

Digital Leisure And Youth Identity: Practices, Authenticity, and Performativity

OCIO DIGITAL E IDENTIDAD JUVENIL: PRÁCTICAS, AUTENTICIDAD Y PERFORMATIVIDAD

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Abstract: This study analyzes the relationship between digital leisure practices and identity-construction processes in youths aged 18–25 living in Lima (Peru), considering their digital narratives and experience of well-being. Using a mixed descriptive–interpretative approach, a structured survey was conducted with 455 young people of different age groups. The results indicate that digital leisure is part of young people’s daily routine and plays a key role in building their digital identity, which manifests itself in diverse, reflexive, and ambivalent ways. The qualitative analysis shows nuances in forms of self-presentation based on age group. It is thus concluded that digital leisure serves as a space for the production of personal narratives and identity management, configured as a heterogeneous and situated experience in young people’s lives.

Keywords: Digital Leisure; Digital Identity; Youth; Digital Communication; Performativity.

Resumen: Este estudio analiza la relación entre las prácticas de ocio digital y los procesos de construcción identitaria en jóvenes de 18 a 25 años residentes en Lima (Perú), considerando sus narrativas digitales y su experiencia de bienestar. Mediante un enfoque mixto descriptivo-interpretativo, se aplicó una encuesta estructurada a 455 jóvenes de distintos grupos etarios. Los resultados revelan que el ocio digital forma parte de la rutina cotidiana juvenil y cumple una función central en la construcción de la identidad digital, que se manifiesta de manera diversa, reflexiva y ambivalente. Se observan matices en las formas de autopresentación según el grupo etario, principalmente a partir del análisis cualitativo. Se concluye que el ocio digital constituye un espacio de producción de narrativas personales y gestión identitaria, configurándose como una experiencia heterogénea y situada en la vida juvenil.

Palabras clave: ocio digital; identidad digital; juventud; comunicación digital; performatividad.



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1. Introduction

Due to the convergence of technologies, literature has documented a shift in the use of leisure time by young people. In a world dominated by digital platforms (Murciano-Hueso *et al.*, 2022), leisure takes on a new role in identity development. This is because algorithms, the creation of expectations, and the search for personal approval intersect with a sense of belonging and individual expression, replacing lasting affective bonds with rapid, superficial interactions (Gómez-Rubio *et al.*, 2024; Virós-Martín *et al.*, 2025).

According to Torralvo-Hernández & Aravena-Domich (2025), knowledge gaps remain regarding how leisure and digital infrastructure intervene in young people's identity construction and the search for authenticity in socialization spaces. Moreover, few studies have explored these dynamics based on specific local realities.

Given this scenario, the study poses the following research question: how are digital leisure practices related to identity construction processes in young people aged 18–25 living in Lima (Peru)? Two specific questions follow: what age and gender differences are found in the forms of digital self-presentation? Moreover, how does digital leisure impact the perception of well-being in this group?

The general objective of the study is to analyze the relationship between digital leisure practices and identity construction in young people aged 18–25 living in Lima (Peru), considering video games, social networks, streaming platforms, and other virtual interaction environments. The specific objectives are as follows: (1) describing the participants' digital leisure habits; (2) identifying predominant forms of self-presentation and digital identity; (3) exploring performativity and personal narratives constructed in digital environments; and (4) examining the perceived impact of digital leisure on youth well-being.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Digital Leisure and Its Role in Young People's Lives

The meaning of the term leisure varies according to different authors, encompassing rest time for fun, disconnection, quality of life, and source of health, among other definitions (Viñals-Blanco, 2013). It is necessary to specify that this term defines the activity performed by a person not objectively but in a memorable, satisfying, and transformative manner. Modern technology has transformed the leisure experience (Galzacorta *et al.*, 2014). Specifically, rather than changing the essential characteristics of the concept

of leisure, this progress has modified the settings in which it occurs. This has led to the emergence of the concept of digital leisure, which refers to the enjoyment of activities carried out in a digitally constructed world (García-Álvarez *et al.*, 2012). Technological developments have established new conditions regarding the use and scope of digital leisure, subject to the possibilities provided by a computer, internet, game consoles, mobile phones, and other digital devices (Tapia, 2017). Moreover, leisure activities in cyberspace can be synchronous or asynchronous and also allow players to remain anonymous (Viñals-Blanco, 2013).

