The International Journal of Indian Psychology
ISSN 2348-5396 (Online) | ISSN: 2349-3429 (Print)
Volume 14, Issue 4, October- December, 2026
DIP: 18.01.053.20261404, DOI: 10.25215/1404.053
https://www.ijip.in

Research Paper

Smartphone Dependency and Coping Strategies: A Correlation Study

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ABSTRACT

In today's digital age, smartphones have become an inseparable part of everyday life, especially for young adults. From staying connected with friends and family to attending classes, working, and seeking entertainment, smartphones play a central role in daily routines. While these devices offer convenience and constant connectivity, their excessive use has increasingly become a matter of concern. Smartphone dependency can be defined using DSM criteria, where an individual a) Is preoccupied with the smartphone, b) Needs to use the smartphone with increased amounts of time in order to achieve satisfaction, c) Has made unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop smartphone use, d) Is restless, moody, depressed, or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop smartphone use. For many of us, we don't even realise when simple phone use slowly turns into addiction. Often, we turn to our phones not out of boredom, but to cope. Coping is the ability to mobilise cognitive, emotional and behavioural methods to deal with problems and manage the internal and external demands of stressful situations (Hamby et al.,2015). The present study aimed to discern the correlation between Smartphone dependency and coping strategies among young adults. Data were collected from 120 participants belonging to the age group of 18-25 years from the Delhi NCR region using purposive sampling. Measures included the Mobile Phone Problem Use Scale-10 (MPPUS10) (Foerster et al., 2015), which is a shorter version of the original MPPUS-27 (Bianchi and Phillips, 2005) and the Coping Scale (Hamby et al., 2013). Data was analysed using descriptive statistics, and Pearson's correlation coefficient was computed. Results indicated a statistically significant positive correlation between smartphone dependency and coping strategies ($r = .22$, $p = .016$). The relationship between smartphone dependency and both emotion-focused and problem-focused coping was also examined. Future research may include more diverse samples and investigate additional psychological variables, such as stress and anxiety, to better understand their role in shaping coping strategies. Further studies may also explore coping mechanisms such as emotion regulation, social support seeking, and distraction as ways individuals manage stress and psychological challenges.

Keywords: *Smartphone Dependency, Coping Strategies, Young Adults, Problem-Focused, Emotion-Focused*

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Received: September 23, 2026; Revision Received: November 02, 2026; Accepted: November 08, 2026

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Due to the rapid advancement in digital technology, smartphones have transformed from merely being gadgets that facilitate communication into tools that play a vital role in our day-to-day activities. Nowadays, smartphones have become indispensable in the lives of many people. They help us wake up using the alarms set on them, keep in touch with friends, attend virtual classes, watch movies, and do other daily activities. Despite their numerous benefits, however, the use of smartphones has triggered issues such as smartphone dependency, among others. Smartphone dependency refers to the excessive use of smartphones by individuals to such an extent that it starts interfering with their daily activities, academic progress, relationships, and even personal health.

The issue has become more common, especially among the younger generation and teens, because most of the individuals using smartphones are young people. Access to social media, gaming, texting, and many other activities that involve frequent interaction through the use of a smartphone has made it more challenging for someone to control their use of the smartphone. At times, one feels like using the smartphone despite not having anything important to do with it. This may cause various issues, including inability to concentrate, insomnia, and panic attacks. There are several factors that cause someone to be addicted to using his or her phone. One may choose to use his or her phone to relieve boredom, loneliness, or stress, or avoid feeling left out of social gatherings. Frequent notifications and updates will contribute to this problem and make it more challenging for the user to control his or her use. As one continues to use his or her phone, one may start spending less time with others.

In this respect, coping strategies play an integral role in aiding individuals in moderating their use of smartphones. Coping strategies involve techniques that people apply to address emotional issues, stressful situations, and other challenges in their everyday activities. Healthy coping mechanisms such as proper time management, screen time restrictions, meditation, engaging in recreational activities, and spending quality time with family and friends can aid individuals in minimising overuse of their smartphones. Such techniques not only assist in managing smartphone addiction but also contribute to improved psychological well-being and lifestyles. Consequently, there is a need for an adequate understanding of smartphone addiction and the coping strategies adopted by individuals in regulating it. This study seeks to investigate the association between smartphone addiction and coping strategies employed by individuals.

Objectives

1. To assess the level of smartphone dependency among young adults.
2. To identify the frequently used coping strategies (emotion-focused, problem-focused) among young adults.
3. To analyse the relationship between Smartphone dependency and coping strategies among young adults.

