

Strengthening Character Education for the Digital Well-Being of Young Citizens: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract : Digital transformation provides opportunities while also creating challenges for young people's well-being, particularly in managing technology use, social interactions, and participation in digital spaces. Digital well-being is not merely related to the intensity of technology use but also to individuals' capacity to manage digital experiences in healthy, adaptive, and responsible ways. This study aims to map research on strengthening character strengths to support the digital well-being of young citizens in educational and citizenship contexts. A Systematic Literature Review was conducted following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Relevant academic literature was identified through appropriate scholarly databases and analyzed using descriptive mapping and thematic synthesis. The findings indicate that self-regulation, empathy, responsibility, and integrity are particularly relevant to developing healthy, ethical, and responsible digital behavior. The review also reveals an emerging connection between digital well-being and digital citizenship, while the integration of character strengths into Citizenship Education to enhance digital well-being remains relatively limited. These findings highlight the need for an educational approach that integrates character strengths, digital well-being, and digital citizenship.

Keywords : Character Strengths; Digital Well-Being; Citizenship Education; Digital Citizenship; Young Citizens

Abstrak : Transformasi digital menghadirkan peluang sekaligus tantangan bagi kesejahteraan generasi muda, terutama dalam mengelola penggunaan teknologi, interaksi sosial, dan partisipasi dalam ruang digital. Digital well-being tidak hanya berkaitan dengan intensitas penggunaan teknologi, tetapi juga kemampuan individu mengelola pengalaman digital secara sehat, adaptif, dan bertanggung jawab. Penelitian ini bertujuan memetakan penelitian mengenai penguatan kekuatan karakter untuk mendukung digital well-being warga negara muda dalam konteks pendidikan dan kewarganegaraan. Penelitian menggunakan metode Systematic Literature Review dengan mengikuti pedoman PRISMA 2020. Literatur ditelusuri melalui basis data akademik yang relevan dan dianalisis menggunakan pemetaan deskriptif serta sintesis tematik. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa self-regulation, empathy, responsibility, dan integrity memiliki relevansi penting dalam membentuk perilaku digital yang sehat, etis, dan bertanggung jawab. Kajian juga menunjukkan adanya keterkaitan antara digital well-being dan digital citizenship, tetapi integrasi penguatan kekuatan karakter dalam Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan untuk meningkatkan digital well-being masih relatif

terbatas. Temuan ini menunjukkan perlunya pendekatan pendidikan yang mengintegrasikan kekuatan karakter, digital well-being, dan kewarganegaraan digital

Kata kunci : *character strengths; digital well-being; pendidikan kewarganegaraan; digital citizenship; warga negara muda*

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INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped how young people learn, communicate, build social relationships, access information, and participate in public life. While digital technologies expand access to knowledge and opportunities for communication and participation, unmanaged digital engagement may also generate distractions, social pressure, academic disruption, and challenges to well-being (Ribble, 2011; Ribble & Bailey, 2023). Consequently, digital well-being has emerged as an important concern in contemporary education. Rather than referring simply to the amount of time spent using technology, digital well-being concerns the quality of individuals' experiences within digital environments and their capacity to manage the benefits and risks associated with digital media (Büchi, 2024; Council of Europe, 2019). Vanden Abeele (2021) further conceptualizes digital well-being as a dynamic state involving the balance between connectivity and disconnectivity, suggesting that healthy digital engagement depends not merely on reducing technology use but on individuals' ability to regulate technology in accordance with their needs, goals, and life contexts.

This perspective is particularly relevant to young people, whose educational and social lives are increasingly mediated by digital technologies. Research indicates that digital well-being involves cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and social capacities, including digital self-regulation, self-efficacy, responsible digital conduct, engagement, safety, and access to supportive digital resources. Education therefore has an important role in developing the capacities required to navigate digital environments in healthy and responsible ways. Culcasi et al., (2025), for example, demonstrate that service-learning and e-service-learning can foster digital well-being while promoting responsible and inclusive digital practices, prosocial values, civic engagement, and digital citizenship. Such findings suggest a shift from approaches primarily concerned with controlling technology use toward educational approaches that strengthen young people's capacity to engage with digital environments adaptively and responsibly.

