



Thriving in the Digital Age: How Self-Compassion, Emotional Resilience, and Online Social Connectedness Shape Young Freelancers' Digital Well-Being

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the link between self-compassion and digital well-being among young freelancers, focusing on the mediating role of emotional resilience and the moderating effect of online social connectedness. With Generation Alpha and Millennials increasingly engaged in digital spaces, understanding the psychological factors that influence digital well-being is crucial. Using a quantitative, cross-sectional research design, data were collected from 300 young freelancers (149 men and 151 women) aged 18–35 through convenience sampling. Participants completed validated measures assessing self-compassion, digital well-being, emotional resilience, and online social connectedness. Findings revealed a positive association between self-compassion and digital well-being, with emotional resilience partially mediating this relationship. Additionally, online social connectedness significantly moderated this link, enhancing the beneficial effects of self-compassion on digital well-being. These results emphasize the role of self-compassion and emotional resilience in promoting healthier digital engagement. The study highlights the need for mental health interventions and digital literacy initiatives to support well-being in digital work environments. Future research should explore these relationships longitudinally and develop intervention-based strategies for fostering sustainable digital well-being. This study adds to the growing literature by providing empirical insights into the psychological factors shaping young freelancers' online experiences.



Introduction

Self-Compassion

Self-compassion is a psychological concept that highlights the importance of being kind and understanding toward oneself, particularly in times of failure, distress, or feelings of inadequacy. It consists of three elements: self-kindness, which involves responding to oneself with warmth rather than self-criticism; common humanity, the recognition that struggles and suffering are a shared human experience; and mindfulness, which entails maintaining a balanced awareness of one's emotions without becoming overly attached to them (Neff, 2023; Shapiro et al., 2006). Together, these components contribute to greater emotional resilience and overall psychological well-being.

Recent studies emphasize the role of self-compassion in strengthening resilience during adversity. An ongoing systematic review and meta-analysis seeks to synthesize evidence on how self-compassion fosters resilience through mechanisms such as emotion regulation and stress coping. Initial findings indicate that self-compassion helps reduce negative emotions, enhance positive emotions, and alleviate stress-related physiological responses, including cortisol levels and inflammation (Gilbert, 2024; JMIR Res Protoc, 2024). These results highlight self-compassion's potential as a protective factor in difficult situations.

Research has also examined the distinction between self-compassion and self-esteem. While self-esteem often relies on external validation, self-compassion provides a more stable sense of self-worth by encouraging acceptance of personal imperfections. Studies indicate that self-compassion is positively associated with traits like openness and agreeableness while helping reduce neurotic tendencies (Neff, 2023; Robins et al., 2001). This makes it a more sustainable approach to mental well-being compared to the fluctuating nature of self-esteem. Interventions designed to cultivate self-compassion, such as Mindful Self-Compassion training and Compassion-Focused Therapy, have shown significant benefits. These programs help individuals respond to their own suffering with greater care and understanding. Research suggests that such interventions not only enhance self-compassion but also alleviate symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress, ultimately promoting overall well-being (Bluth et al., 2023; Nature Research Intelligence, 2024).

Furthermore, the benefits of self-compassion extend beyond personal well-being to enhance interpersonal relationships. Individuals who practice self-compassion are more likely to demonstrate empathy and supportive behaviors, strengthening social connections and contributing to community resilience (Yarnell et al., 2025). These findings underscore the broader societal impact of fostering self-compassion.

In summary, self-compassion serves as a crucial psychological resource that promotes emotional resilience, mental well-being, and positive social interactions. By incorporating practices that cultivate self-kindness, mindfulness, and a sense of common humanity into everyday life or therapeutic interventions, individuals can develop a healthier relationship with both themselves and those around them.

Digital Well-being

Digital well-being is a growing concept that highlights the importance of fostering a healthy relationship with technology. It emphasizes that individuals can enhance their overall well-being by using digital tools mindfully and in balance. Various definitions describe digital well-being as a subjective experience in which technology supports personal goals and contributes to overall life satisfaction (UNESCO, 2024; Gui, Fasoli, & Carridore, 2024). This perspective acknowledges the

dual nature of digital interactions, requiring individuals to navigate both their benefits and challenges to maintain optimal mental and emotional health.