The younger generation strongly prefers digital leisure. A study of 500 young university students in Spain and Colombia on digital leisure indicated that 87% prefer to post as Youtubers. In addition, 30% of women and 28% of men watch series as part of their digital leisure activities (Moral-Pérez *et al.*, 2021). The 2019 Injuve survey (Chicharro *et al.*, 2024) indicates that 91% of men and 95% of women use social networks as primary means of digital leisure. Moreover, 94.7% of adolescents aged between 14–19 prefer to listen to music while 60.4% play video games. Another Spanish study on video games and young people aged 15–29, with a sample of 1,200 people, finds that 4 of 5 young people spend more than 6 hours a day on digital leisure. The most frequent activities are listening to music, watching videos, and using social networks (Calderón-Gómez & Gómez-Miguel, 2022).

2.2. Youth and Identity in the Digital Era

According to Taylor (1996), identity is a complex concept that encompasses individual and social dimensions. At the individual level, he understands it as a definition of the self that subjects elaborate upon throughout their development and continue to redefine throughout life, aligning with Erikson's approach to the construction of the self. From a social perspective, Marcús (2011) pointed out that identity varies and is structured through negotiation processes in daily exchanges. Along the same lines, Hall (2003) sees identification not as something given or natural but as a discursive construction, a never-ending process that occurs based on recognizing shared origins or characteristics with others. Tajfel (1978) adds that social identity derives from the categories to which an individual perceives that they belong, associated with the positive or negative value attributed to these groups. Giménez (1992) complements this argument by stressing identity's intersubjective and relational character: it is not an inherent attribute of subjects but the result of daily interactions with others. Kossoy (2009) further points out

that social identity is the result of tensions between ascribed, inherited, and claimed identities.

These conceptual frameworks are specially relevant for understanding how identity is constructed in the digital era. Turkle (1995) was a pioneer in pointing out that interaction with computers leads to a new form of subjectivity, in which young people can explore aspects of the self and experiment with different roles and identities. Subsequent works have further explored this idea, showing that virtual environments amplify the possibilities of identity construction by offering anonymity, multiplicity of roles, and new forms of socialization (Balardini, 2000; González-Penagos, 2008). In these spaces, participants negotiate and define facets of their identity through resources such as writing, nicknames, and avatars (Noblia, 2009). Thus, identity in the digital era is shaped through interactions with others, mediated by technologies that expand the scope of socialization and allow people to experience multiple versions of themselves.

2.3. Video Games and Identity Construction

Video games are well-established cultural products that embody some of the most relevant aspects of modern society and continue to grow in scope (Muriel and Crawford, 2023). They have evolved into interactive virtual environments that can create communities by recreating aspects of everyday life and fantasy (Villegas & Marambio-Tapia, 2023).

Players' identities are also shaped by the devices they use. Salfate-González (2020) identifies three types of gamers with partial identities: PC gamers, Nintendo fans (*Nintenderos*) and Sony fans (*Sonyers*), whose preference for a device operates as an identity marker within gamer culture.

Currently, video games such as *Fortnite* allow studying how adolescents build their identity in virtual environments, where anonymity facilitates interaction and fosters agreements around shared goals (Etura *et al.*, 2022).

In recent years, video games have even led to professional aspirations. In the gamer subculture (Fanelli, 2023), the identity of the expert player is built through sustained training routines that allow them to win levels, turning digital leisure into a formative identity-building practice.

This dimension becomes more complex when gender representations are analyzed. Budiño-Alló (2024) points out that titles such as *Tomb Raider* or *GTA* hypersexualize female characters, reproducing gender stereotypes. The debate extends to the representation of diverse sexual identities: when *Dragon Age 2* incorporated a character who could initiate a romance with the main

character regardless of their gender, a part of the male community reacted with active rejection, even though the game did not require players to pursue the romance (Budiño-Alló, 2024). Martín-Ramallal *et al.*, (2023) confirm that avatars favor the expression of gender identity thanks to anonymity, although they also reproduce discriminatory behaviors carried over from real life within metaverses.

2.4. Social Networks, Streaming Platforms, and Identity Construction

Other virtual digital entertainment environments include social networks and streaming platforms. Like video games, social networks serve as a space in which people can express and identify themselves: while in real life, users have a fixed identity, they can choose what to show in virtual environments (Olábarri-Fernández & Monge-Benito, 2011), giving rise to a self-construction of identity that is mediated by symbolic representations (Gutiérrez-Miranda, 2024).

One of the biggest concerns on social media is photographs, especially the user's profile picture. A study conducted with 892 Chilean students (Gómez-Urrutia & Jiménez-Figueroa, 2022) confirms that personal identity and image are crucial. Respondents reported high authenticity levels; although one-third of them attempted to look happier in their profile pictures, more than half of the female surveyed individuals stated that they hide problems or fears, with more than 30% of males reporting the same.

Social networks are closely intertwined with reality: they are perceived by young people as an extension of real life that blends with online experience, shaping identities linked to the cultural industry through the consumption of music, videos, podcasts, and movies (Favaro, 2023).