Within this educational perspective, character strengths provide a relevant conceptual foundation. Character strengths are positive capacities that enable individuals to pursue meaningful and socially responsible lives and can be cultivated through educational experiences (Gillham et al., 2011; Lavy, 2020). Their significance lies not only in possessing positive values but also in applying them in real-life situations or *character-in-action* (Tang et al., 2019). In digital environments, capacities such as self-regulation, empathy, responsibility, and integrity may help young people manage distractions, evaluate the consequences of their actions, interact respectfully with others, and make responsible decisions. Emerging evidence supports this connection: Smith et al. (2025), for

example, found that character-strength profiles were associated with patterns of young people's engagement with a digital mental-health platform. These developments indicate that character strengths may provide an important educational resource for understanding how young people navigate digital life, although their specific contribution to digital well-being remains insufficiently synthesized (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

This issue also has an important citizenship dimension because digital environments have become part of the public sphere in which young people communicate, express opinions, access information, build networks, and participate in civic life. Young citizens therefore require not only technological competencies but also the capacity to participate ethically, critically, and responsibly while safeguarding their own well-being and that of others. Civic Education has increasingly been positioned as a means of preparing responsible digital citizens (Azis et al., 2021), strengthening character in the digital age (Widiatmaka et al., 2025), and developing character-oriented learning through digital media (Suhaida et al., 2025). Nevertheless, these research strands remain fragmented. Studies of character strengths predominantly address general student well-being; digital well-being research frequently emphasizes digital behavior, self-regulation, safety, or competencies; and Civic Education research tends to focus on character formation and digital citizenship. A previous systematic review by Anbiya et al. (2026), for example, identified self-regulation, hope, gratitude, perseverance, and critical thinking as strengths associated with student well-being, but it did not specifically examine digital well-being or systematically integrate character strengths with Civic Education and digital citizenship. This fragmentation constitutes the central research gap addressed by the present review.

Accordingly, this study conducts an integrative literature review to map and synthesize the intersection of character strengths, digital well-being, education, and citizenship among young people. Specifically, it addresses four questions: (1) What are the characteristics and trends of research on character strengths and digital well-being among young people in educational contexts? (2) Which character strengths have been identified or developed in relation to young people's digital well-being? (3) How do educational approaches contribute to strengthening character capacities that support digital well-being and responsible digital citizenship? and (4) What research gaps remain for developing Civic Education oriented toward character strengths and the digital well-being of young citizens? By integrating these previously fragmented research strands, this review seeks to clarify the current state of knowledge and provide a conceptual basis for character-oriented Civic Education in increasingly digital environments.

METHOD

This study employed an integrative literature review to synthesize scholarship at the intersection of character strengths, digital well-being, education, and citizenship. An integrative approach was selected because the literature informing the research questions is conceptually and methodologically heterogeneous, including empirical studies,

intervention research, conceptual models, and review studies. The purpose of the review was therefore not to estimate a pooled effect or claim exhaustive database coverage, but to identify recurring relationships, educational approaches, conceptual connections, and gaps across these partially fragmented bodies of scholarship. Descriptive mapping was used to summarize the characteristics of key studies, while thematic synthesis was used to develop cross-study themes and conceptual propositions (Gough et al., 2017).

Literature scope and source selection. Relevant peer-reviewed scholarship was identified from the literature assembled for the study and from reference-based identification of works directly relevant to character strengths, digital well-being, digital citizenship, character education, and Citizenship Education. Priority was given to studies published during the recent period of rapid expansion in digitally mediated education, while earlier foundational works were retained when necessary to define major constructs or analytical perspectives. English-language international scholarship and Indonesian scholarship were both considered in order to connect broader theoretical developments with the Indonesian educational and Citizenship Education context. Because a complete auditable database-search log was not available for the present manuscript, the review does not report unverified database record counts, duplicate counts, or a PRISMA flow diagram (Page et al., 2021).

