time is needed for school, work, or staying in touch with loved ones. But we also know how important it is to pause, reflect, and be intentional in our digital choices. What We Value and Enjoy About Technology We enjoy using technology to: • Stay connected with family and friends • Learn new things and explore interests together • Relax with a movie night or play games as a family • Capture special memories and create together • Help with planning, routines, and staying organised My Digital Balance Commitments As a family, we pledge to be more mindful about how and when we use devices. We commit to: We will reduce our screen time by... (e.g., putting phones away during meals, setting screen-free hours, using a shared charging station outside bedrooms) We will create tech-free moments by... (e.g., spending device-free time outdoors, having regular game or story nights, no screens during homework time) We will look after our digital wellbeing by...	(e.g., encouraging healthy sleep habits, limiting late-night scrolling, talking about how screens make us feel) We will model positive screen use by... (e.g., using tech together for shared activities, being present in conversations, not checking phones when someone is talking) We will support each other in staying balanced by... (e.g., checking in with how screen time is going, reminding each other of our tech-free times, celebrating screen-free wins) Our Family Commitment By making these small, thoughtful changes, we aim to build healthier habits, enjoy more quality time together, and help our children grow up with a strong sense of balance in a digital world. We will make a conscious effort to revisit this pledge as our family's needs grow and change. Digitally Signed: _____ Date: _____

An example Family Pledge we provided families to guide the development of their own one.

21-Day Challenge Findings

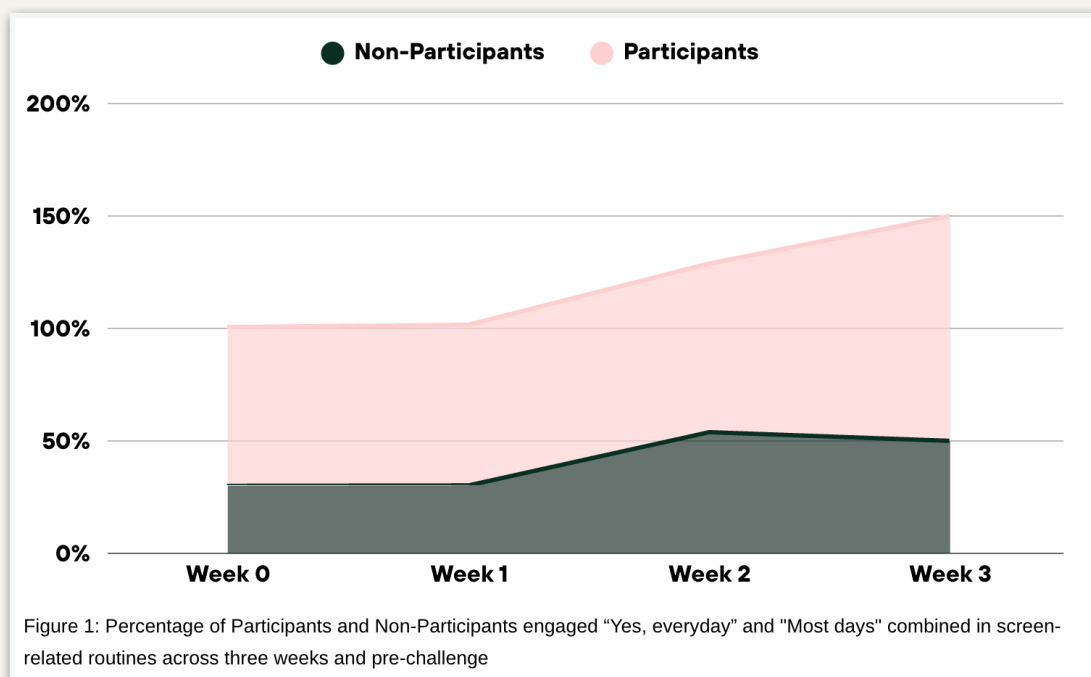
STUDENTS

Adherence to Screen-Related Routines and Personal Goals ("Did you follow any screen-related routines or personal goals this week?")

Pre-Challenge Baseline: Prior to the start of the digital wellbeing challenge, students reported varied engagement with screen-related routines or personal goals. While nearly 40% followed a routine daily or most days, a significant portion (44%) did so only occasionally or rarely, and 17% reported not following any screen-related routines at all.