Streaming platforms have transformed the passive viewer into an active user who endorses, criticizes, or boycotts cultural products with which they do not identify (Bolognesi, 2023), offering a personalized and interactive experience that reinforces identity formation.

2.5. Performativity and Narrativity of the Self in Digital Leisure

Judith Butler (1990) closely relates performativity to the construction of identity, stressing that identity is not a pre-existing essence but is formed as the result of reiterative and regulatory practices. Gender identities are produced through repeated action, gestures, and discourses that maintain and reproduce them culturally, and they can be transformed or subverted in the con-

scious repetition of such acts. Moreover, Markus & Nurius (1986) indicate that the self is not a single, fixed entity but a dynamic set of self-conceptions that includes many possible selves —the present self, the ideal selves, and the feared selves— which change according to internal and social circumstances.

These ideas are especially relevant in virtual environments. The construction of the digital self is complex because it is the user who creates and shapes it, deciding which group expectations to meet and ignore (Gutiérrez-Miranda, 2023). To cite an example, a selfie becomes a provisional and ephemeral identity, conditioned by the trends and social demands of the network. Posting, sharing, and commenting are thus activities that are integral to young people's identity while they engage in digital leisure.

Posting is also an intentional act: users implement multimodal narratives (e.g., photo, video, and audio) not only as a form of marketing their image but also as a contribution to their self-perception (Martínez-Martínez & Rubiano-León, 2024). A study on Emma Watson's digital identity on Instagram (Matas & Gil, 2024) illustrates this process: between 2022 and 2023, the change in aesthetics in her mostly black and white Prada-related posts reflects a transformation in the identity she wished to project, with an increased focus on her creative and artistic side. This shows that digital performativity is not superficial. It is a reflexive practice through which young people actively manage their identity in digital leisure settings.

2.6. Digital Well-being

The concept of digital well-being refers to the moderate use of digital technology to minimize risks such as stress, cognitive overload, and addiction to devices or social networks (Dehghan, 2023) and take advantage of benefits such as access to information and social interactions (Büchi, 2024). Digital well-being comprises three dimensions: digital satisfaction, referring to the positive perception of technology use; emotional and psychological balance in digital environments; and safe and responsible behavior (Gómez-Yepes, 2025; Herdian-Qolbi *et al.*, 2026).

Three types of factors impact digital well-being. Digital practices generate both benefits and risks: access to information versus theft of sensitive data and connectivity versus misinformation (Büchi, 2024; Chen *et al.*, 2025). Social and psychological factors are also relevant, as digital addiction and technological stress can hinder well-being, whereas emotional regulation and coping strategies are vital for healthy use (Cao & Li, 2023; Chen *et al.*, 2025; Hoque *et*

al., 2026). Finally, contextual factors such as socioeconomic inequalities influence how people experience digital well-being (Voloshyna, 2025).

The relationship between youth and digital well-being is complex and can have positive or negative effects. Among the former, the use of technologies can foster flow and engagement in learning (Shao *et al.*, 2024). Among the latter, a lack of digital well-being can be reflected in compulsive use, cyberbullying, stress, and procrastination (Weinstein, 2018; Mayen *et al.*, 2025; Godard *et al.*, 2026). Overall, digital technology use has real effects on well-being, but these effects are small in magnitude and vary by use type and user profile (Dienlin & Johannes, 2020; Valkenburg *et al.*, 2022).

Regarding active and passive use, Verduyn *et al.*, (2022) conclude that neither is always beneficial nor detrimental. Masciantonio *et al.*, (2021) find that passive Facebook use is negatively associated with well-being, whereas active use of Instagram and Twitter is positively related; in contrast, TikTok showed no association. Zhai *et al.*, (2024) report that actively using short videos is positively related to satisfaction and positive affect, and live interaction contributes to reduced social anxiety.

Taking together, these concepts reviewed above provide the theoretical framework that structures this study. Digital leisure constitutes a space in which young people spend much of their contemporary social and cultural lives. In this space, identity is not a fixed entity but a dynamic and relational construct negotiated through interactions with others and digital platforms. Identity construction occurs through performative acts and digital narratives through which young people manage their self-presentation, experiment with different facets of their selves, and produce meanings about themselves. This has consequences on their digital well-being, understood not as a uniform state but as a heterogeneous experience that depends on the type of use, context, and strategies that each young person deploys in their daily digital life.

3. Method

3.1. Research Approach and Design

This study employed a mixed-methods design with a predominantly quantitative and descriptive approach, complemented by a qualitative analysis aimed at exploring meanings associated with digital leisure and the construction of youth identity.

The design is non-experimental and cross-sectional. The aim was to identify trends, habits, and perceptions emerging in the context of contemporary digital entertainment.