The importance of digital well-being has become even more evident in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated dependence on digital technologies for work, education, and social interaction. As individuals adjust to these shifts, it is essential to understand how digital media affects mental health. Research suggests that excessive technology use can contribute to feelings of isolation and anxiety, whereas a balanced approach can strengthen social connections and improve life satisfaction (OECD, 2024; Vanden Abeele, 2021). This highlights the need for individuals to develop awareness of their digital habits and make intentional choices that support overall well-being.

Empirical research has examined the link between digital media use and well-being, yielding mixed findings. Some studies suggest that moderate use can strengthen social bonds and offer emotional support, while excessive engagement is often linked to negative outcomes, including depression and anxiety (Orben & Przybylski, 2019; Büchi et al., 2024). As a result, it is crucial to approach digital consumption with a critical perspective, discerning when it fosters connection and when it may contribute to emotional distress.

To promote digital well-being, various strategies can be implemented at both individual and societal levels. On an individual level, people are encouraged to set clear boundaries for technology use, such as establishing screen-free times or designated spaces. Additionally, educational initiatives can enhance digital literacy, enabling users to better understand the impact of their online behaviors (Ithra Digital Wellbeing Index, 2024). At a societal level, policymakers can develop frameworks that prioritize mental health in the design of digital platforms, ensuring that they foster positive user experiences instead of encouraging exploitative engagement tactics.

The Global Digital Wellbeing Index (2024) provides valuable insights into how various countries are addressing the challenges of digital technology use. By evaluating policies and practices across 35 nations, the index aims to establish benchmarks for creating environments that promote mental health while harnessing the benefits of technology. This collaborative effort emphasizes the shared responsibility of users, developers, and policymakers in fostering a healthier digital landscape.

In conclusion, digital well-being is a complex and evolving concept that requires continual attention as technology becomes more deeply integrated into our lives. By cultivating awareness of our digital behaviors and advocating for supportive policies and practices, we can navigate the complexities of the digital world and enhance our overall well-being.

Emotional Resilience

Emotional resilience is the ability to recover and adapt in response to adversity, stress, and difficult life circumstances. It plays a vital role in psychological well-being, helping individuals maintain emotional stability during challenging times. Key traits of emotional resilience include emotional flexibility, effective coping strategies, and robust social support networks (Rachmad, 2022; American Psychological Association, 2024). As our lives grow more complex and stressful, cultivating emotional resilience has become increasingly important for personal growth and mental health.

Recent research highlights that emotional resilience is not just an inherent trait but a dynamic quality that can be developed over time. Studies suggest that individuals who actively engage in self-reflection and practice emotional regulation techniques are better prepared to cope with

stressors (Luthans, 2002; Lloyd et al., 2016). This adaptability enables them to recover from challenges more quickly and effectively. For example, a recent study found that teachers with high emotional resilience were better able to manage classroom stress, preserving their emotional well-being while creating positive learning environments (Lloyd et al., 2023).

The importance of social support in strengthening emotional resilience cannot be emphasized enough. Strong interpersonal connections provide individuals with the essential resources needed to navigate challenging times. Research indicates that people with robust social networks tend to report higher levels of emotional resilience and lower levels of anxiety and depression (Baker et al., 2021; Vanden Abeele, 2021). This underscores the significance of nurturing relationships with family, friends, and community members as key factors in building resilience.

Additionally, recent studies have explored the relationship between meaning in life and emotional resilience. A 2024 study found that individuals who perceive greater meaning in their lives demonstrate higher levels of emotional resilience (Murden et al., 2024). This connection highlights the role of purpose and direction in enhancing one's capacity to cope with adversity. By fostering a sense of meaning, individuals can strengthen their emotional resources and enhance their overall psychological well-being.

In educational settings, fostering emotional resilience among students has become increasingly crucial. Programs focused on developing social-emotional skills have been proven to improve students' ability to cope with stress and enhance their academic performance (Mansfield et al., 2012; Grant & Kinman, 2014). These initiatives not only provide students with effective coping strategies but also create a supportive environment in which they can emotionally thrive.

In conclusion, emotional resilience is an essential aspect of mental health, which can be cultivated through strategies such as self-awareness, effective coping techniques, and strong social support networks. By understanding the factors that contribute to emotional resilience, individuals can better equip themselves to confront life's challenges. Ongoing research in this field will continue to uncover the ways in which emotional resilience can be nurtured across diverse populations.