Challenge Impact: In Week 1, challenge participants dramatically increased their "Yes, every day" adherence to 57.14%, a clear sign of the challenge's early influence. While overall adherence fluctuated for all students (with a slight dip in Week 1 for "Most days" and "Yes, every day" combined), participants consistently maintained high adherence rates in later weeks, often reporting "Most days" or "Yes, every day." Conversely, non-participants consistently had higher proportions in "Rarely" or "Not at all" categories.

The challenge appears to be highly effective in motivating participants to actively follow screen-related goals, reinforcing pre-existing positive tendencies and driving significant behaviour change.



Perceived Control Over Screen Time ("How in control did you feel of your screen time this week?")

Participant Stability: Participants consistently reported a strong sense of control throughout the challenge. In Week 1, a high majority of participants (57.14%) felt "Mostly in control," contrasting with non-participants who showed a larger increase in feeling "Not at all" or "Rarely" in control. While there was a slight overall dip in perceived control for all students in Week 1 (more reporting "Not at all" or "Rarely"), this generally recovered by Week 2. In later weeks, participants overwhelmingly reported feeling "Completely" or "Mostly in control."

The challenge appears to foster a more robust and stable sense of self-efficacy in managing screen time among participants, suggesting a positive psychological impact.

Intentionality and Pride in Screen Time Management

Screen-Free Choices: While "I sometimes made screen-free choices" remained the most common response for all students, participants consistently showed higher rates of "regularly made time away from screens" and lower rates of "didn't really choose screen-free time," especially by Week 3.

Pride in Management: Participants started with higher neutrality regarding their screen management (64.71% "Neutral" pre-project). However, as the challenge progressed, they showed a clear and increasing trend towards feeling "Somewhat proud" of their screen management, surpassing non-participants in this category by Week 1 and maintaining high rates in later weeks.

The challenge empowered participants to be more proactive and consistent in making screen-free choices, which, in turn, fostered a tangible sense of accomplishment and pride in their digital wellbeing efforts.

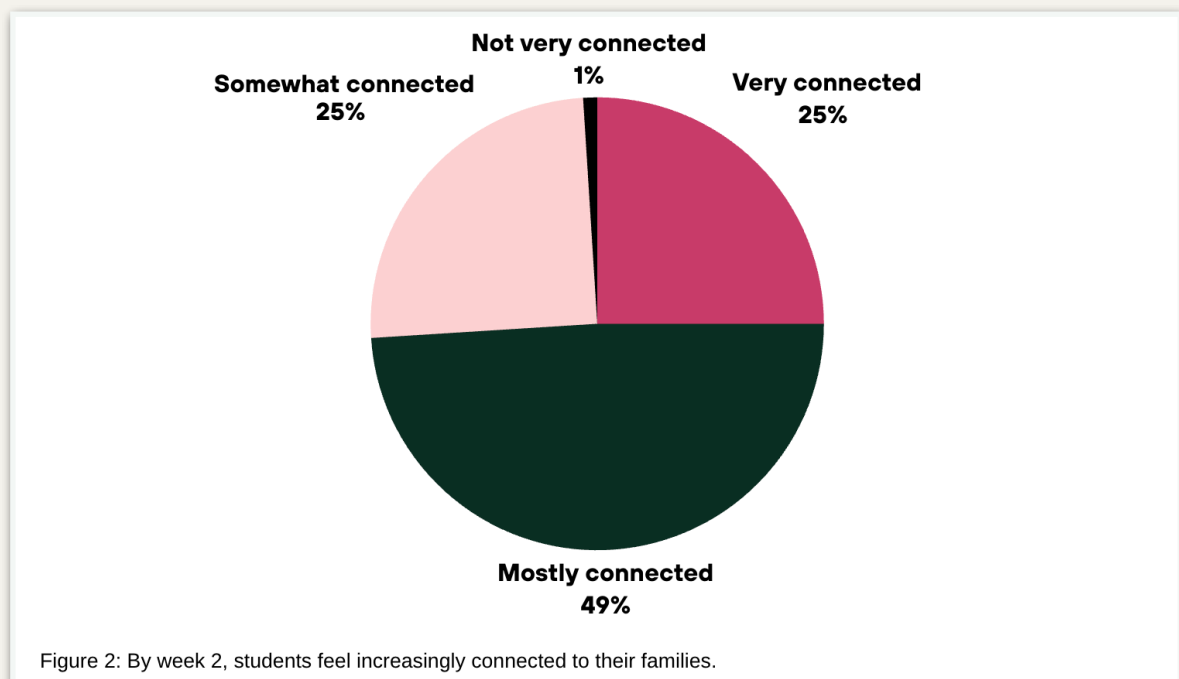
Family Dynamics: Disagreements & Screen-Free Time Together ("Did your family have any disagreements or conflict about screens or devices this week?")