3.2. Population and Sample

The study population comprised young people aged 18–25 living in Lima (Peru) with regular access to the Internet who were familiar with the use of social networks, video games, and other digital platforms.

A non-probability convenience sampling approach was employed, which has been widely applied in exploratory research on youth digital behavior (Etikan *et al.*, 2016). This approach enables efficient access to specific populations when a comprehensive sampling frame is not available. The sample consisted of 455 participants, which exceeds the thresholds recommended for descriptive-comparative analyses (Comrey & Lee, 1992). Notably, this sampling approach limits the generalizability of the results; thus, the findings should be interpreted as exploratory trends. Potential limitations include self-selection bias, digital platform bias, the urban over-representation of Lima, and social desirability in self-reporting. The initial survey collected 518 responses; after applying the exclusion criteria of reported age outside the study's range and not providing informed consent, the final sample consisted of 455 participants (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Demographic characteristics*

Variable	Distribution
Total no.	455 participants
Sex	Female: 240 (52.7%) Male: 215 (47.3%)
Age	Range: 18–25 years old Average: 20.44 years old (SD = 2.14) Mode: 18 years old
Age groups	18–19 years old: 189 (41.5%) 20–21 years old: 128 (28.1%) 22–25 years old: 138 (30.3%)

Source: Prepared by the authors.

3.3. Data Collection Technique and Instrument

Data were collected through a structured self-administered survey, applied virtually using *Google Forms* between November 2025 and January 2026. The instrument comprised 17 items rated on a Likert scale (1–5) organized into 4 dimensions, as well as 3 open-ended questions that delved into the participants' subjective experiences regarding digital leisure, perceived authenticity, and identity experimentation in virtual environments. These open-ended questions complemented the quantitative analysis with an interpretative approach based on content analysis.

The instrument was designed based on a systematic review of specialized literature on digital leisure, youth identity, and performativity, ensuring coherence between the objectives, the analytical dimensions, and formulated items. The 17 items were structured under a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree; 5 = Strongly agree), adopted as a balanced scale with a neutral point, which is appropriate for measuring attitudes and degrees of identification in digital communication studies. For illustrative purposes, one item per dimension is provided below: Dimension 1: «I consider digital leisure to be an important part of my daily routine»; Dimension 2: «Digital activities help me express who I am»; Dimension 3: «I think before I post content because of how it may impact others' image of me»; Dimension 4: «Digital leisure affects my daily mood or well-being». Content validity was verified by the judgment of three experts, who evaluated the relevance, clarity, and coherence of the items. The study was developed following ethical principles for minimal risk research with participants of legal age, ensuring voluntary participation, data anonymity, and exclusively academic use.

3.4. Dimensions, Indicators, and Evidence of the Instrument

The indicators were arranged into four theoretical dimensions:

Table 2. *Dimensions, indicators, and evidence of digital leisure and youth identity variables*

Dimension	Indicators	Items/Evidence
Dimension 1: Digital leisure.	Digital leisure practices	Audiovisual cultural consumption, video games, short video consumption, digital social interaction, content creation, streaming
	Frequency and integration into the routine	Regular use of digital platforms, time spent on digital entertainment
	Purpose of leisure	Entertainment, distraction, relaxation, functional use of leisure time
Dimension 2: Digital identity.	Perceived authenticity	Perceived consistency between personal identity and digital identity
	Partial authenticity	Recognition of a fragmentary or selective representation of the self
	Rejection of another identity	Refusal to construct a distinct or fictitious identity in digital environments
	Identity modulation	Adaptation of expression according to platform, audience, or context
	Increased extroversion	Increased expressiveness or fluency in digital environments

Dimension 3: Performativity and digital narratives.	Self-presentation management	Conscious control of what content, when, and how
	Expressive freedom	Feeling reduced limitations or pressure in digital environments
	Exploration and experience	Playful experimentation, facet testing, and identity play
	Ambivalence	Coexistence of attraction and caution against self-exposure
Dimension 4: Context and effects of digital entertainment.	Environmental mediations	Using anonymity as a secondary condi- tion of expression
	Roles and avatars	Using characters, avatars, or roles, mainly in video games
	Perceived impact	Impact of digital leisure on well-being, self-esteem, and social relationships

Source: Prepared by the authors.

3.5. Data analysis

3.5.1. Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using Python 3.12 with the Pandas, Numpy, Scipy, and Matplotlib libraries. Descriptive statistics (means, medians, and standard deviations) were calculated by item and dimension, frequency distributions for Likert responses, and frequencies by sociodemographic categories. For inferential analysis, Student's t-tests were applied to compare means by sex, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare the three age groups ($\alpha = .05$). Moreover, internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, and the assumptions of normality (Shapiro-Wilk) and homogeneity of variances (Levene) were tested.

