

Research Paper

The Relationship between Test Anxiety and Digital Disturbance among College Students

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ABSTRACT

Test anxiety is a psychological phenomenon that many students experience during their college days. This anxiety has the potential to impair students' academic performance. In addition, smartphones and digital devices have become an essential part of modern students' lives. This has also given birth to various digital disturbances. These disturbances have the potential to impair students' academic performance. This has the potential to increase students' anxiety levels during examinations. The main objective of the present study is to explore the relationship between digital disturbance and test anxiety among college students. The study is based on exploring how digital disturbances, such as excessive use of smartphones, impact students' levels of anxiety during examinations. The data for the study were collected from 288 students of various colleges in Chennai. The analysis is done by using descriptive statistics, t-test and ANOVA. The data collection methods employed for the study were direct data collection using purposive sampling. The test anxiety of the students was measured by the Westside Test Anxiety Scale, while the digital disturbance caused by the use of smartphones was measured by the Smartphone Addiction Scale – Short Version. The results of the study are expected to provide a better understanding of the role of digital disturbances on the test anxiety of students. The results of the study would be useful to educators, psychologists, and other stakeholders to reduce digital distractions and improve the academic well-being of students.

Keywords: *Test Anxiety, Digital Disturbance, Smartphone, Examinations, College Students, Academic performance*

Education is a crucial factor for the personal and intellectual development of an individual. In the contemporary academic world, college-going students are exposed to a variety of academic demands like exams, assignments, presentations, etc. These academic demands often pose a psychological challenge to the academic world of the students. One of the most common forms anxieties for the students is test anxiety. Test anxiety can be defined as the feeling of tension, worry, or fear that the students often experience before or during the exams. These test anxieties often affect the academic performance of the students. In the recent past, the rapid evolution of digital technology has

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profoundly affected the academic world of the students. Smartphones, social media sites, online entertainment etc., have become an integral part of the academic world of the students. Though the evolution of digital technology has many positive effects on the academic world of the students, the uncontrolled usage of the technology often creates a negative effect on the academic world of the students. Digital disturbance can be defined as the interruptions or disturbances caused by the usage of the digital technology by the students. In the case of students, digital disturbances have been on the rise, especially during study time. This has been caused by the use of digital devices, which may distract students, thereby reducing their attention span. Digital disturbances may lead to an increase in the level of test anxieties among students. Studies indicate that excessive use of digital devices may lead to a high level of psychological stress and anxieties among students. This is due to the fact that students may be easily distracted by the use of digital devices, thereby being unable to concentrate during their study time. As a result, this may lead to an increase in the level of test anxieties among students. It is also important to comprehend the relationship between test anxiety and digital disturbance in this modern digital world. Examining the relationship between digital disturbances and anxiety levels of students during tests may help in designing strategies to ensure healthy digital habits among students. Consequently, the aim of this study is to explore the relationship between test anxiety and digital disturbance among college students. It is believed that this study may help in designing strategies to ensure healthy digital habits among students in order to reduce test anxiety and improve their academic performance.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

State-Trait Anxiety Theory

According to the State-Trait Anxiety Theory developed by Charles D. Spielberger, anxiety is composed of two unique aspects or components: state anxiety and trait anxiety. State anxiety is an emotional state or feeling that is evoked by certain situations or conditions, such as examinations, characterized by feelings of tension, nervousness, and worry. On the other hand, trait anxiety is a personality trait or feature that makes an individual perceive a broad array of situations as threatening. In relation to test anxiety in college students, this theory is useful in understanding individual differences in experiencing anxiety. Some people may only experience anxiety in situations such as examinations or tests, while others may have a consistent or underlying feature or tendency to be anxious in any situation. This is the situation-specific aspect of general anxiety. According to this theory, students who have high trait anxiety are likely to experience high state anxiety in examination situations. This is likely to have a negative impact on their concentration and memory abilities. Thus, individual differences in anxiety levels play an important role in understanding how students respond to certain situations.

