

Digital Emotion Regulation Strategies and Perceived Stress Among Young Adults: A Quantitative Study

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Abstract: *The present quantitative study investigated digital emotion-regulation strategies (DER) and perceived stress among young adults in India. A cross-sectional correlational design was employed with young adults aged 18 to 30 years ($N = 103$; 84.47% female, 15.53% male) who regularly utilize smartphones or digital devices. Data collection involved a socio-digital-use information sheet, the Digital Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS), and the 10-item Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10). Descriptive and inferential statistics-including independent-samples t tests, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), Pearson correlation, and simple linear regression- were applied. The sample exhibited a mean DER score of 25.54 ($SD = 4.61$) and a mean PSS score of 19.18 ($SD = 4.91$), with moderate levels being the most prevalent for both variables (69.90% and 78.64%, respectively). While gender and age differences were not statistically significant, daily screen-time categories demonstrated significant differences for both DER, $F(3, 99) = 3.52, p = .018$, and PSS, $F(3, 99) = 3.24, p = .025$, with individuals using screens for more than six hours daily reporting the highest means. Furthermore, DER was significantly and positively correlated with perceived stress, $r = .369, p < .001$. Simple linear regression indicated that DER significantly predicted perceived stress, $R^2 = .136, F(1, 101) = 16.16, p < .001$, accounting for 13.6% of the variance. These findings suggest that while digital technology serves as an emotion-regulation tool, heavy reliance on digital strategies is associated with elevated perceived stress.*

Keywords: Digital Emotion Regulation, Perceived Stress, Young Adults, Smartphones, Emotion Regulation, Digital Technology

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Digital technology is now a part of daily life. It changes how people talk to each other and learn; work gets information stay connected and handle feelings. When people feel stressed, bored, lonely or have tough emotions they often reach for their phones or online sites. So, to really understand how people use technology we need to look at not just how long they spend on devices, but also why they use them especially when dealing with emotions.

Emotion regulation is how people control their feelings and how they show them. Gross came up with theories about how this happens during different parts of the feeling process. Digital tools can play a part in this by offering ways to take your mind off things relax, express feelings or get help from others. For example, people might use their phones to stop thinking about things, listen to music to calm down talk to friend's online share feelings or watch something fun to feel better.

Digital emotion regulation is when people use phones, apps or online content to handle, change, show or deal with their feelings. These methods aren't always good or bad. Their effects depend on why people use them the methods they choose and whether they help or take the place of ways to manage emotions. Looking at these methods helps us understand how people use tools when they have emotional experiences.

Young adulthood is a time when people face changes in school, jobs, relationships, money and who they are. These changes can bring challenges that affect how happy and

healthy people feel. Since young people use a lot of tools this time is important for looking at how they use digital tools to manage emotions.

Perceived stress is how much people think their life is unpredictable hard to control or too much. Cohen, Kamarck and Mermelstein made a test called the Perceived Stress Scale to measure how much people feel stressed. Understanding this is important when looking at how people deal with problems and the ways they handle their feelings.

The link between how people use tools to manage emotions and how much stress they feel can be complicated. Phones give access to fun, distractions talking to people and help from others, which can help with emotions. If people rely too much on digital ways to cope, they might avoid real problems do not use other ways to deal with stress or not get enough rest. Digital tools can help with feeling better. Can also cause problems depending on how they are used.

In this situation looking at how young adults use tools to manage emotions and how much stress they feel can help us understand the role of digital tools in everyday feelings. This study looks at the connection between emotion regulation and stress, in young adults using numbers and facts.

1.2 Theoretical and Empirical Background

Gross wrote about emotion regulation in 1998 and again in 2015. His framework gives a way to understand how people try to change their emotions. In the world of tools people might change their attention by getting distracted. They might change their feelings by watching videos or listening to music. They might ask for help from friends through messages or social media. They might share their feelings using messages.

Studies done for the project show that using smartphones and social media can help with emotions in ways. Glaser and others looked at how people use smartphones when they feel bad. They found that young people might use smartphones to take their mind off things. Hussain and Griffiths looked at how using online social networks affects emotions. They found that talking online can help people feel better. Stieger and Lewetz found that using media can help in different ways depending on how someone feels during the day.