Literature identification strategy. Literature was identified using combinations of concepts corresponding to four domains: character strengths and character development; digital well-being and digital wellness; young people and students; and education, citizenship, digital citizenship, civic engagement, and civic learning. Candidate studies were assessed for substantive relevance to the review questions. Reference lists of highly relevant studies and reviews were also used to identify additional scholarship that could clarify conceptual relationships among the domains. The search expressions previously developed for Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection, and ERIC are retained in Table 1 as a reproducible search framework for a future fully systematic update of this review; they are not presented as evidence of completed database searches in the present study.

Study relevance criteria. Literature was retained when it substantively addressed one or more of the following intersections: character strengths or character development and well-being; adaptive functioning or well-being in digital environments; educational approaches relevant to digital well-being; or character development and responsible digital citizenship within educational or Civic/Citizenship Education contexts. Greater analytical weight was given to studies involving adolescents, students, youth, or young adults and to peer-reviewed research with sufficient methodological or conceptual information. Literature was not used as primary evidence when character was only incidental, when digital technology was discussed without a meaningful well-being or citizenship dimension, or when the source did not provide sufficient information to support the synthesis. Table 2 presents these relevance criteria as an analytical guide rather than as counts in a PRISMA screening process.

Evidence appraisal. The included literature was examined for the type and strength of evidence it contributed to the review questions. Empirical findings were interpreted in

relation to study design, participants, constructs, and reported outcomes, while conceptual and review studies were used primarily to define constructs, connect research traditions, and support theoretical interpretation. Because the evidence base contains heterogeneous designs and not all sources are empirical primary studies, the manuscript does not assign a single numerical quality score across all sources. Instead, claims in the synthesis are calibrated to the directness of the available evidence, and conceptual propositions are explicitly distinguished from empirically established relationships.

Data extraction and synthesis. Information relevant to the review questions was organized using a structured matrix covering bibliographic identity, context, participants where applicable, research design, character construct, conceptualization of digital well-being, educational approach, digital citizenship or civic dimension, principal findings, implications, and research gaps (Table 3). Thematic synthesis identified recurring patterns, similarities, differences, and conceptual relationships across the literature. To avoid overstating relationships among constructs, evidence was classified into three analytical tiers: direct evidence, referring to studies explicitly examining character-related capacities in relation to digital well-being; related evidence, referring to studies connecting character strengths with well-being in digitally mediated settings or digital well-being with educational interventions; and contextual evidence, referring to studies of character education, Citizenship Education, and digital citizenship that informed the broader conceptual relationship. Research gaps were derived from areas in which these strands remained weakly integrated.

Table 1. Reproducible Search Framework for a Future Systematic Update

Database	Exact search strategy and limits
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY(("character strength*" OR "character education" OR "character development" OR "strength-based education") AND ("digital well-being" OR "digital wellbeing" OR "digital well being" OR "digital wellness") AND (student* OR youth OR adolescent* OR "young people" OR "young adult*" OR "university student*" OR "college student*")) AND (education OR "higher education" OR "civic education" OR "citizenship education" OR "digital citizenship" OR "civic engagement" OR "civic learning")) AND PUBYEAR > 2015 AND PUBYEAR < 2027 AND DOCTYPE(ar)
Web of Science Core Collection	TS=(("character strength*" OR "character education" OR "character development" OR "strength-based education") AND ("digital well-being" OR "digital wellbeing" OR "digital well being" OR "digital wellness") AND (student* OR youth OR adolescent* OR "young people" OR "young adult*" OR "university student*" OR "college student*")) AND (education OR "higher education" OR "civic education" OR "citizenship education" OR "digital citizenship" OR "civic engagement" OR "civic learning")) AND PY=(2016-2026); Document Type: Article.