3.5.2. Instrument Reliability

The instrument's internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the entire instrument and for each dimension. The instrument showed good reliability ($\alpha = .879$). By dimensions, the values were acceptable in digital leisure ($\alpha = .762$), digital identity ($\alpha = .743$), and digital performativity and narratives ($\alpha = .741$). The context and effects dimension presented a more moderate value ($\alpha = .674$), which is expected given that it only comprises three items (George & Mallery, 2019).

3.5.3. Statistical Assumptions

Prior to applying parametric tests, normality and homoscedasticity assumptions were verified. The Shapiro-Wilk test indicated that the distributions

slightly deviate from normality in some dimensions, which is to be expected in Likert-scale data. However, given the sample size ($n = 455$), the parametric analyses used are robust to this type of deviation (Field, 2024). The homogeneity of variances was verified using Levene’s test, with the results indicating homogeneous variances in three of four dimensions, with the exception of Dimension 3 (Performativity), where heterogeneity of variances was detected ($p = .006$).

3.5.4. Qualitative Analysis

Responses to the three open-ended questions were analyzed using thematic content analysis, supported by QDA Miner Lite, through exhaustive reading of valid responses ($n = 440\text{--}445$), manual coding by a researcher of the team, and quantification of mentions by code. Six codes were defined for each dimension, triangulating the qualitative findings with the quantitative data.

4. Results

The results are shown below:

Table 3. *Descriptive statistics by dimensions*

Dimension	Items	No. of items	Mean	Median	SD
Dimension 1: Digital leisure	1–4	4	3.51	3.67	.79
Dimension 2: Digital identity	5–9	5	3.05	3	.76
Dimension 3: Performativity and digital narratives	10–14	5	3.39	3.4	.74
Dimension 4: Context and effects of digital entertainment	15–17	3	3.27	3.33	.78

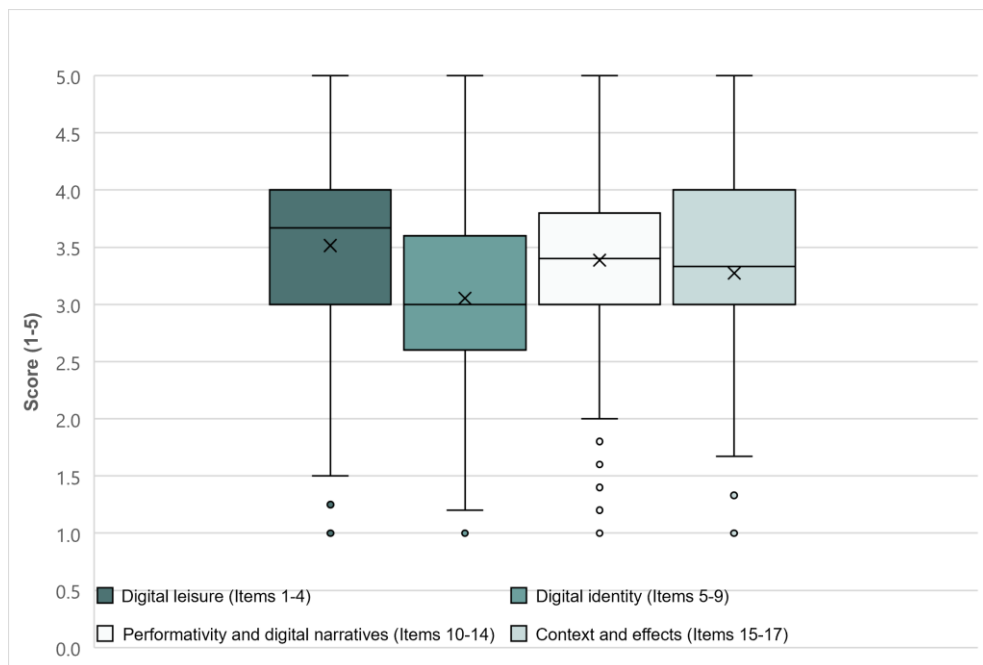
Source: Prepared by the authors.

4.1. Quantitative Results

The general results are presented in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Boxplot: Score distribution per dimension



Source: Prepared by the authors.