Online Social Connectedness

Online social connectedness refers to the sense of belonging and interpersonal relationships that individuals develop through digital platforms. As technology becomes increasingly integrated into everyday life, online interactions have become a vital part of how people form and sustain social connections. This concept is especially relevant in today's world, where digital communication often complements or even replaces in-person interactions. Research indicates that online social connectedness can promote feelings of inclusion and support, though its impact largely depends on the quality and context of these interactions (Büchi, 2024; Lee & Zarnic, 2024).

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the significance of online social connectedness as a tool to combat isolation during times of physical distancing. Digital platforms offered individuals the chance to maintain relationships and participate in social activities virtually. However, research has shown that while online interactions can help alleviate loneliness, they cannot fully replicate the emotional richness of face-to-face connections (Van Bel & Smolders, 2024). For instance, adolescents who heavily relied on digital communication experienced mixed outcomes, with some benefiting from increased support, while others felt more isolated due to the superficial nature of online interactions (Büchi, 2024).

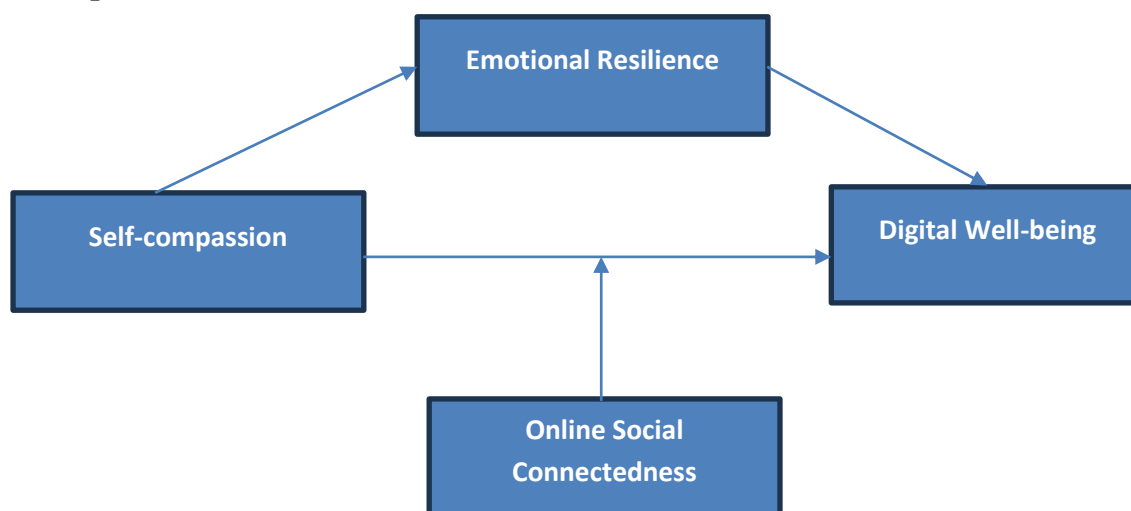
Research shows that online social connectedness plays a crucial role in mental health. Positive digital interactions can boost well-being by offering emotional support and creating a sense of community. On the other hand, excessive or negative online engagement such as cyberbullying or social comparison can intensify feelings of inadequacy and loneliness (Lee & Zarnic, 2024; Büchi, 2024). This dual nature highlights the need for mindful technology use, ensuring its benefits are maximized while minimizing potential risks.

The quality of online interactions plays a key role in shaping their impact on well-being. A study by Büchi (2024) highlights those meaningful connections marked by mutual support and shared interests—are more likely to strengthen emotional resilience than superficial or transactional exchanges. Platforms designed to foster positive engagement and discourage harmful behaviors can greatly enhance users' experiences. For example, features that promote constructive dialogue or reduce exposure to toxic content can create healthier digital environments (OECD, 2024).

Educational initiatives that promote digital literacy also contribute to improved online social connectedness. By teaching individuals to navigate digital spaces responsibly, these programs enable users to build meaningful relationships while avoiding challenges like misinformation or cyberbullying (Büchi, 2024; Lee & Zarnic, 2024). Policymakers and platform developers play an important role in establishing supportive frameworks that improve the quality of online interactions.