ERIC	("character strengths" OR "character education" OR "character development" OR "strength-based education") AND ("digital well-being" OR "digital wellbeing" OR "digital well being" OR "digital wellness") AND (student OR students OR youth OR adolescent OR adolescents OR "young people" OR "young adults" OR "college students" OR "university students") AND (education OR "higher education" OR "civic education" OR "citizenship education" OR "digital citizenship" OR "civic engagement" OR "civic learning"); filters: Publication Date 2016-2026; Journal Articles; Peer Reviewed.
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Table 2. Literature Relevance Criteria

Aspect	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Editorials, opinion papers, book reviews, conference abstracts/proceedings, theses/dissertations, books, and non-peer-reviewed publications
Publication period	2016–2026	Published before 2016 or after 2026
Language	English or Indonesian	Languages other than English or Indonesian
Population	Adolescents, secondary-school students, university/college students, youth, or young adults	Populations outside the target age/educational groups
Character construct	Character strengths, character education, character development, or closely related character capacities are substantively examined	Character is absent or mentioned only incidentally
Digital well-being	Digital well-being/digital wellness or substantively related adaptive well-being in digital environments	Only screen time, digital literacy, technology use, or problematic use without an explicit well-being dimension
Context	Education, Civic/Citizenship Education, digital citizenship, civic engagement, or young people's digital life	Context unrelated to education, citizenship, or young people's digital experiences
Data availability	Full text and sufficient methodological information available	Full text unavailable or methodological information insufficient for extraction/appraisal

Table 3. Data Extraction Matrix

Component	Extracted information
Study identity	Author(s), publication year, journal
Context	Country, educational/ research setting
Participants	Sample size, age, and participant characteristics
Methodology	Research design, data collection, and analytical approach
Character strengths	Character construct(s), strengths, or dimensions examined
Digital well-being	Definition, dimensions, and measure/instrument
Education	Educational approach, learning model, or intervention
Citizenship	Digital citizenship, Civic/ Citizenship Education, civic engagement, or related dimension
Findings	Principal empirical findings relevant to the review questions
Implications	Educational and citizenship implications
Research gaps	Study limitations and recommendations for future research
Evidence tier	Direct, related, or contextual evidence

RESULTS

Study Characteristics and Evidence Structure

The reviewed literature indicates that research on character strengths, digital well-being, education, and digital citizenship has developed across several interconnected but insufficiently integrated research strands. To avoid overstating relationships that have not been directly tested, the evidence was classified into three analytical categories: direct evidence, related evidence, and contextual evidence. Direct evidence refers to studies explicitly examining character-related capacities in relation to digital well-being. Related evidence includes studies linking character strengths with well-being in digitally mediated contexts or connecting digital well-being with educational interventions. Contextual evidence comprises studies of character education, Civic Education, and digital citizenship that provide a broader educational and civic basis for understanding the relationship among the constructs. This classification is consistent with the analytical structure established in the review.

The literature also shows considerable variation in research design and disciplinary orientation. Some studies are empirical investigations of character strengths and well-being, while others focus on educational interventions, digital citizenship, or conceptual models of digital well-being. For example, (Tang et al., 2019) conducted a longitudinal study involving 349 adolescents and examined caring, inquisitiveness, self-control, strength use, academic achievement, and eudaimonic well-being. (Culcasi et al., 2025), by contrast, conducted a qualitative literature-based analysis of three higher-education service-learning and e-service-learning cases addressing digital well-being. This methodological diversity indicates that the relationship among character strengths, digital well-being, and digital

citizenship is currently supported by different forms of evidence rather than by a single unified research tradition.

