

Constant Online Connectivity, Emotional Intelligence, and Stress Levels among Young Adults

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between constant online connectivity, stress levels, and emotional quotient among young adults in Laguna, Philippines, and determined whether emotional quotient moderated the relationship between online connectivity and stress. Anchored on the Interaction of Person-Affect-Cognition-Execution model, the study used a quantitative research design with correlation and moderation analysis. Data were gathered from 90 young adults aged 18 to 24 years old through convenience sampling. The Online Vigilance Scale, Perceived Stress Scale, and Wong and Lay Emotional Intelligence Scale were used to measure constant online connectivity, stress, and emotional quotient, respectively. Results showed that respondents had moderate levels of online connectivity, stress, and emotional quotient. Constant online connectivity was significantly and positively related to stress levels, indicating that higher online engagement was associated with higher stress. The overall model was significant, but emotional quotient did not significantly predict stress and did not moderate the relationship between online connectivity and stress. The findings suggest that continuous online availability, social media expectations, prolonged screen exposure, and pressure to remain responsive contribute to digital stress among young adults. The study concludes that excessive and unmanaged online engagement may negatively affect psychological well-being, while emotional quotient alone may not be sufficient to reduce digital-related stress. The study recommends healthier online habits, stronger boundaries between online and offline activities, and further research on coping factors such as social support, lifestyle behaviors, digital self-control, coping strategies, and online boundary management. The study aligns with SDG 3, SDG 4, and SDG 9 by addressing mental health, learner well-being, and sustainable digital engagement. Its sustainability impact lies in supporting public health, educational, institutional, and digital well-being initiatives for young adults.

Keywords: Online Connectivity, Digital Stress, Emotional Quotient, Online Boundary Management, Psychological Well-Being, Stress Levels

1. Introduction

Constant online connectivity has become a defining feature of young adults' daily lives, shaping communication, relationships, identity, academic routines, and emotional experiences. While digital connection offers convenience and social access, continuous online presence may also expose young adults to digital stress, emotional fatigue, cognitive overload, social comparison, fear of missing out, and pressure to remain responsive. This study examines the relationship between constant online connectivity and stress levels among young adults in Biñan/Laguna, Philippines, and explores whether emotional quotient moderates this relationship.

For many young adults, being offline is no longer the usual condition. Smartphones, social media, and continuous internet access have made online presence a routine part of everyday life, blurring the separation between online and offline experiences. Young adults often manage friendships, communication, and self-presentation through digital spaces, making connectivity a continuous rather than occasional activity (Vanden Abeele et al., 2022). This constant connectivity can produce digital stress, especially when young adults feel expected to respond immediately, remain active online, and follow ongoing conversations (Vanden Abeele et al., 2022). Over time, such pressure may result in emotional exhaustion and experiences resembling digital burnout (Pedalino & Camerini, 2022). Excessive or difficult-to-manage internet and smartphone use has also been associated with stress, emotional exhaustion, and more serious mental health risks (Cheng et al., 2026). Young adulthood is a sensitive developmental stage involving emotional, cognitive, and social changes. Young adults may be especially responsive to peer evaluation, online validation, and relationship concerns. Social media may therefore intensify comparison, fear of missing out, and dependence on likes, comments, and online approval, which can heighten stress and emotional strain (Zhou & Cheng, 2022). Emotional intelligence may help young adults understand and regulate emotions during stressful online interactions, while lower EI may increase vulnerability to digital stress and

emotional difficulties (Chamizo-Nieto et al., 2021). The Interaction of Person-Affect-Cognition-Execution model further suggests that personal traits, including emotional intelligence, may shape online behavior and emotional outcomes (Piccerillo & Digennaro, 2024).