In conclusion, online social connectedness is a complex phenomenon that has both positive and negative effects on mental health and well-being. While it provides opportunities for support and community building, it also introduces challenges that need thoughtful management. By encouraging meaningful digital interactions and promoting responsible use of technology, individuals can maximize the benefits of online social connectedness while minimizing its potential risks.

Conceptual Model



Objectives

1. To examine the association between self-compassion and digital well-being among young freelancers.
2. To investigate mediating function of emotional resilience between self-compassion and digital well-being among young freelancers.

3. To investigate moderating function of online social connectedness between self-compassion and digital well-being among young freelancers.

Hypotheses

1. Self-compassion is positively linked to digital well-being among young freelancers.
2. Emotional resilience mediates the association between self-compassion and digital well-being among young freelancers.
3. Online social connectedness moderates the association between self-compassion and digital well-being among young freelancers.

Measures of Study

Emotional Resilience Scale

The Emotional Resilience Scale (ERS) was designed to evaluate emotional resilience across various settings, with a particular focus on employee well-being. Developed by Wagnild and Young in 1993, the scale comprises 14 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale, where higher scores reflect greater resilience. Research has shown that the ERS is a reliable measure, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.72 to 0.94, indicating strong internal consistency across diverse populations. It has also demonstrated solid validity, showing positive correlations with psychological well-being and negative associations with stress and anxiety, reinforcing its effectiveness in assessing emotional resilience (Wagnild & Young, 1993; Pritzker & Minter, 2014; Windle et al., 2011).

Digital Well-being Scale

The Digital Well-Being Scale (DWBS) was designed to assess individuals' subjective well-being in digital environments, considering both hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of happiness. Developed by Arslankara et al. (2022), the scale includes 12 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. It has demonstrated strong reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values indicating high internal consistency. Its construct validity was supported through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, identifying three key dimensions: digital satisfaction, safe and responsible behavior, and digital wellness. The scale was validated with a sample of 367 digital technology users and aims to address the need for a comprehensive measure of digital well-being.

Self-Compassion Scale

The Self-Compassion Scale (SCS), developed by Kristin Neff in 2003, measures individual differences in self-compassion, which includes self-kindness, recognizing shared human experiences, and mindfulness. The scale consists of 26 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Research has shown it to be highly reliable, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.86 to 0.92, indicating strong internal consistency (Neff, 2003; Neff et al., 2019). It has also demonstrated good validity, as it correlates with positive mental health outcomes such as lower anxiety and depression and greater life satisfaction. Factor analyses have supported its three-dimensional structure and its distinction from related concepts like self-esteem.

Online Social Connectedness

The Online Social Connectedness Scale (OSCS), developed by Lee, Draper, and Lee in 2001, measures the extent to which individuals feel socially connected in online environments. The scale consists of 20 items rated on a 6-point Likert scale, with higher scores reflecting stronger feelings of connectedness. Research has shown that the OSCS has excellent reliability, with internal consistency coefficients exceeding 0.92 across different populations. It has also demonstrated strong validity, including concurrent, construct, convergent, and discriminant validity, confirming its effectiveness in assessing online social connectedness. This scale is particularly valuable for exploring how digital interactions influence individuals' sense of belonging and community (Lee, Draper, & Lee, 2001; Lee & Robbins, 1995).

Table 1: Descriptive characteristics of the sample (N=300)

Variable		n	%
Age			
	18-26	172	57.33
	27-35	128	42.66
Gender			
	Men	149	43.9
	Women	151	50.33
Family system			
	Joint	140	46.66
	Nuclear	160	53.33
Residency			
	Urban	145	48.33
	Rural	155	51.66
Family income			
	30,000-50,000	22	7.3
	51,000-70,000	38	12.66
	71,000-90,000	45	15
	91,000- 120,000	145	48.33
	>120,000	50	16.66

The sample comprised 300 participants (both men and women) within the age groups of 18–26 and 27–35 years. Regarding family structure, 46.6% of participants belonged to joint families, while 53.3% were from nuclear families. Additionally, the dataset includes information on family income and residency.