Participants reported notably higher pre-challenge family disagreements (more "Most days" and "Yes, every day") compared to non-participants, possibly reflecting existing family tension around screens or their willingness to engage in difficult conversations. While both groups saw a slight overall increase in conflict in Week 1, participants generally experienced more frequent disagreements. By Week 2, participants showed a marked decrease in frequent conflicts, suggesting successful resolution or adaptation.

"How often did your household spend screen-free time together this week?"

Participants consistently reported more frequent ("Daily" or "Most days") screen-free time together with family throughout the challenge, especially compared to non-participants. For example, participants report 35.29% daily screen-free time vs 13.33% for non-participants. This indicates the challenge's positive spillover effect on family interactions.

The challenge prompted active re-negotiation of screen use within participant households, leading to initial conflicts that seem to resolve over time. Crucially, it also encouraged a consistent increase in dedicated screen-free family time.



Overall Interpretation and Key Takeaways for Students

The 21-day digital wellbeing challenge demonstrably influenced the screen habits and perceptions of participating students. Key findings indicate:

Behavioural Intentionality: Participants, starting with higher pre-challenge motivation, consistently increased their adherence to screen-related goals and became more intentional about their screen-free choices for learning and personal time.

Improved Self-Regulation: A clear positive trend emerged in participants' perceived control over screen time and their emotional responses (increased calmness) after screen use.

Dynamic Family Adaptation: While initial family conflicts around screens were more prevalent among participants, these seem to have given way to more consistent screen-free family time, suggesting successful family adaptation to new digital boundaries.

Nuanced Screen Use for Learning: Rather than outright reduction, participants appeared to shift from a daily reliance on screens for learning/work to a more mindful, yet still frequent, pattern of use.

Emotional State: The challenge appears to foster a greater sense of calmness after screen use among participants over time. Participants, starting from a slightly less positive emotional baseline, showed a more significant improvement in feeling "Calm" compared to non-participants.

Sample Size Limitation: It is crucial to acknowledge the significant reduction in respondent numbers by Weeks 2 and 3. While the trends among the remaining participants are compelling, the smaller sample sizes limit the generalisability of conclusions drawn from these later weeks.

In summary, the digital wellbeing challenge appears to be a valuable intervention that fostered positive behavioural changes and a stronger sense of self-management regarding screen time among its participants, encouraging a more balanced and mindful digital lifestyle.