A major theme in the literature is that constant online connectivity is associated with increased stress among young adults. Continuous smartphone use and prolonged online engagement may create cognitive overload and emotional fatigue as young adults balance digital interaction with offline responsibilities (Yang et al., 2021). Digital stress also emerges from perceived pressure to remain responsive and socially active online, especially when young adults feel evaluated or obligated to reply immediately (Nick et al., 2022). Excessive social media use is further linked to stress through social comparison, fear of missing out, and exposure to peer feedback (Chen et al., 2023). Recent studies strengthen this pattern. Problematic internet use is associated with increased stress and emotional exhaustion (Dadi et al., 2024), while prolonged and uninterrupted online engagement is a significant predictor of stress, particularly when combined with academic and social pressures (Tang et al., 2024). In the Philippine setting, increased internet use among students has been linked to stress and psychological distress (Balberan & Bengwasan, 2024), while prolonged screen time and continuous online engagement contribute to mental fatigue and stress among students (Baticulon et al., 2021). Excessive social media use among Filipino young adults has also been associated with higher stress due to social comparison, online validation, and pressure to remain engaged (Cleofas, 2022). Another theme concerns emotional quotient or emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and use emotions effectively. It is increasingly viewed as a core competency related to mental health, leadership, learning, decision-making, resilience, and interpersonal relationships (Miao et al., 2021). Individuals with higher emotional intelligence tend to demonstrate better emotional regulation and adapt more effectively to stressful environments (Miao et al., 2021). Emotional intelligence has been associated with lower anxiety, depression, and stress (Bermejo-Martins et al., 2021), greater subjective well-being and life satisfaction (Sánchez-Álvarez et al., 2022), and protection against burnout and emotional exhaustion (Llevado et al., 2025). Among young adults, emotional intelligence predicts life satisfaction and psychological adjustment (Gomez-Baya et al., 2021), lower peer conflict, higher self-esteem, and stronger social relationships (Qualter et al., 2022). It is also negatively associated with cyberbullying involvement and emotional distress, making it relevant in digital environments (Chamizo-Nieto et al., 2021). Emotional intelligence helps individuals identify stress triggers, manage emotional responses, and maintain psychological balance (Matthews et al., 2017), while higher EI supports coping and resilience during crises (Keefer et al., 2023).

The literature also shows that constant connectivity, stress, and emotional intelligence are interconnected. Mobile connectivity may support social interaction but can also reduce digital well-being when stress and fear of missing out are high (Alotaibi, 2026). FoMO links smartphone use to psychological distress, sleep problems, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and academic stress (Alotaibi, 2026). High screen use has also been associated with emotional and behavioral problems, with evidence suggesting a bidirectional pattern in which screen use contributes to distress and distressed individuals use screens to cope (Noetel et al., 2024). Passive social media use may increase loneliness and stress, while digital interaction may fail to satisfy social needs met through face-to-face communication (Roberts et al., 2024). However, balanced digital use, self-control, and guidance may support better digital well-being and lower stress (Rosić et al., 2024). Digital stressors include connection overload, pressure to remain available, fear of missing out, and approval anxiety (Pew Research Center, 2018, as cited in De Groote & Van Ouytsel, 2022; Reinecke et al., 2018; Steele et al., 2020; Hall et al., 2021, as cited in De Groote & Van Ouytsel, 2022). Constant online presence is also linked to emotional fatigue, information overload, and social anxiety (Soraci et al., 2025; Yildiz et al., 2025). Digital burnout, or mental exhaustion from excessive social media exposure, has become a growing concern as young adults struggle to maintain boundaries between online and offline life (Sismondini, 2025). Emotional intelligence may buffer these stressors because it supports emotional perception, understanding, and regulation. Trait emotional intelligence refers to emotional self-perceptions that influence behavior and coping (Petrides and Furnham (2001). Higher emotional intelligence has been linked to better stress management, stronger relationships, and improved psychological well-being (Mavroveli et al., 2009; Nelis et al., 2011, as cited in Piccerillo & Digennaro, 2024). Low emotional intelligence may increase the risk of stress and maladaptive coping (Alshakhshi et al., 2022). At the same time, excessive reliance on digital communication may limit face-to-face interaction and weaken empathy, social awareness, and emotional regulation skills (Mérelle et al., 2017; Monacis et al., 2017, as cited in Pino & Mastromarino, 2023). Young adults who seek validation through digital approval may experience greater distress when online feedback becomes psychologically significant (Khan (2025). Still, balanced use of digital platforms may support emotional expression, social support, and relationship maintenance (Verma et al., 2023, as cited in Jin & Jiang, 2025).

Globally, research indicates that continuous digital engagement is associated with psychological strain, including stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and digital fatigue (Yang et al., 2021; Nick et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2023; Dadi et al., 2024; Tang et al., 2024). These findings reflect a wider concern that “always-on” digital environments may increase young adults’ exposure to information overload, social comparison, fear of missing out, and expectations of constant availability. Nationally, Philippine studies reflect similar concerns. Filipino students and young adults are highly active online, and frequent internet use, prolonged screen exposure, and social media pressure have been associated with stress, mental fatigue, and psychological distress (Balberan & Bengwasan, 2024; Baticulon et al., 2021; Cleofas, 2022). Locally, the study

focuses on young adults in Biñan/Laguna, where online connectivity is examined in relation to stress levels and emotional quotient. This local focus is important because digital stress may operate differently depending on social expectations, educational demands, access to technology, and everyday patterns of digital use.