METHODOLOGY

Aim: The present study aimed to examine the correlation between Smartphone dependency and coping strategies among young adults.

Sample

A sample of 120 literate participants belonging to the age group of 18-25 years from the Delhi-NCR region was chosen. Purposive sampling was used because it enabled the targeted selection of individuals relevant to the study objectives.

Tools

1. **Mobile Phone Problem Use Scale-10 (MPPUS10)**: It was developed by Foerster et al. (2015) for measuring problematic mobile phone use and is a shortened version of the MPPUS-27 developed by Bianchi and Phillips (2005). The instrument comprises 10 items that evaluate mobile phone addiction among individuals through five factors: lack of control, withdrawal, consequences in one's life, craving, and peer dependence. The reliability of the shortened version is rather high and satisfactory, with Cronbach's Alpha of 0.85. Besides, the scale had good validity, especially convergent and construct validity, because it retained an extremely close connection with the original 27-item scale (r=0.90).
2. **Coping Scale:** It was developed by Hamby et al. (2015) and was employed to assess coping strategies. It measures approaches to coping that are either cognitive, emotional, or behavioural in nature. It is composed of 13 statements that are grouped into two factors, problem-focused (items 1, 3, 4, 6, 11, 12, and 13) and emotion-focused (items 2, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 10). Another good characteristic of this measure is its reliability, wherein its internal consistency was found to be 0.91. The scale demonstrated strong convergent validity, correlating significantly with regulatory strengths (Anger Management, r = .57; Endurance, r = .63).

Procedure

In order to make sure that everyone would be able to participate, the research was conducted using Google Forms. Before completing the survey forms, the respondents were informed of their right to participate voluntarily, as well as the confidentiality of the answers.

RESULT

The collected data were analysed using Jamovi version 2.6, employing Pearson's coefficient of correlation to examine the relationship between Smartphone dependency and coping strategies.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of smartphone dependency and Coping Scale (Two dimensions: emotion-focused and problem-focused)

	Dimensions	n	M	SD
1.	Smartphone dependency	120	4.86	1.45
2.	Coping strategies	120	2.54	0.497
3.	Emotion-focused	120	2.35	0.614
4.	Problem-focused	120	2.71	0.544

Table 1 indicates moderate levels of smartphone dependency and coping styles among participants, with emotion-focused coping more prominent than problem-focused coping. Participants showed significantly high smartphone dependence, with people reaching for their phones much more often.

Table 2 Correlations for Study Variables

	Variables	1	2	3	4
1.	Smartphone dependency	-			
2.	Coping strategies	.203	-		
3.	Emotion-focused	.220		-	
4.	Problem-focused	0.125			-

****p<.001*

Table 2 indicates that coping strategies show a weak positive correlation with smartphone dependency, meaning higher coping efforts are linked to slightly more smartphone use. Among the other sub-variables, emotion-focused coping showed a stronger positive correlation, implying that individuals who rely on emotional regulation may be more oriented toward smartphone use, potentially as a means of managing emotional distress or daily hassles of life. In contrast, problem-focused coping demonstrates a weaker relationship, indicating that more task-oriented coping approaches are less likely to be linked to smartphone dependency.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the relationship between smartphone dependency and coping strategies among young adults and found a weak positive correlation between the two variables. The results reveal a weak positive correlation between smartphone dependency and coping strategies ($r = .203$, $p < .001$), with emotion-focused coping demonstrating a slightly higher correlation ($r = .220$) than problem-focused coping ($r = .125$). This further suggests that individuals use their smartphones more to cope with emotional distress and daily hassles than for proactive problem-solving.

These results correspond to the results of earlier studies concerning smartphone dependence and coping styles. Thus, Elhai et al. (2017) reported that a common strategy to deal with anxiety or stress among young people was to distract oneself or even hide behind one's phone. It could provide an immediate relief and, therefore, be seen as such. It corresponds to a strong relationship between smartphone dependency and emotion-focused coping in our study and indicates that it is the type of coping more likely to be adopted. At the same time, Busch & McCarthy (2021) have demonstrated that there might be a weak association between smartphone usage and problem-focused coping because young people would rather engage in passive browsing than attempt to solve their problems actively. As mentioned before, the same idea can be supported by the recent findings of Foerster et al. (2015), who have shown that emotional symptoms of MPPUS-10 cause people to turn to device-dependent coping.