The digital leisure dimension presented the highest score, with a median of 3.7 and the central 50% of scores ranging between 3.0 and 4.0, indicating regular and consistent use among most participants. The digital identity dimension showed the lowest score, with a median at the neutral point of the scale (3.0), and a more compact distribution, reflecting greater diversity of opinions regarding the use of digital identity as a form of expression. The performativity and digital narratives dimension reached a median of 3.4, with scores concentrated between 3.0 and 3.8, and a greater presence of low outliers compared with the other dimensions. Finally, the context and effects dimension presented the greatest variability, with a median of 3.3 and a wider interquartile range, reflecting a heterogeneous experience of the impact of digital leisure on well-being. Detailed results by dimension are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics by item

Item	Statement	Mean	Median	SD
1	Regular use of digital platforms	3.90	4	1.13
2	Free time spent on digital leisure	3.52	4	1.04
3	Digital leisure as part of the routine	3.33	3	.75
4	Digital leisure to maintain relationships	3.26	3	1.02
5	Digital activities to express identity	3.25	3	.98
6	Profile/nickname/avatar to show identity	3.03	3	1.14
7	Digital identity differs from face-to-face identity	2.89	3	1.10
8	Experiencing personality facets	3.34	4	1.06
9	Fake version in social networks	2.76	3	1.14
10	Freedom to modify digital identity	3.26	3	1.08
11	Posts represent identity	3.56	4	1.01
12	Reflecting before posting	3.71	4	1.03
13	Anonymity to explore other ways of being	3.33	3	1.10
14	Interactions impact self-perception	3.08	3	1.07
15	Cultural context influences digital entertainment	3.52	4	.93
16	Digital groups impact self-esteem	3.12	3	1.03
17	Digital leisure impacts daily well-being	3.17	3	1.04

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The t-tests revealed no significant differences by sex on the dimensions of digital leisure ($t = -.23$, $gl = 453$, $p = .817$); digital identity ($t = 1.06$, $gl = 453$, $p = .288$); or context and effects ($t = 1.26$, $gl = 453$, $p = .210$). The only significant difference was found in performativity and digital narratives, where women scored higher than males ($t = 3.03$, $gl = 399.3$, $p = .003$, $d = .29$, small effect). The results of ANOVA did not detect significant differences between the three age groups in any dimension (D1: $F = .30$, $gl = 2$, 452 , $p = .739$; D2: $F = 1.73$, $gl = 2$, 452 , $p = .178$; D3: $F = .10$, $gl = 2$, 452 , $p = .909$; D4: $F = 1.26$, $gl = 2$, 452 , $p = .284$), with trivial effect sizes ($\eta^2 < .01$).

The four dimensions correlated positively and significantly with each other (all $p < .001$). The strongest association was found between digital identity and performativity ($r = .680$), empirically supporting the theoretical argument that performativity is the logic by which young people manage their

digital identity. The correlations between digital leisure and the other dimensions were moderate (r between .358 and .426), whereas digital identity and performativity showed strong correlations with context and effects ($r = .532$ and $r = .656$, respectively).

4.1.1. Digital Leisure Dimension

Regarding the digital leisure dimension, 50% of the participants had scores between 3.0 and 4.0, with a median of 3.7, above neutral. Low outliers were identified in a small percentage of participants (1%–2%), suggesting regular and consistent use of digital leisure in the majority of the sample.

4.1.2. Digital Identity

The median was at the neutral point (3.0), with a more compact distribution than the digital leisure dimension. The relative symmetry of distribution indicates a diversity of opinions regarding the use of digital identity as a form of expression.

4.1.3. Performativity and Narratives

The median was 3.4, with scores concentrated between 3.0 and 3.8. A greater presence of low outliers was observed compared with the other dimensions, indicating a minority group with little awareness of their digital performativity.

4.1.4. Context and Impacts

This dimension presented the greatest variability, with a median of 3.3 and a wider interquartile range, reflecting a heterogeneous experience of the impact of digital leisure on well-being.

4.2. Qualitative Results

The qualitative results of the three open-ended questions of the survey are shown below, with coding assisted by *QDA Miner Lite software*.

4.2.1. Digital Leisure Activities

Six codes were assigned to this dimension. As shown in Table 5, the highest frequency of mentions were concentrated in cultural consumption (14.9%) and video games (12.1%), followed by short video consumption (9.8%). In comparison, content creation (4.8%), social interaction (1.1%), and live streaming (.4%) presented considerably lower frequencies. These results suggest that young people's digital leisure is primarily receptive in nature, orient-

ed toward content consumption rather than content production or active interaction.

Table 5. *Frequency of codes in the digital leisure dimension in digital spaces*

Category	Code	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Digital leisure activities	Cultural consumption	153	14.9
	Videogames	124	12.1
	Short video consumption	101	9.8
	Content creation	47	4.8
	Social interaction	11	1.1
	Live streaming	4	.4

Source: Prepared by the authors, with the support of QDA Miner Lite.

4.2.2. Identity in Digital Environments

Six codes were assigned to this dimension. As shown in Table 6, the highest frequency of mentions were concentrated in authenticity (15.1%), followed by adaptation (7.0%) and exploration (3.9%). In comparison, extroversion (2.4%), rejection of another identity (1.7%) and anonymity (.5%) presented lower frequencies. The predominance of authenticity suggests that young people perceive digital spaces primarily as a place to express themselves in a genuine way, although the significant presence of adaptation indicates that this authenticity coexists with a conscious management of identity based on context and audience.