This study is anchored on the Interaction of Person-Affect-Cognition-Execution model, which explains online behavior through the interaction of personal characteristics, affective responses, cognitive processes, and executive functioning. The model suggests that internet use is not random but shaped by personality traits, emotions, and cognitive patterns, which may lead to balanced or unhealthy online behaviors (Brand et al., 2016). Within this study, constant online connectivity is conceptualized as the independent variable, stress level as the dependent variable, and emotional quotient as the moderating variable. The conceptual argument is that young adults who remain constantly connected online may experience higher stress due to social pressure, responsiveness demands, and information overload. Emotional quotient is expected to influence how young adults interpret, regulate, and respond to these digital stressors. In this framework, higher emotional quotient may weaken the effect of online connectivity on stress, while lower emotional quotient may increase vulnerability to stress during digital engagement (Brand et al., 2016). The literature also relates this issue to the Compulsive Internet Use Theory, which suggests that excessive online behavior may function as a coping response to distress, escapism, or the need for social validation. When these needs are unmet, online engagement may intensify anxiety, stress, and emotional instability.

Although many studies examine internet use among young adults, much of the literature focuses on extreme forms of digital behavior, such as social media addiction or online gaming addiction (Marciano et al., 2022; Piccerillo & Digennaro, 2024). Less attention has been given to everyday constant connectivity, where young adults are always reachable, frequently check messages, and feel pressure to respond quickly. This ordinary but continuous digital presence may appear harmless, yet it can produce stress through social expectations and the perceived need to remain available. Another gap concerns the role of emotional intelligence in real-time digital stress. Emotional intelligence is often treated as a general protective factor for mental health, but fewer studies examine how it interacts specifically with constant online activity and digital stress (Piccerillo & Digennaro, 2024). The idea of “online now” burnout remains underexplored, particularly in relation to whether emotional quotient moderates the relationship between online connectivity and stress among young adults. This study addresses these gaps by examining the relationship between constant online connectivity and stress levels among young adults in Biñan/Laguna and by testing whether emotional quotient changes the strength or direction of that relationship. The findings may inform guidance and counseling support, digital wellness programs, and interventions that help young adults manage the psychological demands of constant connectivity.

This study most directly aligns with SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-Being because it examines stress, emotional exhaustion, emotional regulation, and psychological well-being among young adults. By investigating how constant online connectivity relates to stress, the research contributes to understanding digital behaviors that may affect mental health. It also aligns with SDG 4 – Quality Education because many young adults experience digital engagement within academic and developmental contexts. The study’s findings may support guidance, counseling, and learner well-being initiatives by identifying how digital habits and emotional competencies relate to stress. The study has additional relevance to SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure in the limited sense that it examines the human and psychological implications of technology use. It does not study digital infrastructure directly, but it contributes to discussions on healthier and more sustainable engagement with digital innovation.

The study contributes to public health sustainability by addressing digital stress as a mental health concern among young adults. Understanding how online connectivity affects stress can support preventive approaches to emotional fatigue, burnout, and psychological strain. It also contributes to educational sustainability because young adults’ digital habits may affect academic functioning, coping, and overall student well-being. Findings may guide schools, counselors, and educators in promoting healthier boundaries between online and offline demands. The study supports technological and digital sustainability by emphasizing that technology use should be managed in ways that protect emotional well-being. Sustainable digital participation requires not only access to online platforms but also healthy habits, emotional regulation, and awareness of the psychological effects of constant connectivity. Finally, the study has relevance to community and institutional sustainability because guidance offices, educational institutions, families, and youth-serving organizations may use its insights to design support systems for young adults navigating digital life.

The study aims to determine the frequency of online connectivity, the level of stress, and the level of emotional quotient among young adults in Biñan/Laguna. It further examines whether constant online connectivity is significantly related to stress levels and whether emotional quotient moderates this relationship. The null hypotheses state that there is no significant relationship between constant online connectivity and stress levels among young adults, and that emotional quotient does not significantly moderate the relationship between constant online connectivity and stress levels. The alternative hypotheses state that there is a significant relationship between constant online connectivity and stress levels, and that emotional quotient significantly moderates this relationship.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study utilized a quantitative research design with moderation analysis to address the research questions. Moderation analysis was used to examine how a third variable affects the strength or direction of the relationship between two variables (Hair et al., 2021). This approach was appropriate because the study tested whether emotional quotient influenced the relationship between online connectivity and stress levels.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted among young adults living in Laguna. Respondents came from different areas, with the largest number residing in Sta. Rosa, followed by Cabuyao, Biñan, San Pedro, Calamba, Nagcarlan, Luisiana, Silang Cavite, and Santa Rosa. The distribution indicates that most participants were from Sta. Rosa, while the remaining respondents were distributed across nearby locations.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents were young adults aged 18 to 24 years old who regularly used digital devices such as smartphones, tablets, or computers for online activities. Most respondents were between 19 and 21 years old, indicating that they were in a developmental stage where online engagement, emotional functioning, and stress experiences were relevant to the study's focus.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

A total of 90 respondents participated in the study. The researchers used convenience sampling to select respondents who were willing to participate and who met the inclusion criteria (Stratton, 2021). This sampling method was suitable because the study focused on young adults who regularly used digital devices and were physically located in Laguna during the data collection period. The sample size was considered adequate for examining the relationship among online connectivity, emotional intelligence, and stress levels through correlation and moderation analysis, since moderation analysis tests whether a third variable affects the relationship between two individual variables (Hair et al., 2021).

