

COUNSELING GUIDANCE SERVICES IN OVERCOMING INDICATIONS OF ADOLESCENT ANXIETY IN THE DIGITAL ERA: A STUDY AT SMP NEGERI 24 SELUMA

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ABSTRACT

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The rapid advancement of digital technology has significantly influenced adolescents' psychological well-being, particularly through excessive social media use and online interactions. This study aimed to analyze the role of guidance and counseling services in addressing indications of adolescent anxiety in the digital era at SMP Negeri 24 Seluma. A descriptive qualitative approach with a field research design was employed. Data were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation involving seven informants selected through purposive sampling, comprising five students, one guidance and counseling teacher, and one homeroom teacher. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, including data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing, while source and method triangulation were applied to ensure data credibility. The findings revealed that students experienced anxiety arising from multiple digital-related factors, including pressure to maintain a positive online image, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), excessive social comparison, cyberbullying, and concerns regarding digital privacy and personal data security. These conditions negatively affected students' self-confidence, emotional stability, social interaction, and learning concentration. Guidance and counseling services implemented through information services, individual counseling, and group counseling played an important role in helping students regulate emotions, develop healthier digital behaviors, strengthen resilience, and improve psychological well-being. The study concludes that comprehensive and collaborative guidance and counseling interventions are essential for preventing and reducing adolescent anxiety while promoting responsible digital citizenship in secondary schools.



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INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has fundamentally transformed various aspects of human life, including communication, education, entertainment, and social interaction. Internet connectivity and social media platforms have enabled individuals to access information instantly, establish virtual relationships, and participate in global communities without geographical limitations (D. C. A. Ginting et al., 2024). Within educational settings, digital technology has significantly improved learning accessibility by facilitating online instruction, collaborative learning, and immediate access to educational resources. Nevertheless, alongside these advantages, digital transformation has introduced new psychological and social challenges, particularly among adolescents, whose developmental characteristics make them more vulnerable to digital influences (Arbi &

Amrullah, 2024; Sanjaya et al., 2026).

Adolescence represents a critical developmental stage characterized by rapid physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes. During this period, young people actively seek personal identity, social acceptance, and emotional security while developing independence from their families. Consequently, adolescents are highly susceptible to environmental influences, including those originating from digital environments (Anggoro, 2025). Social media has evolved beyond a communication platform into a space where adolescents construct personal identities, seek peer recognition, and evaluate their social status. The desire to obtain positive feedback through likes, comments, and online interactions often encourages adolescents to present idealized versions of themselves, increasing psychological pressure to meet unrealistic social expectations (Faizal et al., 2022; M. F. F. Nasution & Batubara, 2024).

The increasing intensity of digital media use has been associated with various mental health concerns among adolescents. Excessive engagement with social networking platforms frequently contributes to anxiety, stress, emotional instability, low self-esteem, and depressive symptoms. Three major phenomena have attracted considerable scholarly attention: cyberbullying, social comparison, and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) (Afiyah et al., 2025). Cyberbullying, including online harassment, humiliating comments, dissemination of personal photographs without permission, and repeated digital intimidation, has become one of the most prevalent threats affecting adolescents' psychological well-being. Victims often experience embarrassment, fear, social withdrawal, and declining self-confidence, all of which may interfere with academic achievement and healthy psychosocial development (Kurniawan et al., 2026; Riswanto & Marsinun, 2020).

Similarly, continuous exposure to carefully curated online content encourages adolescents to compare their appearance, achievements, lifestyles, and social relationships with those portrayed by peers or influencers on social media. Such upward social comparisons frequently generate dissatisfaction with oneself, feelings of inadequacy, and persistent anxiety regarding personal worth. Adolescents may eventually evaluate their success based on virtual recognition rather than authentic personal development, creating unhealthy psychological dependence on digital validation (Faizal et al., 2022; M. F. F. Nasution & Batubara, 2024).