Table 2: Psychometric properties of all the scales (N=300)

Scales	k	α	M	SD	Range		Skew	Kurt
					Actual	Potential		
ERS	14	.79	35.67	8.91	14-72	14-98	.54	.55
SCS	26	.83	42.93	10.21	5-24	26-130	.64	.48
DWS	12	.83	30.98	8.24	12-54	12-60	.75	.56
OSCS	20	.82	40.97	9.75	20-140	20-160	.09	-.71

Note: ERS= Emotional Resilience Scale; SCS=Self-compassion scale; DWS= Digital Well-being scale; OSCS= Online Social Connectedness Scale

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics and alpha reliability coefficients for all the instruments used in this study. The reliability coefficients for the scales fall within an acceptable range, varying from .79 to .83. Additionally, normality assumptions were assessed, with skewness and kurtosis values for all scales ranging between -3 and +3, which aligns with the criteria for a normal distribution (George & Mallery, 2010). The table also distinguishes between the potential range, which represents the minimum and maximum scores defined by each scale, and the actual range, which reflects the observed results.

Table 3: Correlation matrix between DWS, SCS, OCS and ERS (N=300)

	Variables	1	2	3	4
1	DWS	-			
2	SCS	.77**	-		
3	OCS	.72**	.54	-	
4	ERS	.56**	.36**	.49**	-

Note: ERS= Emotional Resilience Scale; SCS=Self-compassion scale; DWS= Digital Well-being scale; OCS= Online Social Connectedness Scale

The table displays the Pearson correlation coefficients among four variables. Self-compassion is positively associated with digital well-being ($r = .77$), Emotional Resilience ($r = .36$), and Online Social Connectedness ($r = .49$) with $p < .01$, indicating that higher self-compassion is linked with higher digital well-being, emotional resilience and online social connectedness. Online social connectedness is positively linked to emotional resilience and digital well-being. Likewise, similar patterns were observed with all variables.

Table 4: Regression Coefficients of Independent Variables on Dependent Variable (Digital Well-being)

Variables	B	SE	t	p	95%CL
Constant	2.25	.79	1.74	.00	1.12 - 3.25
SCS	.60	.05	5.07	.00	.61 - .19
ERS	.38	.06	8.97	.00	.29 - .48
OCS	.23	.14	1.69	.00	.05 - .08

Note: ERS= Emotional Resilience Scale; SCS=Self-compassion scale; DWS= Digital Well-being scale; OCS= Online Social Connectedness Scale

The table presents the results of a regression analysis assessing the predictors of the outcome variable. The constant is highly significant ($B = 2.13$). Self-compassion emerges as a significant predictor ($B = .60$), while emotional resilience also shows a positive effect ($B = .38$). Additionally, online social connectedness contributes significantly ($B = .23$). All predictors are statistically significant at the $p < 0.001$ level, with 95% confidence intervals.

Table 5: Mediating role of emotional resilience between self-compassion and digital well-being(N=300)

Variables	R ²	B	SE	t	95% CI	
					LL	UL
Total effect SCS- DWS (c)	.56	.27***	.02	18.55	.26	.30
Direct effect SCS- ERS (a)		.53***	.06	21.72	.42	.54

EC- SWL (b)		.39***	.04	11.04	.31	.49
ERS- DWS (c')		.12***	.03	6.21	.08	.23
Indirect effect						
SCS- ER- DWS	.68	.17***	.01		.22	.32

Note: ERS= Emotional Resilience Scale; SCS=Self-compassion scale; DWS= Digital Well-being scale; OSCS= Online Social Connectedness Scale

$p < .01^{**}$; $p < .001^{***}$

Table 5 presents the findings of a mediation study that investigates the indirect impact of self-compassion and digital well-being. The investigation focuses on the mediating impact of emotional resilience. The results suggest that emotional resilience influences the association between self-compassion and digital well-being. The regression analysis, which includes the total effect of predictor variable (self-compassion), reveals 56% variance in digital well-being. The indirect effect demonstrates that the relationship between self-compassion and digital well-being is partially mediated by emotional resilience. The mediation explains an additional 12% increase in digital well-being. The increase in self-compassion increases the level of emotional resilience, which increases the digital well-being.