Table 4. Key Studies Underpinning the Synthesis

Study	Context/Design	Main Construct(s)	Main Finding Relevant to This Review	Evidence Category
Büchi (2024)	Conceptual/theoretical study of digital media and well-being	Digital practices, harms/benefits, subjective well-being	Digital well-being concerns subjective well-being within environments saturated by digital media and should be understood through the consequences of digital practices rather than technology use alone.	Related
Vanden Abeele (2021)	Conceptual model	Digital well-being; connectivity/disconnectivity	Digital well-being is dynamic and reflects the balance individuals experience in managing mobile connectivity and disconnection.	Related
Tang et al. (2019)	Longitudinal study; 349 adolescents from three schools	Caring, inquisitiveness, self-control, strength use, eudaimonic well-being	Character strengths were positively associated with well-being; strength use mediated the effects of inquisitiveness and self-control on educational outcomes and eudaimonic well-being.	Related
Lavy (2020)	Review of character-strength interventions in schools	Character strengths; strengths in development	Character strengths can be intentionally fostered through educational environments and school-level practices.	Contextual
Culcasi et al. (2025)	Qualitative literature-based analysis of three higher-education SL/e-SL cases	Digital well-being, service-learning, digital citizenship, prosocial values	Service-learning and e-service-learning can provide experiential contexts for responsible digital engagement, digital citizenship, and digital well-being.	Related
Azis et al. (2021)	Research and Development; online Civic Education	Character development; digital citizenship	Student-centered Civic Education can support students' character development as digital citizens through critical engagement with contextual problems and responsible use of technology.	Contextual
Widiatma ka et al. (2025)	Qualitative literature/document study	Civic Education, national character, digital era	Civic Education remains a strategic educational context for strengthening students' civic knowledge, skills, disposition, and national character in the digital era.	Contextual

Study	Context/Design	Main Construct(s)	Main Finding Relevant to This Review	Evidence Category
Suhaida et al. (2025)	Development research; ADDIE-based model development	Civic Education, digital media, character development	A digital-media-based Modification of Project Citizen model was developed to strengthen students' character through Civic Education.	Contextual
Anbiya et al. (2026)	Systematic literature review; 26 international articles	Character strengths and student well-being	Self-regulation, hope, gratitude, perseverance, and critical thinking were among strengths associated with student well-being, although digital well-being and digital citizenship were not integrated as the central outcomes.	Related/Contextual

Direct evidence refers to studies explicitly testing character-related capacities in relation to digital well-being; related evidence refers to studies linking character strengths with well-being or digital well-being with educational approaches; contextual evidence refers to studies that inform the broader relationship through character education, Civic Education, or digital citizenship. Büchi's framework conceptualizes digital well-being in terms of subjective well-being in digitally saturated environments, while Vanden Abeele emphasizes its dynamic character and the balance between connectivity and disconnection. Lavy's review also supports the educational developability of character strengths rather than treating them as immutable individual traits.

Character Strengths Associated with Digital Well-Being

Across the reviewed literature, self-regulation and closely related self-management capacities emerged as the most consistently supported character-related capacities relevant to adaptive digital engagement. Digital environments require individuals to regulate attention, impulses, connectivity, technology use, and responses to online stimuli. From a character-strength perspective, this function closely corresponds to the capacity to regulate behavior in accordance with goals and values.

Empirical evidence concerning general student well-being also supports the importance of self-regulatory character capacities. (Tang et al., 2019) found that self-control, caring, and inquisitiveness were positively associated with eudaimonic well-being among adolescents and that strength use mediated the relationship between self-control and well-being. Similarly, the previous systematic review by (Anbiya et al., 2026), which synthesized 26 peer-reviewed international studies, identified self-regulation alongside hope, gratitude, perseverance, and critical thinking as relevant character strengths associated with student well-being.

Other strengths emerging from the broader educational and digital citizenship literature include empathy, responsibility, integrity, caring, perseverance, hope, gratitude,

and critical thinking. However, the directness of evidence varies considerably. Self-regulation and self-control have comparatively stronger support in studies of adaptive functioning and well-being, whereas empathy, responsibility, and integrity are more frequently discussed within character education, digital citizenship, and responsible digital participation. Therefore, the evidence does not support the conclusion that all character strengths have equivalent direct relationships with digital well-being.

Relationships between Character Strengths and Digital Well-Being

The synthesis reveals a recurring relationship between character-related capacities and adaptive behavior in technologically mediated environments. Research on character strengths indicates that positive traits become educationally meaningful not merely through possession but through their actual use. Tang et al. (2019), for example, demonstrated that *strength use* functioned as a mechanism linking some character strengths to educational and well-being outcomes.