Technostress theory

The theory of technostress, as proposed by Craig Brod, explains the stress experienced by an individual as a result of the use of information and communication technologies. The technostress experienced by an individual occurs when the individual finds it hard to cope with the demands of the use of information and communication technologies. The technostress experienced by an individual may also result from the constant use of information and communication technologies and the pressure experienced by the individual as a result of the constant use of the same. The use of information and communication technologies by students may also result in technostress and in disturbances. The disturbances may result in the students finding it hard to focus and study.

Why these theories are important?

The research is based on the State-Trait Anxiety Theory and the Technostress Theory. The State-Trait Anxiety Theory describes the impact of personality traits and the situation on the emotions of students during examinations. These factors play an important role in the academic performance of students. Students' perception of academic pressure is the result of these factors. The Technostress Theory also explains the impact of the use of digital technology as a factor for stress among students. The use of excessive smartphone technology creates disturbances for students and increases the level of stress. The theories are important for the analysis of the impact of digital disturbance and test anxiety among students. The State-Trait Anxiety Theory explains the impact of personality traits and the situation. On the other hand, the Technostress Theory explains the impact of the use of technology. In the context of modern education, the use of technology is unavoidable. The theories are important for the analysis of the impact of the psychological factors of students and the impact of the use of technology.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Review of Literature Related to Test Anxiety:

Almutairi (2024) conducted a study to examine the prevalence and determinants of test anxiety among medical students. The study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design and was carried out among 222 medical students from the Unaizah college of medicine using convenience sampling. Validated tools for measuring test anxiety were used to assess anxiety levels and associated socio-demographic factors. The main objective of the study was to determine the rate of test anxiety and the key demographic predictors influencing it, such as gender, social support, and living situation. The findings revealed that nearly one-third of the students experienced moderate levels of test anxiety, indicating that test-related stress is a significant concern among medical trainees. Furthermore, female students, individuals with lower social support, and those living away from family were found to have higher odds of experiencing test anxiety, as identified through descriptive statistics and logistic regression analysis. The study concluded that social and demographic factors play a considerable role in shaping students' anxiety levels, highlighting the need for institutional interventions to support vulnerable groups.

Jirjees, F., Odeh, M., Al-Haddad, A., Ass'ad, R., Hassanin, Y., Al-Obaidi, H., Kharaba, Z., Alfoteih, Y. & Alzoubi, K. H. (2024) conducted an exploratory study titled "test anxiety and coping strategies among university students in the UAE" to investigate the prevalence of test anxiety and the coping mechanisms used by students during examination periods. The study surveyed 925 university students from 14 colleges across a major UAE university, including both undergraduate and postgraduate learners. The majority of the participants were female (82.9%). The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, utilizing a structured, self-administered online questionnaire. The major objectives were to identify the demographic and academic factors associated with test anxiety and to examine the coping strategies students employ to manage exam-related stress. Data analysis included descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages), along with inferential analyses using chi-square tests and Cramer's V to determine the strength of associations. Post hoc analysis using adjusted standardized residuals (ASR) helped identify specific categories contributing to significant relationships younger students (below 20 years), female students, those in their early years of study, and students with lower cumulative GPAs (cGPA) exhibited significantly higher levels of test anxiety. Overall, the study highlights the multifaceted nature of test anxiety among university students in the

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UAE and emphasizes the importance of effective, healthy coping strategies to reduce exam-related stress.

Rajendran V. G., Jayalalitha S. & Adalarasu K. (2022) conducted a study titled “EEG based evaluation of examination stress and test anxiety among college students” to scientifically assess the cognitive stress experienced by students during examinations. This study employed EEG (electroencephalography) biomarkers to measure changes in brain activity associated with test anxiety. The sample consisted of 14 college students aged between 17 and 21 years from south India, and the experiment was carried out at Sastra Deemed University, Kumbakonam. The study adopted a quantitative research design, using EEG recordings obtained through an 8-channel wireless EEG system. Statistical comparisons were performed at a significance level of $p < 0.05$. The findings revealed a significant decrease in alpha, beta, and theta band energies after the examination, indicating reduced stress and anxiety levels. Gender comparisons further indicated that male students exhibited higher theta activity before the exam, signifying greater pre-exam stress compared to female students. After the exam, males showed lower heart rate index values, suggesting better stress recovery. Overall, the study highlights that EEG biomarkers offer an objective and reliable method for assessing test anxiety, and confirmed that examination stress is significantly elevated before the exam than after. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on psychophysiological assessment of academic stress in Indian college students.