Another emerging issue is the widespread occurrence of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), defined as the persistent concern that others may be experiencing rewarding events without one's participation. Adolescents experiencing FOMO feel compelled to remain constantly connected to social media in order to avoid missing important information, social interactions, or popular trends (Nurjanah & Mesra, 2025). This behavior often results in excessive smartphone use, sleep disturbances, reduced academic concentration, and heightened anxiety whenever internet access is unavailable. Furthermore, many adolescents gradually associate their self-esteem with digital engagement indicators such as followers, likes, and comments, making them increasingly vulnerable to emotional distress when online expectations are not fulfilled (Chaniago, 2025; Elfausta et al., 2026).

The growing prevalence of adolescent mental health problems has become a significant public health concern in Indonesia. According to the Indonesia National Adolescent Mental Health Survey (I-NAMHS) 2022, approximately 34.9% of Indonesian adolescents experience mental health problems requiring varying levels of psychological support (Agustini et al., 2024). Despite these alarming figures, many adolescents continue to experience limited access

to professional counseling services, inadequate family support, and insufficient mental health literacy within educational institutions (Putriyani et al., 2025). Moreover, unrestricted digital media exposure from an early age, combined with inadequate parental supervision, further increases adolescents' vulnerability to psychological disturbances associated with excessive internet use (D. A. Ginting et al., 2024).

These circumstances demonstrate that digital transformation presents not only educational opportunities but also substantial psychological risks that require comprehensive intervention (Sudirman et al., 2024). Consequently, educational institutions are increasingly expected to address students' emotional well-being alongside their academic development. Schools have become strategic environments for implementing preventive and developmental mental health programs, particularly through counseling and guidance services designed to strengthen adolescents' coping skills, emotional regulation, and digital resilience (Muslih et al., 2025; Nadhiroh, 2025).

Guidance and counseling services play a central role in promoting students' psychological well-being by assisting them in understanding themselves, managing emotions, enhancing self-confidence, developing healthy interpersonal relationships, and solving personal and social problems (Putri et al., 2024). Within the context of digital society, school counselors are also expected to educate students regarding responsible digital citizenship, healthy social media use, cyberbullying prevention, and emotional resilience when encountering negative online experiences. Beyond preventive education, counseling services provide a confidential and supportive environment where students can openly discuss emotional difficulties, interpersonal conflicts, and psychological concerns without fear of stigma (Velyna, 2025; Yoga Armanda et al., 2025).

These challenges are also evident among students of SMP Negeri 24 Seluma. Preliminary observations and semi-structured interviews conducted with students and school counselors revealed an increasing tendency toward anxiety-related symptoms during recent years. Students reported experiencing anxiety arising from academic pressure, peer relationship conflicts, excessive social media engagement, and constant demands to follow rapidly changing digital trends (Aristawidya & Ansyah, 2026). Several students acknowledged becoming victims of cyberbullying through insulting comments, online ridicule, and unauthorized dissemination of personal photographs, experiences that substantially reduced their confidence and willingness to participate in social interactions (Musakif et al., 2024). Other students expressed persistent worries about being excluded from peer groups whenever they failed to keep pace with current online trends, illustrating the growing influence of digital culture on adolescents' emotional well-being (Azhara et al., 2024).

Considering these circumstances, examining the contribution of school guidance and counseling services in addressing adolescent anxiety within the digital era has become increasingly important. Although previous studies have documented the psychological consequences of digital technology among adolescents, limited research has specifically explored how school counseling interventions respond to these emerging challenges within Indonesian junior high schools. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the role of guidance and counseling services in overcoming indications of adolescent anxiety in the digital era among students of **SMP Negeri 24 Seluma**. The findings are expected to provide empirical evidence that supports the development of more responsive counseling programs, strengthens collaboration among counselors, teachers, and parents, and contributes to creating healthier,

safer, and more supportive educational environments for adolescents navigating the complexities of the digital age.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach using a field research design to examine the implementation of guidance and counseling services in addressing indications of adolescent anxiety in the digital era at SMP Negeri 24 Seluma. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and behaviors within their natural context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Field research was considered appropriate because the study focused on exploring real-life phenomena through direct interaction with participants in their educational environment. The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 24 Seluma, located in Air Petai Village, Sukaraja District, Seluma Regency, Indonesia, over a one-month period following the issuance of the research permit. Qualitative inquiry emphasizes systematic observation, interpretation, and description of social phenomena to generate a comprehensive understanding of the issues under investigation (Ramdhan, 2021).