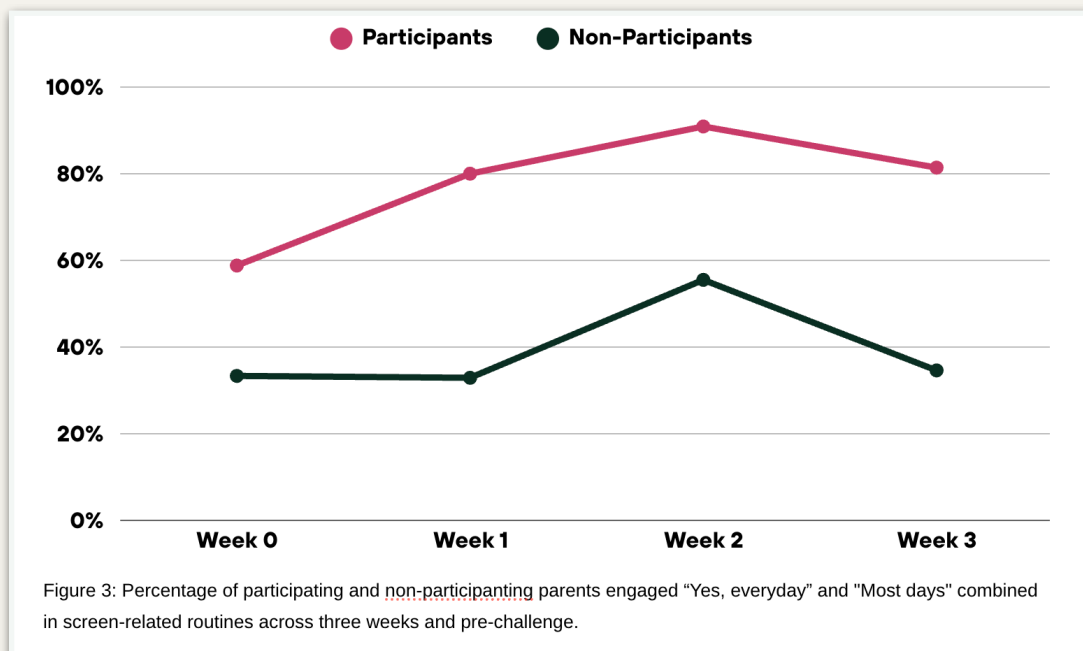
21-Day Challenge Findings

PARENTS

Adherence to Screen-Related Routines and Personal Goals ("Did you follow any screen-related routines or personal goals this week?")

Pre-Challenge Baseline: Before the challenge began, parental engagement with screen-related routines was mixed. While **58.8%** of parents reported following a routine **daily or most days**, **23.6%** did so **only occasionally or rarely**, and **17.6%** did not follow any routines at all. Notably, non-participants consistently showed **higher proportions** in the "Rarely" or "Not at all" categories.

Challenge Impact: In **Week 1**, adherence among participants surged, with **80% reporting "Yes, every day"**: a strong indicator of the challenge's early influence. This momentum carried through the following weeks, with most participants continuing to report following routines **"most days" or daily**.



Perceived Control Over Screen Time

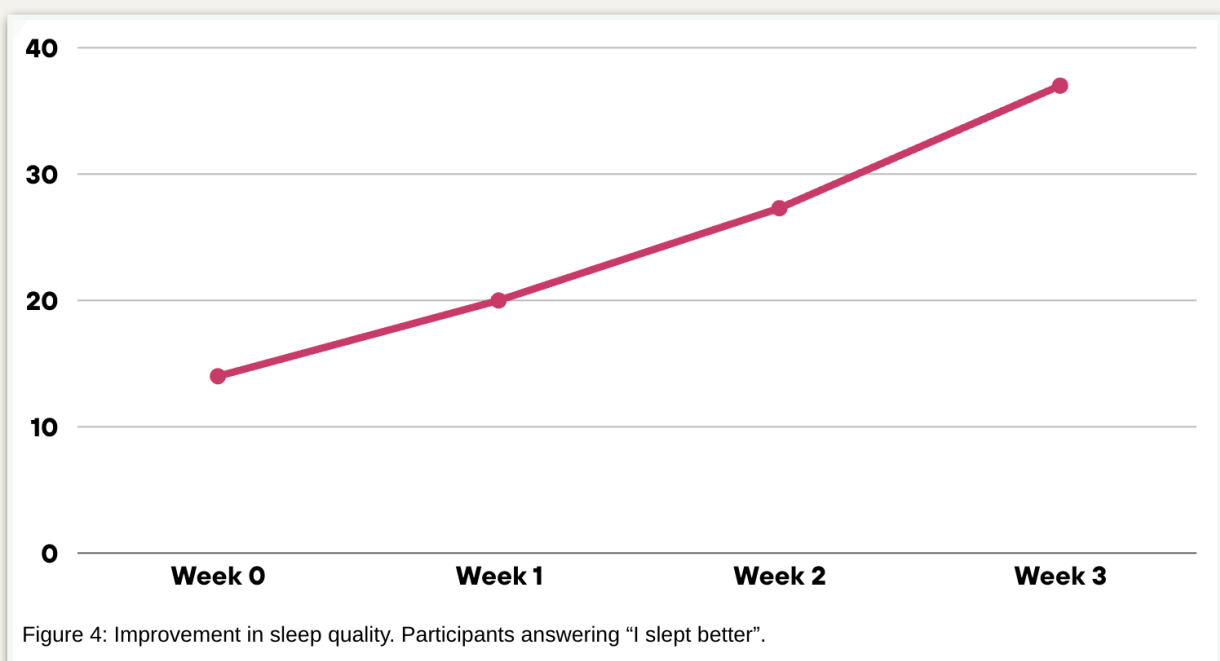
"How in control did you feel of your screen time this week?": Across all weeks, participating parents **consistently** reported **strong control** over their screen use. Responses such as **"Rarely"** or **"Not at all"** remained **below 10%** in both participant and non-participant groups, even though the latter were not actively engaging in structured routines.