Pagaria, N. (2020) examined a study titled “Exam Anxiety in College Students” with the aim of examining the prevalence of test anxiety among undergraduate learners and determining gender differences in their anxiety levels. The study included a sample of 120 college students (60 males and 60 females) aged between 18 and 21 years. A quantitative research design was used, and data were collected through a standardized test anxiety scale. The primary objectives of this study were to assess the extent of test anxiety among students and to compare the anxiety levels between male and female college students. The study hypothesized that a significant difference would exist between the two groups. The findings revealed an overall mean test anxiety score of 28.18 (SD = 7.65) among the participants. Female students recorded higher test anxiety (M = 29.68, SD = 6.61) compared to male students (M = 26.68, SD = 8.35). The statistical analysis indicated a significant gender difference ($t = 1.98, p = 0.03$), supporting the stated hypothesis. Thus, the study concluded that female students experience significantly higher levels of exam anxiety than their male counterparts.

Review of Literature Related to Digital Disturbance

Lee, Cho & King (2025) published an editorial titled "Addictive Disorders and Digital Medicine: Technology-Based Solutions for Addictive Disorders" in *Frontiers in Psychiatry* to provide an overview of emerging digital interventions being used to address addictive behaviours and associated mental health issues. The article synthesizes contributions from multiple studies within a research topic focused on how digital tools such as mobile applications, blended therapies, artificial intelligence driven platforms, and wearable technologies are reshaping addiction treatment and mental health care delivery. It highlights key domains in digital psychiatry, including the scalability of mobile app interventions, the integration of digital Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) with traditional face-to-face approaches, and the application of AI for adaptive and personalized therapeutic support. By summarizing research trends and technological applications across addictive and mental health contexts, the article underscores the growing importance of digital interventions in

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addressing behavioural and psychological challenges associated with increased technology use. Such insights are useful for understanding how digital solutions may influence not only addiction but also related areas such as sleep quality, anxiety, and student mental health in the digital era.

Maberah, Alrosan, Alaboud & Alabdalhaq (2025) conducted a study titled “Digital Anxiety and Sleep Disorders: The Predictive Role of Cyberchondria among University Students in Jordan” to examine the contribution of cyberchondria (digital anxiety) to sleep disorders among university students. Using a descriptive predictive research design with a sample of 506 students, the study found that students reported high levels of cyberchondria and varying degrees of sleep disturbance. Multiple linear regression analysis revealed a negative and statistically significant relationship between cyberchondria and sleep disorders, indicating that higher levels of digital anxiety were associated with greater sleep problems. The results highlight how excessive online Health-related searching and digital anxiety can disrupt normal sleep patterns among university populations, thereby emphasizing the emerging psychosocial impacts of digital technology usage. The authors suggest that educational and mental health programs should address cyberchondria and promote healthier digital practices to support better sleep quality and psychological well-being among students.

Kumar, Rangappa, Suchitra & Gowda (2024) conducted a questionnaire-based study among pre-university and university students in India to examine how digital media distractions during blended learning affect students’ overall development including academic performance, mental and physical health, outlook on life and future, while also considering the moderating roles of institutional counselling and students’ spiritual inclination. Their PLS-SEM analysis revealed that although greater internet use increased both e-learning engagement and digital distractions, the level of distraction was significantly higher than effective e-learning, indicating that students were more prone to “e-distractions” than productive e-learning. The study further found that digital distractions had strong negative repercussions on students’ mental health including anxiety, nervousness, lack of focus, irritability and physical health issues negatively influenced their academic performance and perception of their future life. Notably, the availability of institutional counselling and students’ spiritual inclination did not significantly mitigate these negative outcomes, suggesting that simple counselling support may not be sufficient to counteract the harms of digital distractions in blended-learning contexts. The authors argue that while blended learning and digital platforms offer flexibility and access, without proper management of digital distractions, they can undermine holistic student development academically, psychologically, and physically.