Newer studies keep showing that using tools to manage emotions is not the same for everyone. Marciano and others found that asking for help through messages can help with daily sadness. Using digital tools too much or without control can make things worse. Tag and others looked at how emotions change when people use smartphones. They found that it is possible to see how people use tools to manage emotions in daily life. Hollenstein and Faulkner and Scott and others looked at people. They found that digital tools can help people feel better or recover from feelings.

The studies also show that using technology a lot is not the same as using it for a purpose. Using smartphones has been linked to problems, in previous studies. At the time using digital tools on purpose can help people feel connected and find ways to cope. This shows that it is important to look at how people use tools to manage emotions instead of thinking that all screen time has the same meaning.

1.3 Need and Significance of the Study

Technology has become an omnipresent part of everyday life, making it crucial to understand how people interact with it on a day-to-day basis. Literature reviews reveal that technology plays various roles in emotion-regulation processes, including distraction, expression, relaxation, seeking information, and social support; however, the way these behaviours are subjectively experienced and influence people's psychological well-being could depend on their strategies.

The current study focuses on the psychological function of technology use, exploring the empirical links between specific digital emotion-regulation strategies and young adults' perceived stress levels.

The significance of the research resides in contributing to an enhanced understanding of how young adults interact with technology in their daily struggles. specifically, the expected results will:

- Provide further validation of technology use in emotion regulation,
- Clarify the most common ways people use technology to cope,
- Elucidate the relationship between digital emotion regulation and stress,
- Raise awareness of how different emotion regulations strategies might be adaptive or not, and
- Be a basis for future psychological and psychoeducational studies and interventions.

1.4 Objectives and Hypothesis

- To assess the baseline levels, prevalence and descriptive usage patterns of digital emotion-regulation strategies among young adults.
- To analyse the severity distribution and levels of perceived stress within the target population.
- To examine the empirical relationships and associations between digital emotion-regulation strategies and perceived stress among young adults.
- To examine significant differences in the levels of digital emotion-regulation strategies and perceived stress across selected socio-demographic and digital user-related variables (such as gender, age groups, educational qualifications, occupational status and daily screen time categories).

H1 (Alternative Hypothesis): There will be a statistically significant relationship between digital emotion-regulation strategies and perceived stress among young adults.

H0 (Null Hypothesis): There will be no statistically significant relationship between digital emotion-regulation strategies and perceived stress among young adults.

2. Review of Literature

The literature reviewed for the project can be organized into three broad themes: digital technology as a means of emotion regulation, digital engagement and psychological distress, and the role of screen-time or technology-related behavior in stress. Together, these themes suggest that digital behavior can be understood as part of a broader coping system rather than as an isolated behavioral outcome.

2.1 Digital Technology as an Emotion-Regulation Resource

Digital environments give access to activities that can change how we focus and how we feel. Distraction is a function that's very easy to use. If someone feels bad that person can quickly turn attention toward videos, games, social media feeds, music or other content. Digital communication can also give support. Online communities can give chances to show feelings and connect with others. Extant research indicates that these digital functions are particularly salient when individuals experience heightened emotional distress. Glaser et al. (2018) Found evidence that people use smartphones to manage affect by using distraction and other coping processes. Hussain and Griffiths (2018) highlighted the emotional functions of online social networks. Stieger and Lewetz (2018) demonstrated that smartphone behaviour can change according to mood and situational needs. These results support the idea that digital technology's an external resource that can become a part of emotion-regulation processes.

2.2 Digital Engagement, Avoidance, and Stress

Although smartphone use may give comfort depending on distraction or avoidance can bring other results over a longer time.

Elwood and Stewart (2021) looked at papers. Found that problematic smartphones use links to ways of handling feelings. They suggested that problematic smartphone use may be stuck with trouble in controlling experiences.

Foroughi et al. (2021) Also studied smartphone engagement and mental strain showing that more smartphone use can match mental results.

The difference between relief and lasting change is important.

Using a phone can lower the feeling right now but does not fix the root of the stress.

If this pattern repeats the person may rely more on the phone whenever upset.

This idea does not say that using a phone to manage feelings is always bad. It says that how useful it is may vary with the situation, why the phone is used, how flexible one is and how it works with ways to cope.

2.3 Recent Research and Research Gap

Recent research has started to look at emotion regulation as something that changes over time. Tag and others (2022) looked at how emotions change while using a smartphone. Hollenstein and Faulkner (2024) and Scott and others (2024) looked at how digital tools help with managing emotions every day. De Segovia Vicente and others (2026) studied how people use smartphones to handle emotions and negative feelings using a method that collects data over time. These studies show that it is important to look at how people use tools in connection with their emotions instead of seeing all phones use the same way.