Table 6. *Frequency of codes in the identity dimension in digital spaces*

Category	Code	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Identity in digital spaces	Authenticity	155	15.1
	Adaptation	72	7.0
	Exploration	40	3.9
	Extroversion	25	2.4
	Rejection of another identity	18	1.7
	Anonymity	5	.5

Source: Prepared by the authors, with the support of QDA Miner Lite.

4.2.3. Performativity in Digital Leisure Environments

Six codes were assigned to this dimension. As shown in Table 7, the highest frequency of mentions were concentrated in controlling self-presentation (10.1%) and freedom (8.6%). Playful experimentation (3.7%) and ambivalence (2.6%) ranked in the middle, whereas reduced social judgment (1.1%) and catharsis (.5%) presented lower frequencies. These results indicate that young people are aware of how they present themselves in digital spaces and value the freedom they offer, although some experience tension between self-expression and control of their image.

Table 7. *Frequency of codes in the performativity dimension in digital entertainment spaces.*

Category	Code	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Performativity in digital leisure spaces	Controlling self-presentation	104	10.1
	Freedom	89	8.6
	Playful experimentation	38	3.7
	Ambivalence	27	2.6
	Reduced social judgment	11	1.1
	Catharsis	5	.5

Source: Prepared by the authors, with the support of QDA Miner Lite.

5. Discussion

The discussion is organized and presented by dimension.

5.1. Digital Leisure as an Everyday Practice

The participants' responses indicate that digital leisure plays a key role in the daily lives of young people, as they regularly engage with online platforms, video games, and social media. The respondents mentioned activities such as «watching videos on TikTok», «playing video games», «chatting with my friends», and «scrolling on social networks», confirming the transformation of the spaces in which leisure takes place and not its essential characteristics (García-Álvarez *et al.*, 2012; Viñals-Blanco, 2013).

The qualitative results also revealed that digital leisure is not limited to entertainment or social connection and includes cultural and informational practices. Expressions such as «it is more comfortable to read in my cell phone», «I watch anime videos because they allow me to multitask», and «I find out about things that happen around the world» accounted for a multi-functional form of digital leisure, in which content consumption is part of

young people's social and cultural life (Moral-Pérez *et al.*, 2021; Calderón-Gómez & Gómez-Miguel, 2022).

5.2. Digital Identity and Ambivalence

The data indicated differentiated positions with respect to the use of digital identity as a form of personal expression. About half the participants used it to express themselves, whereas the other half were more neutral or reticent; thus, it is the dimension with the least general agreement. Expressions such as «especially in publications where I can show myself as I am», «I don't like to share my personal life», and «not completely, I don't share my whole life» indicate the variety of positions around digital identity. These findings are consistent with those of Turkle (1995), Noblia (2009), and Balardini (2000), who point out that digital identity is constructed in a mediated way not only by technology but also by the groups converging in it.

A relevant finding is the paradox revealed by the data: young people use digital platforms intensively to entertain and connect but not necessarily to express who they are. Expressions such as «it is a distraction, but it doesn't define me», «I'm much more than just a profile», and «there are things I can express better in person» illustrate this gap between use and identity. This paradox is consistent with the results of Gómez-Urrutia and Jiménez-Figueroa (2022) in a study of Chilean adolescents, who found that young people present high levels of perceived authenticity but simultaneously hide aspects of their lives in their digital profiles.

This ambivalence should not be interpreted as an incoherence but as an identity-construction logic in multifaceted digital environments (Butler, 1990; Gutiérrez-Miranda, 2023; Matas & Gil, 2024). This relation is empirically supported by the strong correlation between the two dimensions ($r = .680, p < .001$).

5.3. Digital Narratives and Reflexivity

This section suggests that a significant portion of young people consciously reflect on how they present themselves in digital spaces and on the impact that their post can have. Expressions such as «I feel that everything I consume and share talks about me», «I like to experiment», and «sometimes I end up changing or not posting what I really want» indicate different levels of reflexivity around the construction of digital narratives. These findings are consistent with those of Olábarri-Fernández and Monge-Benito (2011) and

Gómez-Urrutia and Jiménez-Figueroa (2022), who point out that cyberspace allows users to decide what, when, and how to post.

The concern for consistency between what one shows and who one truly is also reflects in expressions such as «What I share is the way I want to be seen» and «I try to be the way I really am and not pretend to be something I am not». This conscious management of self-presentation aligns with Martínez-Martínez and Rubiano-León (2024), who highlight the use of multimodal narratives as a way of constructing self-perception and group perceptions.