Primary data were collected through non-participant observations and semi-structured interviews, while secondary data were obtained from school documents, counseling records, field notes, and other relevant institutional documents (Sugiyono, 2019). Participants were selected using purposive sampling, whereby informants were intentionally chosen based on predefined criteria relevant to the objectives of the study (Etikan et al., 2016). The study involved seven informants, consisting of five students who demonstrated indications of anxiety associated with digital technology use (coded as S1, S2, S3, S4, and S5), one guidance and counseling teacher (T1), and one homeroom teacher (T2). Data were analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles et al. (2014), comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, credibility was established through source triangulation and method triangulation by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentary evidence (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the rapid development of digital technology has significantly influenced the psychological well-being of adolescents at SMP Negeri 24 Seluma. Data obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation revealed that excessive use of social media has become one of the primary factors contributing to students' anxiety. Most participants reported spending considerable time accessing platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp, where social interactions increasingly depend on virtual responses rather than direct interpersonal communication. Students admitted experiencing anxiety when their uploaded content received fewer likes, comments, or reactions than expected. This condition reduced their self-confidence and encouraged continuous dependence on social validation through digital platforms. These findings reinforce previous studies demonstrating that social media has become an important medium for identity construction and social recognition among adolescents (Ramadhany, 2025; Nasution & Batubara, 2024).

One prominent finding concerns adolescents' pressure to present an idealized self-image on social media. Participants described feeling compelled to appear attractive, successful, and socially accepted to avoid negative judgments from their peers. Several students reported deleting photographs or posts that received limited engagement because they feared embarrassment and social rejection. Classroom observations further indicated that some students devoted greater attention to managing their online appearance than participating in direct social interactions. Such behavior reflects the increasing influence of digital environments on adolescents' self-concept and emotional well-being. According to Social Comparison Theory, individuals evaluate themselves by comparing their characteristics with those of others, a process that becomes more intense within social media environments where carefully curated personal images dominate daily interactions (Nanaz et al., 2025; Oktaviani, 2023). Consequently, unrealistic comparisons frequently undermine adolescents' self-esteem and increase anxiety.

Another important issue identified in this study is Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). Most participants acknowledged repeatedly checking social media because they feared missing current information, trending topics, or activities involving their friends. This behavior often occurred even during classroom learning, reducing students' concentration and academic engagement. Several participants also expressed disappointment and loneliness when observing peers participating in social activities without their involvement. Such experiences generated feelings of exclusion, jealousy, and social insecurity. These findings support previous research indicating that FOMO has become a common psychological consequence of continuous digital connectivity and contributes to emotional distress among adolescents (Nurjanah & Mesra, 2025; Hasanuddin et al., 2024). Continuous exposure to social media encourages adolescents to remain constantly online, increasing dependency on digital communication while reducing emotional regulation.

The study further revealed that frequent social comparison substantially influenced students' self-confidence. Participants commonly compared their physical appearance, academic achievements, lifestyle, popularity, and number of followers with those of peers displayed on social media. Such comparisons led many students to perceive themselves as less successful or less attractive than others. Observational findings showed that students who frequently engaged in upward social comparison tended to become quieter, less confident, and more reluctant to participate in classroom interactions. These findings are consistent with previous studies demonstrating that excessive exposure to idealized online content contributes to insecurity, low self-esteem, and negative self-evaluation among adolescents (Sa'idah & Nisrina, 2024; Nanaz et al., 2025).