Within the digital well-being literature, a comparable emphasis is placed on individuals' capacity to manage digital practices in relation to personal goals, relationships, and well-being. Büchi (2024) conceptualizes digital well-being through the relationship among digital practices, their benefits and harms, and subjective well-being, while Vanden Abeele (2021) emphasizes the dynamic regulation of connectivity and disconnection. Taken together, these strands suggest a recurring empirical and conceptual pattern in which internal capacities become relevant when translated into adaptive digital practices. Nevertheless, the literature reviewed provides limited direct testing of a complete character strengths–digital behavior–digital well-being pathway.

Educational Approaches and Digital Citizenship

The reviewed literature identified several educational approaches relevant to the development of character and adaptive digital engagement. Service-learning and e-service-learning represent one important strand. (Culcasi et al. (2025) analyzed three higher-education cases and found that experiential approaches can connect academic learning, community engagement, responsible digital practices, digital citizenship, and dimensions of digital well-being.

Civic Education studies provide another relevant strand (Azis et al., 2021). showed that student-centered online Citizenship Education can support character development and digital citizenship by engaging students critically with contextual problems and encouraging responsible use of science and technology. Suhaida et al. (2025) developed a digital-media-based Civic Education model using an ADDIE-informed development process and a Modification of Project Citizen approach to strengthen students' character. Widiatmaka et al. (2025) similarly position Civic Education as an important educational context for building national character among university students in the digital era.

Taken objectively, these studies show that education can address character development and responsible participation in digital environments. However, digital well-being is not consistently measured as an explicit educational outcome in the Civic Education

literature, while character strengths are not consistently treated as explanatory capacities in digital well-being research.

Research Gaps

Four major gaps emerged from the synthesis. First, studies explicitly examining character strengths and digital well-being within the same empirical model remain limited. Second, the available evidence is relatively stronger for self-regulation and self-control than for empathy, responsibility, and integrity. Third, educational studies tend to address character development, digital well-being, or digital citizenship as partially separate domains rather than as interconnected outcomes. Fourth, empirical research directly integrating character strengths and digital well-being within Civic Education remains underdeveloped.

These gaps become particularly visible when the major research strands are compared. Character-strength research provides evidence concerning well-being and strength use; digital well-being research examines adaptive engagement with digital environments; and Civic Education research increasingly addresses character and digital citizenship. Yet the explicit intersection of these three strands remains limited. This confirms the gap already visible in the original synthesis, in which Civic Education and character development were well represented in digital contexts but digital well-being had not consistently been positioned as an educational outcome.

Table 5 . Research Gaps Emerging from the Review

Research Domain	Current Evidence	Identified Gap
Character strengths and well-being	Character strengths, including self-regulation and self-control, are associated with positive educational and well-being outcomes.	Limited direct testing specifically against digital well-being.
Self-regulation	Comparatively strong theoretical and empirical support as a self-management capacity.	Need for direct tests of self-regulation as a character strength in digital well-being models.
Empathy, responsibility, integrity	Strongly represented in character education and digital citizenship discourse.	Limited direct empirical evidence linking these strengths to digital well-being.
Digital well-being	Increasingly conceptualized as multidimensional and related to adaptive digital practices.	Character strengths are rarely incorporated systematically as antecedent capacities.
Educational interventions	Service-learning, e-service-learning, and character interventions show educational potential.	Few interventions simultaneously assess character development, digital well-being, and digital citizenship.

Research Domain	Current Evidence	Identified Gap
Civic Education	Increasing attention to character and digital citizenship.	Digital well-being rarely appears as an explicit Civic Education outcome.
Integrated framework	Separate bodies of literature provide complementary evidence.	Lack of a unified empirical framework connecting character strengths, digital behavior, digital well-being, and digital citizenship.

DISCUSSION

Character Strengths as Character-in-Action in Digital Environments

The findings suggest that character strengths should not be understood merely as normative qualities or personal attributes that students possess. Their educational significance lies in their application in situations requiring judgment, regulation, interaction, and decision-making. This interpretation is consistent with the strength-use perspective, according to which character strengths become consequential when individuals mobilize them in concrete life contexts. Tang et al. (2019) provide empirical support for this mechanism by showing that strength use mediated relationships between specific character strengths and positive educational outcomes.