The data in Table 7 identify diverse expressions of performativity: some favored control of self-presentation (10.1%) and expressive freedom (8.6%), whereas others opted for playful experimentation (3.7%) or experienced ambivalence (2.6%). This variety confirms that performativity is not presented in a homogeneous way but as a process under construction in which young people seek ways to feel identified in digital spaces, in line with what Markus and Nurius (1986) theorize about the multifaceted and dynamic nature of the self.

5.4. Wellness and Digital Experience

This dimension evidences significant heterogeneity in the way young people perceive the impact of the cultural context and digital leisure practices on their well-being. The results suggest that digital experience is not experienced homogeneously but depends on the forms of interaction, digital spaces used, and self-presentation strategies adopted. This aligns with the results of Büchi (2024), who points out that digital well-being depends on the balance between the benefits and risks associated with technology use.

The qualitative responses indicated that, for some participants, digital environments are associated with feelings of greater freedom of expression, although they were accompanied by conscious control over what one chooses to show. Expressions such as «there is more freedom», «I only post the most important things that happen to me», and «I show the positive things in my life» reflect the tension between expression and self-regulation. Some respondents also stated that there is less social judgment in digital environments, enabling emotional exploration and playful experimentation, in line with the findings of Shao *et al.*, (2024) on the role of flow as a mediator of digital well-being.

However, the data also revealed that digital leisure can have a negative impact on well-being. Expressions such as «there are moments when I take the lead and take out all my frustration» suggest that some young individuals use digital spaces as an emotional release, which is line with the findings of

Godard *et al.*, (2026) and Weinstein (2018) on compulsive use and its consequences on well-being. In this regard, the results are consistent with Verduyn *et al.* (2022), who point out that neither active nor passive use is always beneficial or detrimental but that the impact depends on context and user profile.

The qualitative analysis revealed interpretative nuances according to the age group that the ANOVA did not identify in the mean scores (all $p > .05$; $\eta^2 < .01$): 18- to 19-year-olds tended to present greater identity experimentation; 20- to 21-year-olds presented greater awareness of the social impact of their practices; and 22- to 25-year-olds showed a more reflective and strategic use of digital leisure. This divergence is complementary: it illustrates the ability of mixed approaches to capture dimensions of the digital experience that quantitative instruments fail to measure, in line with what was suggested by Mayen *et al.* (2025).

6. Conclusions

Based on the results, this study concludes that, in the sample analyzed, digital leisure constitutes a major space in the daily lives of young people aged 18–25 not only as entertainment but also as a space for identity construction. The most frequent leisure practices (cultural consumption, video games, and short videos) revealed a predominantly receptive form of leisure, along with a growing presence of creative and informative practices that broaden its social and cultural function.

The digital identity emerging from these practices is neither homogeneous nor stable but dynamic and contextual. Young people manage their self-presentation reflexively, choosing what, when, and how to publish, confirming that there is performativity in their digital practices, albeit moderate and situated. Identity ambivalence (using platforms intensely without feeling that they fully represent them) is not a contradiction but represents the logic of constructing the self in multifaceted digital environments.

Regarding digital well-being, the findings indicate a heterogeneous experience that varies according to type of use, platform, and life context. The qualitative analysis revealed interpretative nuances according to age group, although the ANOVA did not find significant differences between age groups in any dimension (all $p > .05$; $\eta^2 < .01$).

From a theoretical point of view, the study provides empirical evidence from a Latin American context regarding the relationship between digital leisure, identity, and well-being, contributing to a field dominated by European and North American research. From a practical point of view, the findings pre-

sent relevant guidance for designing digital education and media literacy programs aimed at young university students.

The use of convenience sampling limits the generalizability of the results, paving the way for future research with probability samples that would allow contrasting these findings with those from other Latin American contexts. Moreover, future studies can delve deeper into digital identity from interdisciplinary approaches that integrate psychology, communication, and cultural studies.

Ethics and Transparency

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Conflict of Interest

It is hereby declared that there is no conflict of interest.

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Author Contributions

Contribution	Author 1	Author 2	Author 3	Author 4
Conceptualization	X	X		
Data curation	X	X	X	
Formal analysis	X	X		
Financing acquisition				
Research	X	X	X	
Method	X	X	X	
Project management				
Resources	X	X		
Software	X	X		
Supervision	X	X		
Validation	X	X		
Visualization	X	X		
Writing - Original draft	X	X	X	
Writing - review and editing	X	X	X	

Data Availability Statement

A Drive link is shared where the database, research instrument validation, and complete statistical report with tables of assumptions, ANOVAs, t-tests, correlations, and reliability can be found.

<https://tinyurl.com/yjbnnh5j>

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