Another significant contributor to adolescent anxiety identified in this research is cyberbullying. Several participants reported receiving insulting comments, body-shaming messages, ridicule, and offensive responses through social media platforms. Such experiences generated feelings of fear, embarrassment, sadness, and reluctance to continue participating in online communication. Some students deliberately reduced their social media activities after becoming victims of online harassment. Classroom observations similarly showed that students who experienced cyberbullying appeared more withdrawn and demonstrated greater difficulty expressing their emotions openly. These findings confirm previous evidence suggesting that cyberbullying has serious consequences for adolescent mental health, including increased anxiety, emotional distress, and declining psychological well-being.

(Riswanto & Marsinun, 2020; Agma, 2025).

Besides social interaction problems, concerns regarding digital privacy and personal data security also emerged as an important source of anxiety. Several participants expressed concerns about unauthorized access to personal information after experiencing suspicious online messages or attempted account hacking. Consequently, students became increasingly cautious when sharing personal information on digital platforms. Although awareness of digital security appeared to increase, participants still demonstrated limited knowledge regarding effective strategies for protecting personal privacy online. This finding suggests that digital literacy should encompass not only technical competencies but also psychological preparedness and awareness of online safety.

The findings also demonstrate the strategic role of guidance and counseling (GC) services in addressing adolescents' anxiety within digital environments. According to interviews with the school counselor and homeroom teacher, counseling interventions were implemented through information services, individual counseling, and group counseling. Information services primarily focused on educating students about responsible social media use, digital ethics, emotional regulation, and strategies for maintaining psychological well-being while interacting online. These preventive efforts align with previous findings emphasizing the importance of psychoeducational interventions in promoting healthy digital behavior among adolescents (Nasution et al., 2025).

Students experiencing more severe emotional problems received individual counseling, providing confidential opportunities to discuss personal experiences related to anxiety, cyberbullying, family issues, and social media dependence. Participants reported feeling emotionally supported after counseling sessions and demonstrated greater confidence in managing their psychological difficulties. These findings support previous studies indicating that individual counseling enables adolescents to develop adaptive coping strategies through therapeutic communication and personalized intervention (Journal et al., 2024).

In addition, group counseling emerged as an effective intervention for strengthening peer support and reducing feelings of isolation. Students recognized that many classmates experienced similar digital-related problems, encouraging openness, empathy, and mutual emotional support. Through structured group discussions facilitated by the guidance counselor, participants learned practical strategies for managing anxiety, improving emotional resilience, and using social media more responsibly. Similar findings have been reported by Candra et al. (2025), who demonstrated that collaborative counseling activities significantly improve adolescents' psychological adjustment and social competence.

Overall, the findings indicate that adolescent anxiety in the digital era is multidimensional, involving pressures associated with online self-presentation, fear of social exclusion, excessive social comparison, cyberbullying, and concerns regarding digital privacy. These psychological challenges cannot be addressed solely through individual efforts but require comprehensive collaboration among schools, families, and communities. Within this context, guidance and counseling services function not only as curative interventions but also as preventive and developmental programs that strengthen students' emotional regulation, digital literacy, resilience, and responsible technology use. Therefore, school-based counseling services represent an essential strategy for promoting adolescents' psychological well-being and healthy adaptation within increasingly complex digital environments (Candra et al., 2025; Remaja et al., 2025; Velyna, 2025).

CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrate that adolescent anxiety in the digital era is influenced by multiple interconnected factors, including pressure to present an ideal self-image, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), social comparison, cyberbullying, and concerns regarding online privacy and personal data security. These factors contribute to reduced self-confidence, emotional instability, impaired social relationships, and decreased academic concentration. The increasing dependence on social media has intensified adolescents' vulnerability to psychological distress, highlighting the need for systematic interventions within the school environment.

Guidance and counseling services at SMP Negeri 24 Seluma have an important role in addressing these challenges through preventive, developmental, and remedial interventions. Information services, individual counseling, and group counseling provide students with opportunities to understand digital risks, strengthen emotional regulation, develop adaptive coping strategies, and build healthier patterns of social media use. Strengthening collaboration among guidance counselors, teachers, parents, and schools is essential to create a supportive educational environment that promotes adolescents' mental well-being and responsible participation in the digital society.

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