The studies reviewed for this project still show that there is a need to measure how digital emotion regulation connects with stress in adults, in India. It also needs to look at some digital use details. The current study tries to fill this gap by looking at DER and PSS in a group of people and checking if the results are different based on gender, age and how much time people spend on screens.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Participants

A quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional, correlational design was used. The study focused on Indian young adults aged 18–30 years who regularly used smartphones or other digital devices. Participants were recruited through non-probability convenience sampling. A total of 107 responses were received, and 103 eligible responses were retained for the reported analysis. Four responses were not included because consent was not provided.

3.2 Sample Characteristics

Variable	Category	<i>n</i>	%
Gender	Female	87	84.47
	Male	16	15.53
Age	18–21	7	6.80
	22–25	71	68.93
	26–30	25	24.27
Education	Post-Graduate	44	42.72
	Under-Graduate	31	30.10
	Professional Course	23	22.33
	Others	5	4.85
Occupation	Employed	48	46.60
	Student	30	29.13
	Unemployed	16	15.53
	Self-Employed	9	8.74
Daily use	<2 hours	5	4.85
	2–4 hours	42	40.78
	4–6 hours	31	30.10
	>6 hours	25	24.27

The sample was predominantly female and concentrated in the 22–25-year age group. Almost half of the participants were employed, while students represented the second-largest occupational group. The largest daily-use category was 2–4 hours, followed by 4–6 hours and more than 6 hours.

3.3 Measures

Socio-demographic and digital-use information sheet. A structured information sheet collected age, gender, educational qualification, occupation, and daily digital-device or internet use. Daily screen time was reported by participants and categorized into four groups: less than 2 hours, 2–4 hours, 4–6 hours, and more than 6 hours.

Digital Emotion Regulation Scale (DER). Digital emotion regulation was assessed using the Digital Emotion Regulation Scale used in the project. The measure captures digital strategies used in relation to emotional experiences, including functions such as distraction, social support, relaxation, and emotional expression. The project classified DER scores into low, moderate, and high levels.

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10). Perceived stress was measured using the 10-item Perceived Stress Scale developed by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983). Items are rated on a five-point response scale from 0 (never) to 4 (very often), with reverse scoring applied to positively worded items. Higher total scores indicate greater perceived stress.

3.4 Procedure and Ethical Considerations

Data were collected through an online questionnaire. Participants were informed about the study and provided informed consent before accessing the measures. Participation was voluntary, and respondents could discontinue participation according to the approved research procedure. Unnecessary personally identifying information was not collected. The data were treated confidentially and analysed in aggregate form for academic research purposes.

3.5 Statistical Analysis

The collected data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. Frequencies and

percentages were used to describe categorical variables, while means and standard deviations summarized the primary study variables. Independent-samples *t* tests were used to examine gender differences. One-way ANOVA was used to compare DER across age groups and both DER and PSS across daily screen-time categories. Pearson's correlation was used to assess the association between DER and PSS. Simple linear regression was used to examine the predictive association between DER and perceived stress. Statistical significance was evaluated at $p < .05$.

4. Results

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
Digital Emotion Regulation	103	15	36	25.54	4.61
Perceived Stress (PSS)	103	8	34	19.18	4.91

The mean DER score was 25.54 ($SD = 4.61$), indicating that the sample generally fell within the moderate range identified in the project. The mean PSS score was 19.18 ($SD = 4.91$), with the largest proportion of participants classified in the moderate stress category.

Table 2: Distribution of DER and PSS Levels

Variable	Level	n	%
DER	Low	19	18.45
	Moderate	72	69.90
	High	12	11.65
PSS	Low	13	12.62
	Moderate	81	78.64
	High	9	8.74

Moderate digital emotion regulation was the most common category, representing 69.90% of the sample. Similarly, 78.64% of participants were in the moderate perceived-stress category. These distributions suggest that neither very low nor very high scores represented most participants.