The present review extends this perspective into digital environments and proposes the concept of character-in-action. Character-in-action refers to the contextual activation of character strengths when young people encounter actual challenges in digital life. Self-regulation, for example, becomes character-in-action when students manage attention, impulses, or connectivity. Empathy becomes visible when they consider the effects of online communication on others. Responsibility is enacted when they consider the social consequences of sharing information or expressing opinions, while integrity is enacted when online behavior remains consistent with ethical values even when external supervision is absent. This interpretation shifts character education from the transmission of values toward the development of capacities that can be mobilized in actual digital situations.

Self-Regulation as the Primary Bridging Capacity

Among the capacities identified in the synthesis, self-regulation provides the most plausible and empirically supported bridge between character strengths and digital well-being. Contemporary digital environments continuously require choices concerning whether, when, how long, and for what purposes individuals engage with digital technologies. Vanden Abeele's dynamic model of digital well-being is particularly relevant because it conceptualizes digital well-being around the ongoing negotiation between connectivity and disconnection. Büchi's framework similarly emphasizes that digital practices generate benefits and harms that ultimately relate to subjective well-being. From this perspective, self-regulation can be understood as an internal capacity that enables

young people to manage these choices adaptively. Yet the synthesis also indicates that digital well-being cannot be reduced to self-regulation alone. Digital environments are simultaneously interpersonal and civic environments. Empathy, responsibility, and integrity therefore complement self-regulation by connecting personal management with ethical interaction and concern for others.

Reconceptualizing the Relationship between Character Strengths and Digital Well-Being

The principal conceptual contribution of this review is to move beyond viewing character strengths and digital well-being as independent educational outcomes. Based on the convergence among character-strength, digital well-being, and educational research, the review proposes the following process-oriented relationship:

Character Strengths → Character-in-Action in Digital Environments → Adaptive and Responsible Digital Behavior → Digital Well-Being

Within this framework, character strengths represent relatively enduring psychological and moral capacities. Character-in-action represents the activation and application of these capacities in specific digital situations. Adaptive and responsible digital behavior represents their behavioral manifestation, including regulating technology use, evaluating information, interacting ethically, respecting others, and making responsible decisions. Digital well-being represents the broader condition in which digital engagement contributes to rather than undermines personal and social functioning.

This framework should not be interpreted as a causal model already demonstrated by the reviewed studies. Rather, it represents a conceptual proposition generated through systematic synthesis. The reviewed literature provides evidence for individual links within the pathway, but it does not yet provide sufficient empirical evidence for the full sequence. This distinction is important because it enables the review to generate theoretical integration without overstating the empirical evidence.

Extending Digital Well-Being toward Digital Citizenship

A further contribution of the synthesis is the recognition that digital well-being contains a relational and civic dimension. Young people engage with digital environments not only as individual technology users but also as members of communities and increasingly as digital citizens. They communicate, participate in networks, express opinions, create and distribute information, interact with diversity, and engage with public issues.

Research in Civic Education supports this extension. Azis et al. (2021), for example, demonstrate that Civic Education can facilitate the development of students as digital citizens through critical engagement with contextual issues and responsible technology use. The educational model developed by Suhaida et al. (2025) similarly illustrates how digital media and Civic Education can be deliberately integrated to support character formation.

Digital well-being therefore cannot be defined exclusively by whether individuals personally feel comfortable or maintain healthy technology-use patterns. It also concerns

the quality and consequences of their participation in shared digital environments. This extends the proposed framework:

Character Strengths → Character-in-Action → Adaptive and Responsible Digital Behavior → Digital Well-Being → Responsible Digital Citizenship

The final link should again be understood as a theoretical proposition rather than an established causal sequence. Its value lies in showing how research on personal well-being and research on citizenship can be conceptually connected.