Pandey, Lelisho, Hasan & Mesfin (2023) conducted a study titled “Factors Associated with Sleep Disorders Among Indian and Ethiopian Students in the Digital World in the Midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic” to investigate the prevalence and determinants of sleep problems among university students from India and Ethiopia during the COVID-19 pandemic. This cross-sectional, internet-based survey included 443 students and assessed sleep quality using tools such as the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index while also examining key psychosocial variables like anxiety, depression, and pandemic-related stress. Results revealed that more than half of the students experienced significant sleep disturbances, and factors such as female gender, smoking, prolonged quarantine, having a family member with COVID-19, and elevated psychological distress (anxiety, stress, and depression) were significantly associated with poor sleep quality. These findings underscore how the

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interaction between COVID-19-related fears, mental health stressors, and increased digital engagement may contribute to sleep disturbances in student populations. The study highlights the negative effects of extended digital technology use particularly exacerbated by remote learning, social isolation, and pandemic pressures on students' sleep health and overall well-being. It suggests that targeted interventions focusing on mental health support, sleep hygiene education, and balanced digital practices are essential to mitigate sleep problems and support academic functioning among young adults in an increasingly digital world.

Research Gap

Despite extensive research conducted on test anxiety and digital disturbance individually, very few research studies have explored the relationship between these two variables in college students. However, very few research studies, particularly in the context of India, have explored the relationship between digital disturbance and its direct contribution or interaction with test anxiety. The research studies conducted recently (2019-2025) have mainly explored digital stress and anxiety individually, but none have explored both variables together. Additionally, very few intervention studies have explored test anxiety, and none have explored digital behaviour regulation as a factor that contributes to or affects test anxiety. This reflects a conceptual, contextual, and research gap in the existing research literature. The current research study has attempted to bridge the gap in the existing research literature by exploring the relationship between test anxiety and digital disturbance in college students.

Need and Significance of the Study

In the contemporary digital age, college students are exposed to digital devices like smartphones, laptops, and social media. Though these digital devices are beneficial for learning and communicating, overexposure to them may result in digital disturbance. For instance, digital disturbance may include constant notifications from digital devices, distractions from social media usage, and difficulties in concentrating on learning activities. This may affect the students' focus, study habits, and academic performance. Test anxiety is another psychological problem that most college students encounter. It is a feeling of anxiety that occurs before or during a test or examination. It is a major psychological problem that affects most college students. Excessive test anxiety may lower the students' confidence level, affect their focus, and affect their performance. Therefore, the investigator felt that the need of this study entitled, "The relationship between test anxiety and digital disturbance among college students."

Objectives And Hypotheses

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the level of Test Anxiety among college students.
2. To study the level of Digital Disturbance among college students.
3. To find out whether there is any significant difference in Test Anxiety and Digital Disturbance with respect to:
 - i. -Gender
 - ii. -Age
4. To find out whether there is any significant relationship between Test Anxiety and Digital Disturbance among College Students.

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Hypotheses of the Study

1. There is a significant difference in Test Anxiety and Digital Disturbance with respect to:
 - i. -Gender
 - ii. -Age
2. There is a significant relationship between Test Anxiety and Digital Disturbance among College Students.

METHODOLOGY

Research Method

The researcher used a quantitative correlational research approach in the current study.

Sample

The participants of the study were students from various Government, Government Aided, and Private colleges in Chennai. The sample size of the research was 288 students. The samples were collected through the Purposive Sampling method. The data was collected on a voluntary basis, and the participants were asked to provide their consent before the data was collected.

Tools Used in the Study

The instruments used in the present study are discussed below:

- Westside Test Anxiety Scale developed by Richard Driscoll (2004).
- Smartphone Addiction Scale – Short Version (SAS-SV) developed by Kwon Min-Kyu and colleagues (2013).