Table 3: Gender Differences

Outcome	Male M (SD)	Female M (SD)	<i>t</i>	df	<i>p</i>
DER	25.98 (4.94)	25.46 (4.58)	0.41	101	.68
PSS	18.69 (5.52)	19.28 (4.82)	-0.44	101	.66

The independent-samples *t* tests did not show statistically significant gender differences in either DER or perceived stress. DER scores were similar for males and females, $t(101) = 0.41$, $p = .68$. Perceived stress was also not significantly different, $t(101) = -0.44$, $p = .66$. Thus, the results do not support a gender-based difference in the two primary variables within this sample.

Table 4: One-Way ANOVA Comparing Digital Emotion Regulation Across Age Groups

Age group	n	DER M	SD
18–21	7	24.14	4.10
22–25	71	25.49	4.81
26–30	25	26.08	4.22

The one-way ANOVA indicated no statistically significant difference in DER across age groups, $F(2, 100) = 0.73$, $p =$

.49. Although the mean DER score was somewhat higher in the 26–30 group than in the younger groups, the observed differences were not statistically significant.

Table 5: One-Way ANOVA Comparing DER and PSS Across Daily Screen Time Categories

Screen time	n	DER M	DER SD	PSS M	PSS SD
<2 h	5	23.80	5.40	15.40	3.05
2–4 h	42	24.89	4.05	19.21	3.93
4–6 h	31	24.70	5.03	18.06	4.27
>6 h	25	28.03	4.15	21.28	6.54

Daily screen-time categories showed statistically significant differences for both outcomes. For DER, $F(3, 99) = 3.52$, $p = .018$. The more-than-six-hours group had the highest DER mean ($M = 28.03$, $SD = 4.15$). For perceived stress, $F(3, 99) = 3.24$, $p = .025$, with the more-than-six-hours group again showing the highest mean ($M = 21.28$, $SD = 6.54$). These findings indicate an association between daily screen-time category and both digital emotion regulation and perceived stress in the present sample.

Table 6: Pearson Correlation Between Digital Emotion Regulation and Perceived Stress

Variables	N	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
DER and PSS	103	.369	< .001

Pearson's correlation revealed a positive, statistically significant association between digital emotion regulation and perceived stress, $r = .369$, $p < .001$. Participants reporting greater use of digital strategies for emotion regulation also tended to report higher perceived stress. The magnitude of the correlation indicates a moderate positive association.

Table 7: Linear Regression Analysis Predicting Perceived Stress from Digital Emotion Regulation

Predictor	B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	R^2	F
Constant	9.124	2.52	—	3.621	< .001	.136	16.16
DER	0.394	0.098	0.369	4.02	< .001		

Simple linear regression showed that DER significantly predicted perceived stress, $B = 0.394$, $SE = 0.098$, $\beta = .369$, $t = 4.02$, $p < .001$. The model was statistically significant, $F(1, 101) = 16.16$, $p < .001$, and explained 13.6% of the variance in perceived stress ($R^2 = .136$). Because the study was cross-sectional, this predictive statistical relationship should not be interpreted as evidence that DER causes stress.

5. Discussion

The present study looked at emotion regulation and perceived stress among 103 young adults from India. The results show that people use devices to help with their feelings. The study found that higher scores on emotion regulation are linked to higher perceived stress. This pattern fits the idea that digital behaviour can do different mental jobs and its link, to well-being changes depending on how digital technology is used.

5.1 Levels of Digital Emotion Regulation and Perceived Stress

The moderate digital emotion regulation was the common category making up 69.90% of the people who took part. The moderate level of perceived stress was also the common at 78.64%. These results show that digital emotion regulation and perceived stress were experiences in the group rather than extreme problems that only affected a few people. This pattern matches the research that says young people often use smartphones and online tools as part of their daily emotional coping.

The fact that most people were, in the groups is important because it stops people from looking at digital technology in a negative way. Just because something is used a lot does not mean it is a problem. Instead, the reason why people use it should be thought about. A phone can help someone feel better relax, talk to others or show their feelings. The same action might not be helpful if it is used the same way every time or if it is the only way someone deals with stress.

5.2 Gender and Age

The study did not find a gender difference in DER or perceived stress. This means that among the people in this sample male participants and female participants reported similar levels. Still, we should be careful with this result because the sample was heavily skewed toward females with 87 females and 16 males. This skew weakens the confidence we can have in saying that gender equivalence applies to the broader young-adult population.

Likewise, DER did not differ significantly across the three age groups. The lack of an age-group effect means that within the 18-to-30 age range age might not be a key factor for DER in this sample. Yet the youngest age group had seven participants so we need future studies, with more evenly spread age groups before we can say that developmental age is unimportant.