Overall, the relationship between smartphone dependency and emotion-focused coping is established. The results presented above coincide with other studies related to smartphone dependency and coping mechanisms. Elhai et al. (2017) proved that smartphone addiction occurs when people turn to their gadgets for distraction or avoidance purposes, which brings some relief, at least temporarily. This finding matches the stronger association that we detected during our investigation, confirming the higher intensity of emotion-oriented coping strategy in this case.

On the other hand, Busch and McCarthy (2021) argued that extensive smartphone usage leads to a decrease in the frequency of problem-oriented coping, as users engage in passive browsing and ignore the need to address their problems directly. It supports our results of the weaker correlation between smartphone addiction and emotion-focused coping. Recently, the findings of Foerster et al. (2015) related to the MPPUS-10 questionnaire prove that withdrawal and cravings make people use devices for emotion regulation, which means that young adults tend to be dependent on smartphones and turn to them as a way to deal with stressful situations.

The stronger relation to emotion-focused coping implies the close connection between the use of smartphones and coping strategies of modern young people dealing with everyday

problems. In demonstrating the greater role of the discussed coping strategy, this research emphasises the necessity to come to terms with the presence of smartphones in our emotional lives. In other words, instead of trying to get rid of such an impact completely, we should try to establish healthier coping practices for a more effective use of technology in our everyday lives.

Implication

One aspect that is brought out clearly from the study is that most young adults may be utilising their smartphones to deal with their stress and problems that come their way. With the significant positive association between smartphone addiction and coping mechanisms, it becomes evident that while smartphones can help individuals get respite or a diversion from stress in the short-term, it may not necessarily be beneficial all the time. Unlike routine habits, smartphone addiction serves as an emotional safety net for navigating the stresses of life.

To start with, the significantly higher correlation with emotion focused coping when compared with problem focused coping points towards the fact that when the usage of smartphones exhibits DSM-related withdrawal symptoms like anxiety, irritability, restlessness, preoccupation with thoughts regarding smartphone, and distress when deprived of their smartphone, it indicates that most individuals are trying to relieve themselves of their emotional stress by seeking a quick distraction through their smartphone. To end this unhealthy vicious circle, young adults must go through psychological therapy such as CBT, which will precisely help them understand the factors which induce their smartphone use, such as stress, mood swings, and irritability.

Another intervention strategy can be for colleges and universities to create awareness regarding proper smartphone usage to educate learners about good practices for using smartphones and how to tell the difference between productive and addictive behaviors. Early identification through the utilization of methods such as MPPUS-10 is key, as it would allow for the identification of students who have a tendency towards smartphone addiction, which in turn ensures timely assistance. Workshops in problem-solving and emotion regulation skills would be helpful as it helps individuals to develop healthy coping skills and allow them to manage stress without resorting to their smartphones. Creating tech-free zones, such as libraries, in order to facilitate interactions and discussions away from technology would also go a long way towards fostering digital wellness. Mindfulness techniques could also prove beneficial since they enable people to better identify their desire to check on their smartphone while giving them some time to reflect instead of checking immediately out of habit.

Overall, the reduction of phone dependency and the use of other ways of dealing with stressful situations might aid this procedure to become successful and ensure that technology does not become a constraint but remains helpful. Early detection of these tendencies could prove beneficial in the lives of young individuals who could develop proper attention and psychological resilience. Further research in this area would make it possible to explore the psychological problems linked to stress and emotions.

CONCLUSION

In the present study, the aim was to explore the relationship between smartphone addiction and coping strategies. This study included a purposive sample of 120 individuals within the age range of 18 to 25 years old from the region of Delhi-NCR. The study employed the scale

measures, such as the Mobile Phone Problem Use Scale-10 (MPPUS10) (Foerster et al., 2015), where MPPUS-10 is an adaptation of the MPPUS-27, and the coping scale by Hamby et al. (2013). The data collection process in the current study was done using Google Forms only. There exists a weak but significant positive correlation between smartphone addiction and coping strategies, where emotion-focused coping was significantly more positively correlated.

These results imply that young adults are effectively dealing with stress using coping strategies; however, they are more likely to seek help from their phones for instant gratification instead of solving the problem at hand. Although there could not be any causation due to the correlational nature of the study, the results call for future research and intervention to address this matter to ensure a proper coping strategy is used for effective problem-solving.

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Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Singh, R., Khurana, K., & Goel, K. (2026). Smartphone Dependency and Coping Strategies: A Correlation Study. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, *14*(4)*,* 609-615. DIP:18.01.053.20261404, DOI:10.25215/1404.053