Scoring Procedure

The Westside Test Anxiety Scale, created by Richard Driscoll (2004), has 10 items that are used to measure the level of test anxiety among students. The items measure the students' worry, fear, and performance impairment during the test period. Each item is scored using a Likert scale consisting of 5 points, ranging from 1, "Not at all true," to 5, "Extremely true." The maximum score of the scale would be 50 and minimum score would be 10. The total score is obtained by finding the average of the total items, where a high score implies a high level of test anxiety among students.

The Smartphone Addiction Scale – Short Version (SAS-SV), created by Kwon Min-Kyu et al. (2013), has 10 items used to measure the level of smartphone addiction. The items are scored based on a Likert scale with a total of 6 points, ranging from 1, "Strongly disagree," to 6, "Strongly agree." The maximum score of the scale would be 60 and minimum score would be 10. The total score is obtained by adding the total responses of the items, where a high score implies a high level of smartphone addiction.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

The data collected was processed and analysed with the help of suitable statistical analysis and interpretation of the study. The statistical tests used to analyse the data and test the hypotheses are one-way ANOVA, correlation, t-test of students, and measures of central tendency.

Testing of Objectives and Hypotheses

Objective 1: To study the level of Test Anxiety among college students.

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Table 1: Level of Test Anxiety among college students

Variable	N	Maximum Score	Mean	Standard Deviation	Percentage
Test Anxiety	288	42	27.77	5.900	66.11%

The mean and standard deviation of the level of test anxiety among college students are shown in Table 1. The maximum possible score in the test anxiety scale is 42. The mean score for test anxiety among college students is 27.77, and the percentage is 66.11%. Hence, from the mean score and its percentage, it is clear that college students have a moderate level of test anxiety.

Objective 2: To study the level of Digital Disturbance among college students.

Table 2: Level of Digital Disturbance among college students

Variable	N	Maximum Score	Mean	Standard Deviation	Percentage
Digital Disturbance	288	92	66.10	10.589	71.84%

The mean and standard deviation of the level of digital disturbance among college students are shown in the Table 2. Maximum possible score for digital disturbance scale is 92. The mean for digital disturbance among the students is 66.10, and the percentage is 71.84%. Hence, from the mean score and its percentage, it is clear that college students have a moderate level of digital disturbance.

Hypothesis 1(a): There is a significant difference in Test Anxiety and Digital Disturbance with respect to Gender

Table 3: Showing significant difference between test anxiety and digital disturbance among college students with respect to Gender.

Sl. No.	Variables	Gender	N	Mean	Sd	'T' Value	Significance
1	Test Anxiety Total Score	Male	118	26.94	5.98	1.991	0.05 Significant
		Female	170	28.34	5.79		
2	Digital Disturbance Total Score	Male	118	65.00	10.703	1.468	Not Significant
		Female	170	66.87	10.468		

Table 3 shows that the 't' value for test anxiety and digital disturbance for college students based on gender. The calculated t value of test anxiety is 1.991, which is significant at 0.05 levels. It can be concluded that there is a significant difference between male and female college students regarding test anxiety. From the mean value, it is clear that female college students have more test anxiety level than male college students. Because, females are likely to feel anxiety at a higher level than males due to various biological, psychological, and social factors. Females may feel anxiety due to hormonal changes, as oestrogen and progesterone hormones influence their moods and anxiety levels. Sometimes they may feel pressure from their gender and may feel unsafe, leading to anxiety. They feel anxiety at a higher level as they are open with their emotions.

As far as digital disturbance, the calculated value of t is 1.468, which is not significant. It can be concluded that there is no significant difference between male and female college students regarding digital disturbance.