Sleep Quality

"Did you notice any changes in your sleep this week?": Among participants, perceived sleep quality **steadily improved** throughout the challenge:

- **Baseline:** 14% reported "I slept better"
- **Week 1:** 20%
- **Week 2:** 27.3%
- **Week 3:** 37%

The control group's trend was inconsistent and inconclusive by comparison.



Family Dynamics

"How connected did you feel to your family this week?": Participating parents reported an **increasing sense of family connection** over time, reaching **88.9%** ("Very connected" or "Mostly connected") by **Week 3**. In contrast, the control group's perceived connection remained largely unchanged at around **65%**.

Intentionality and Pride in Screen Time Management

Screen-Free Choices: Parents increasingly made conscious efforts to disconnect. The percentage who responded **"I regularly made screen-free choices"** grew from **35.7% in Week 1 to 73% by Week 3**.

Pride in Management: Participants also expressed growing **pride in their ability to manage screen time**, mirroring similar trends observed among students. Many described themselves as **"Somewhat proud"**, reflecting a strengthened sense of agency and progress.

The challenge clearly supported parents in becoming more proactive, mindful, and consistent in their screen use, leading to both behavioural shifts and greater self-recognition of success.

Overall Interpretation and Key Takeaways for Parents

The 21-Day Digital Wellbeing Challenge had a clear and measurable impact on participating parents. Key takeaways include:

Behavioural Intentionality: A sustained increase in daily or near-daily routine adherence.

Improved Self-Regulation: High and stable levels of perceived control over screen use.

Dynamic Family Adaptation: Strengthened feelings of connection within the family unit.

Emotional Wellbeing: Gradual improvements in sleep, mood, and pride around digital habits.

In summary, the challenge successfully empowered parents to adopt healthier screen habits, increase mindfulness, and foster stronger connections within their households.

LIMITATIONS OF THE PROJECT

Despite its success, the digital wellbeing project faced several noteworthy limitations. The primary challenge emerged in data collection, where response rates varied significantly across different survey phases. Given the voluntary nature of participation, maintaining consistent engagement proved particularly challenging, especially among indirect participants such as students and teachers who were not primary stakeholders in the project.

Furthermore, inherent methodological limitations must be acknowledged. The study relied heavily on self-reported data, focusing on qualitative metrics such as personal experiences and emotional responses. While this approach provided valuable insights into participants' digital wellness journeys, it introduced potential response bias. The project's effectiveness was contingent upon participants' willingness to communicate openly and honestly about their digital habits and experiences.

FUTURE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

Areas that we would identify as opportunities for further research based on the process and findings from this project are:

- Conducting the project with the same design, however adding in regular intervention (for example, once a week), to keep engagement and motivation of participants high, thus directly targeting the lower engagement rates we saw as the weeks progressed.
- A larger sample size of the same project design would enable us to develop wider insights and identify trends on a larger scale.
- Implement the challenge across school groups to support widespread digital wellbeing efforts but also create an opportunity to benchmark screen habits and emotional outcomes across schools within the same ecosystem.
- Repeating the same project design but in schools in different global regions may provide some interesting insight into how the geographical context has an impact on those areas explored within this project.
- The original design of the project was to complete it within schools who needed to actively 'ban' students from mobile phones. In reality, the schools who chose to join the project had all already implemented strategy of different designs to control student access to their mobile phones. Therefore, it would be interesting to complete the project in a school where this hasn't been implemented yet to explore the impact at the initial point of 'ban' or 'control.'

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The schools

EdRuption would like to thank the schools who invited them into their community and the members of staff who were the point of contact throughout the research project.

We aimed to explore perceptions and perspectives through a mix of direct questions, discussions, reflection, and video prompts. Despite there being a mix of beliefs within each stakeholder group we worked with, the level of honesty and respect during each session was greatly appreciated. The level of reflection across all stakeholder groups allowed for some deep exploration into the role of digital devices and the apps and platforms that we use on those devices.

The biggest highlight was facilitating the Family Workshops, and seeing parents and children engaging in open and honest dialogue, reflection, and a willingness to understand each other's viewpoints. The laughter that filled the room on many occasions was fantastic to hear.

Our student interns

We are thankful for New York University, Abu Dhabi for allowing us the opportunity to recruit student interns to support us with the data analysis and the development of this report.

Samira Aldybergenova and Sezim Bekova worked tirelessly to ensure that the underlying research and analysis of the data was thorough and robust. Their CV's are outstanding and we are convinced they have a very impressive future ahead of them. Their role in the completion of this research project has been invaluable.



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