Table 6: Moderating Role of Online social connectedness on Relationship Between Self-compassion and Digital-Wellbeing (N=300)

<i>Predictors</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>95% CI</i>	
		<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
Constant	13.24***	12.36	13.49
Self-compassion	.28***	.21	.27
Emotional Resilience	.09***	.04	.21
Emotional Resilience * Self-compassion	.05*	.03	.06
R ²	.56***		
ΔR ²	.08*		
F	121.03***		

Note: * $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$

The moderation analysis confirms that self-compassion has a significant positive effect on digital well-being, suggesting that higher self-compassion is associated with greater digital well-being. Emotional resilience also demonstrates a positive impact, indicating that as emotional resilience increases, the outcome variable improves. Additionally, the interaction term (Emotional Resilience × Self-Compassion) is both significant and positive, suggesting that emotional resilience enhances the relationship between self-compassion and digital well-being.

Discussion

In today’s digital world, freelancers face unique challenges that can affect their overall well-being. Self-compassion has been recognized as a key factor in strengthening psychological resilience and promoting well-being (Neff, 2003a; Breines & Chen, 2012). This discussion explores how self-compassion influences digital well-being among freelancers, with a focus on emotional resilience as a mediator and online social connectedness as a moderator.

Self-compassion involves treating oneself with kindness, acknowledging shared human struggles, and practicing mindfulness (Neff et al., 2005). It helps individuals develop healthier ways of

coping with stress (Leary et al., 2007; Zhang & Chen, 2016). For freelancers, who often experience isolation or pressure from constant digital connectivity, self-compassion can provide relief by fostering a more balanced emotional response to challenges (Wanberg et al., 2012).

Emotional resilience plays a crucial role in managing the uncertainties and stressors of freelance work. Research suggests that self-compassionate individuals tend to be more emotionally resilient, as they are less self-critical and better equipped to handle setbacks (Gilbert & Procter, 2006; Neff et al., 2007). By cultivating self-compassion through mindfulness and self-kindness, freelancers can build emotional resilience, helping them navigate the demands of digital work with greater ease (Jopling, 2000).

Online social connectedness plays a crucial role in shaping how self-compassion influences digital well-being. While excessive social media use can sometimes lead to self-comparison and appearance-related concerns (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2021), engaging with supportive online communities can foster a sense of belonging and reduce loneliness for freelancers. Research suggests that when self-compassion is combined with strong online social support, it can have a positive impact on mental health (Sheldon, 2008).

Digital well-being involves managing stress and maintaining psychological balance in a technology-driven world. Freelancers who practice self-compassion are more likely to develop healthy coping strategies to handle work-related stress than those who don't (Breines & Chen, 2012). Moreover, having meaningful online connections—ones that promote community rather than competition—can help reduce self-comparison and contribute to overall well-being.

In conclusion, this study confirms that self-compassion plays a vital role in enhancing freelancers' digital well-being by strengthening emotional resilience. Additionally, positive online social connections further support this relationship by reducing loneliness and creating a sense of support, which is essential for mental well-being in remote work settings. These findings align with growing research emphasizing the importance of integrating mindfulness and self-compassion practices into daily routines to promote mental health in an increasingly digital world.

Conclusion

In summary, this study underscores the important role of self-compassion in improving digital well-being among freelancers, with emotional resilience acting as a bridge and online social connectedness enhancing this effect. The findings suggest that self-compassion helps freelancers build emotional resilience, enabling them to better manage stress and cope with the demands of digital work. Moreover, having strong online social connections further strengthens this relationship, as those who engage in supportive digital communities' experience even greater benefits from self-compassion. This highlights that while self-compassion and emotional resilience are key to digital well-being, meaningful social connections can amplify their positive impact. These insights point to the need for mental health initiatives that not only promote self-compassion and emotional resilience but also encourage freelancers to engage in positive, supportive online interactions to foster overall well-being in digital workspaces.

Limitations and Suggestions

While this study offers valuable insights into how self-compassion, emotional resilience, and online social connectedness contribute to digital well-being among freelancers, it does have some limitations. Since the data was self-reported, there is a possibility of biases, such as social desirability or inaccurate self-assessment. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of the study means we cannot establish cause-and-effect relationships between these factors. The use of convenience sampling may also limit how well these findings apply to a wider population of

freelancers. To build on this research, future studies could use longitudinal methods to track changes over time and incorporate more objective measures of digital well-being. Exploring freelancers from different cultural and professional backgrounds would also provide a more well-rounded perspective. From a practical standpoint, these findings highlight the need for mental health support and digital literacy programs that encourage self-compassion, strengthen emotional resilience, and promote positive online interactions ultimately helping freelancers maintain a healthier digital work experience.

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