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Hypothesis 1(b): There is a significant difference in the test anxiety and digital disturbance among college students with respects to Age

Table 4: Showing significant difference in the Test Anxiety and Digital Disturbance among college students with respect to Age

Sl.NO.	VARIABLES	SOURCE	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Significance
1	Test Anxiety	Between Groups	495.730	2	247.865	7.439	0.01 Significant
		Within Groups	9495.683	285	33.318		
		Total	9991.413	287			
2	Digital Disturbance	Between Groups	2553.674	2	1276.837	12.289	0.01 Significant
		Within Groups	29611.201	285	103.899		
		Total	32164.875	287			

From the table 4 that the calculated ‘F’ values (7.439 & 12.289) are significant at 0.01 level of significance. Hence, it can be concluded that there exists a significant difference among college students based on their age groups (18-20 years, 21-23 years, and 24-25 years) with respect to test anxiety and digital disturbance. From the mean value, it shows that the age group of (18-20) years has more test anxiety than the age group of (21-23) years and (24-25) years. From the mean value, it shows that the age group of (18-20) years has more digital disturbance than the age group of (21-23) years and (24-25) years. Hence, the formulated hypothesis that “There exists a significant difference in the test anxiety and digital disturbance amongst college students with respect to age” is accepted.

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant relationship between the Test Anxiety and Digital Disturbance among college students

Table 5: Showing Correlation Coefficient Values for Test Anxiety and Digital Disturbance

Variables	Correlation Coefficient	Significance
Test Anxiety and Digital Disturbance	0.715	0.01 Significance

From the table 5, it is inferred that the value of correlation between Test Anxiety and Digital Disturbance is 0.715. The correlation between these two variables is positive and significant. Therefore, it is found that there is significant positive relationship between Test Anxiety and Digital Disturbance, and hence, the formulated hypothesis is accepted.

Education Implications

- The research can help higher learning institutions understand the role digital disturbance plays in test anxiety among college students.
- The research can help educators and administrators develop effective ways to mitigate digital distractions and test anxiety in academic settings.
- The research can be used to develop awareness programs to help students deal with digital disturbance and test anxiety.
- The research can help learning institutions develop policies to help students deal with digital disturbance and test anxiety.

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- The research can be used to help students become effective in their academic professional endeavours by reducing the impact of digital disturbance and test anxiety.

Recommendations

- Colleges need to provide awareness programs and workshops for students to understand test anxiety and how it could be managed in an effective manner.
- There is also a need for institutions to provide guidance for the management of digital disturbance, such as controlling excessive use of smartphones and other distractions during study time.
- Teachers need to promote healthy study habits among students by advocating the use of structured study time and avoiding unnecessary digital disturbances during academic time.
- Students need to keep training in time management and stress management skills to cope with academic and digital disturbances.
- Educational institutions should monitor and evaluate students' usage and consumption of digital media and devices and their levels of anxiety to provide support to those in need.

Suggestions

- Future studies can include larger and more diverse sample.
- Researchers may examine additional psychological variables such as self-esteem, sleep quality, attention span, and emotional regulation to gain deeper insights into test anxiety.
- Comparative studies can be conducted to explore gender difference or difference between academic streams in digital disturbance and test anxiety.
- Future research may use qualitative methods like interviews or focus groups to better understand students' personal experience with digital disturbance during exam periods.
- Researches can explore the impact of specific digital factors such as social media usage, online gaming, and notification frequency on students' anxiety level.

CONCLUSION

However, it is important to understand the various factors that affect the academic performance and psychological well-being of students, especially with the increasing exposure to digital media. One factor that has been observed as affecting the academic performance of students is test anxiety. On the other hand, digital disturbance has been noted as an important factor affecting the academic performance of students. The relationship between test anxiety and digital disturbance among college students offers an important insight into the impact of excessive exposure to digital media and its contribution to the levels of test anxiety among students. The academic performance of students can be improved by recognizing the relationship between test anxiety and digital disturbance. The academic performance of students is closely associated with the levels of test anxiety and the impact of digital disturbance. By recognizing the relationship between test anxiety and digital disturbance, academic institutions can take appropriate measures to improve the academic environment for students. This will help in the improvement of the academic performance of students by controlling test anxiety and digital disturbance.

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Conflict of Interest

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