Why This Integration Matters for Citizenship Education

The proposed integration has particular significance for Citizenship Education. Contemporary citizenship is increasingly practiced within digitally mediated environments. Civic participation therefore requires more than knowledge of political institutions, rights, responsibilities, and digital literacy. It also requires individuals who can regulate themselves, evaluate information critically, interact empathetically, act with integrity, and accept responsibility for the consequences of their digital actions.

Civic Education can consequently be reconceptualized as a pedagogical space connecting personal capacity, digital behavior, well-being, and civic responsibility. Instead of teaching character solely as normative content, Civic Education can provide authentic opportunities for students to apply character strengths to contemporary digital dilemmas (Branson & Quigley, 1998). Students may be asked to regulate their responses to provocative information, assess misinformation, consider the emotional consequences of online interaction, negotiate conflicting views, protect privacy, exercise integrity when creating or sharing information, and assume responsibility for their participation in digital communities.

Experiential approaches identified in the review provide potential pedagogical mechanisms for this purpose. Service-learning and e-service-learning are especially relevant because they integrate reflection, real social needs, participation, and digital engagement. (Culcasi et al., 2025) explicitly demonstrate the potential of these approaches for connecting responsible digital practices with digital well-being. Likewise, digital Project Citizen-oriented approaches provide opportunities to link civic learning, digital media, and character development.

Theoretical, Conceptual, and Practical Contributions

This integrative review makes three interrelated contributions. Theoretically, it introduces character-in-action in digital environments as a mechanism through which character strengths may become relevant to digital well-being. This advances the discussion beyond the parallel treatment of character strengths and well-being by specifying the behavioral process through which their relationship may operate. Conceptually, the review connects character strengths, adaptive digital behavior, digital well-being, and digital citizenship within a single integrative framework. It thereby reframes digital well-being as not only an individual psychological condition but also a relational and civic condition shaped by how individuals behave toward others in shared digital environments.

Educationally, the synthesis positions Citizenship Education as a promising integrative setting for strengthening character capacities relevant to both digital well-being

and responsible digital citizenship. This implies that Civic Education can contribute not only to civic knowledge and civic dispositions but also to students' capacities to navigate digital environments in ways that support personal well-being, ethical relationships, and responsible participation. The framework also generates a clear empirical research agenda. Future longitudinal, experimental, and intervention-based studies should test whether specific character strengths predict digital well-being through adaptive digital behavior and whether these relationships subsequently contribute to responsible digital citizenship. Particular attention should be given to self-regulation, empathy, responsibility, and integrity, because the present synthesis indicates stronger empirical support for self-regulatory capacities but substantially less direct evidence for interpersonal and civic character strengths.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this integrative literature review indicate that character strengths are relevant to young people's capacity to navigate digital environments. Self-regulation emerges as the most strongly supported capacity for managing technology use, attention, and digital behavior, while empathy, responsibility, and integrity provide complementary foundations for ethical and responsible digital participation. These strengths become educationally meaningful when enacted in real digital situations, conceptualized in this review as character-in-action. The synthesis further suggests that digital well-being encompasses personal, relational, ethical, and civic dimensions, thereby connecting it with responsible digital citizenship. Citizenship Education can therefore serve as an important pedagogical context for integrating character development, adaptive digital behavior, digital well-being, and responsible citizenship. This review has several limitations. The literature examined is heterogeneous in terms of research designs, participant characteristics, conceptual definitions, and measurement approaches.

Moreover, relatively few studies directly examine the relationship between specific character strengths and digital well-being or integrate character strengths, digital well-being, and Citizenship Education within a single empirical framework. Consequently, the proposed relationship between character strengths, character-in-action, adaptive and responsible digital behavior, digital well-being, and responsible digital citizenship should be regarded as a conceptual proposition rather than an established causal model. Future research should employ longitudinal, experimental, and intervention-based designs to empirically test these relationships and develop integrated Citizenship Education interventions. Comparative and cross-cultural studies are also recommended to examine the applicability of this framework across different educational and sociocultural contexts.

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