5.3 Screen Time and Psychological Variables

A significant difference was found across screen-time categories for both DER and perceived stress. Participants who reported than six hours of daily screen use had the highest mean DER and PSS scores. This pattern suggests that people who spend a lot of time on devices might also use those devices more often to manage their emotions. It also points to the possibility that higher screen time could be linked to stress levels.

Still screen time by itself does not explain the psychological meaning behind digital behaviour. The current study relied on self-reported screen-time categories. It did not separate the reasons people use screens- such as for school, work, socializing, entertainment or emotional coping. Because of this the differences seen between groups should not be taken as proof that longer screen time causes stress. It is just as likely that people who feel stressed turn to digital devices more often, as a way to cope.

5.4 DER and Perceived Stress

The primary findings demonstrate a positive link between DER and perceived stress with a correlation of .369 and a significance level below .001. The regression analysis also showed that DER explains 13.6 percent of the changes in perceived stress. These results back the study hypothesis that DER and perceived stress are strongly connected.

This relationship suggests that DER can serve as a relief for people who are already feeling stressed. People who feel stress may turn to digital environments for distraction, connection or emotional relief. On the hand constantly using DER might also mean that people are avoiding the real causes of their stress or are not using other healthy coping methods. Earlier studies about smartphone use and emotion regulation give a framework for both of these ideas (Elwood & Stewart 2021; Glaser et al. 2018).

Given the cross-sectional design of this study, temporal precedence cannot be established which comes first. It could be that higher stress leads people to use DER or that using DER might raise stress through other ways or that both are affected by extra factors such as loneliness, sleep, coping style, social support, academic demands or job stress. To figure out the timing and direction studies that follow people over time or sample experiences, in life would be better.

6. Implications

The findings may change how we think about psychology, counselling, education and digital-health research. When we assess a person asking about behaviour can help us see how young adults deal with distress. Incorporating digital usage queries during clinical intakes can clarify a client's broader coping architecture. Doctors and counsellors might ask if clients use technology as a flexible tool or if they rely on it as the main way to dodge tough feelings.

Psychoeducation can focus on emotion-regulation skills instead of telling people to stay away from digital devices all the time. Young adults can learn to spot triggers choose coping responses on purpose keep offline friendships and use digital tools that help instead of replace larger coping resources. Schools and colleges can also promote well-being and help people see how screen habits mix with stress and everyday life.

The study also points to research, on interventions. Programs could look at whether teaching coping strategies, mindfulness, problem-solving, emotional awareness or set digital-use habits changes how digital emotion regulation relates to stress. These programs would need careful long-term study before we could say they work.

7. Limitations and Future Directions

- The study design is cross-sectional which means it cannot show cause and effect or the order in which things happen.
- The sample was chosen based on convenience, which makes it harder to apply the findings to people outside the study.
- The group had women, which created a gender imbalance.

- How much time people spent on devices was reported by them and could be inaccurate because of memory or guessing.
- The study did not look at digital platforms or separate the reasons for using them like school, work, fun or emotional needs.
- Perceived stress might be affected by factors that were not measured or controlled in this study.

Future research should get more varied groups of people including a better mix of genders and ages. Long-term studies or ones that track people over time could help find out if stress changes come before changes in how people use tools to manage emotions or the other way around. Using ways to measure digital use could help with the self-reported screen time. Researchers could also look at methods like distracting oneself getting support, from others relaxing or expressing feelings and see how each of these methods affects stress, happiness, sleep, loneliness and coping.

8. Conclusion

The present study evaluated digital emotion regulation and perceived stress in young adults and found moderate levels of both digital emotion regulation and perceived stress in the sample. Digital emotion regulation was linked to perceived stress and regression analysis showed that DER explained 13.6 percent of the variance in perceived stress. Significant differences were found across screen-time categories for both digital emotion regulation and PSS but gender differences and age-group differences, in digital emotion regulation were not statistically significant. Overall, the findings show the importance of looking at the purpose of digital technology use rather than treating screen time as a full measure of psychological functioning. Digital devices can provide emotional and social functions but relying more on digital regulation may also happen together with higher perceived stress. The findings should be understood within the limits of the sample, and the design and future longitudinal research is needed to clarify the mechanisms behind this association.

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