2.5 Research Instrument

The study used three established psychological instruments to measure the main variables. Constant online connectivity was measured using the Online Vigilance Scale, a 12-item instrument that assesses preoccupation with being consistently and permanently connected online. It uses a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1, or Strongly Disagree, to 5, or Strongly Agree, and measures salience, reactivity, and monitoring. The scale has a Cronbach's alpha value ranging from 0.80 to 0.92 and demonstrates good construct validity through its relationship with measures of fear of missing out and smartphone addiction. Stress was measured using the Perceived Stress Scale or PSS-10, a 10-item questionnaire that assesses how often respondents experienced stress-related feelings during the past month. It uses a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 to 4, or never to very often. The instrument includes both direct and reverse-scored items and has a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.80, with criterion validity shown through correlations with physiological stress markers and psychological distress outcomes. Emotional quotient was measured using the Wong and Lay Emotional Intelligence Scale, a 16-item self-report instrument using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1, or strongly disagree, to 7, or strongly agree. It measures four dimensions of emotional intelligence: self-emotion appraisal, others' emotion appraisal, use of emotion, and regulation of emotion. The scale has internal consistency scores usually ranging from 0.76 to 0.90 and is considered psychometrically sound due to its convergent validity with other emotional intelligence models and its predictive value for life satisfaction and academic or professional performance.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection followed a structured process. The researcher first secured permission from the school administration to conduct the study. The purpose of the study and the instructions for answering the questionnaire were explained to the respondents to ensure proper understanding. The questionnaires were distributed through Google Forms for respondent convenience, and participants were given sufficient time to answer honestly and independently. The completed responses were then encoded, organized, and prepared for statistical analysis.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical tools. Descriptive statistics, including the mean and standard deviation, were used to determine the levels of constant online connectivity, emotional quotient, and stress among respondents. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationship between online connectivity and stress levels. Multiple linear regression analysis with an interaction term between constant online connectivity and emotional quotient was used to test the moderating effect of emotional quotient. All statistical analyses were conducted at the 0.05 level of significance.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

The study followed ethical standards for research involving human participants. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and parental consent was secured for participants who were minors. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed that they could withdraw at any time without negative consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by ensuring that no identifying information was collected. In compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173), all collected data were treated with strict confidentiality and used only for academic purposes. The data were securely stored and protected from unauthorized access. Results were presented in aggregate form so individual responses could not be traced to any participant. The researcher also ensured that the study did not cause harm, discomfort, or disruption to the respondents' normal academic activities.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Main Findings

3.1.1 Levels of Constant Online Connectivity, Stress, and Emotional Quotient

The respondents showed moderate levels of constant online connectivity, stress, and emotional quotient. For constant online connectivity, the mean score was 38.9, the median was 39.0, and the standard deviation was 11.9, with scores ranging from 15 to 60. This indicates noticeable variation in online connectivity, meaning some respondents were highly connected while others were less engaged online. For stress, the mean score was 31.5, the median was 31.0, and the standard deviation was 4.39, with scores ranging from 14 to 47. For emotional quotient, the mean score was 5.07, the median was 5.59, and the standard deviation was 1.48, with scores ranging from 1.50 to 7.00. These findings suggest that while the respondents generally had moderate stress and emotional quotient levels, online connectivity varied more widely among them. This variation may be important because differences in digital engagement could influence emotional and psychological outcomes. The findings are consistent with literature showing that increased engagement in online platforms can affect emotional intelligence and mental health, while internet addiction can significantly affect emotional intelligence among students (Tyagi & Meena, 2022).

3.1.2 Relationship Between Constant Online Connectivity and Stress Level

The analysis showed a significant positive relationship between constant online connectivity and stress level among young adults in Laguna. The correlation result produced a p-value of 0.002 and a Pearson's r value of 0.327, indicating a weak-to-moderate positive correlation. This means that higher levels of online connectivity were associated with higher stress levels, while lower levels of online connectivity were associated with lower stress levels. This result supports international and local studies showing that excessive online engagement contributes to psychological strain. Young adults who remain constantly connected may experience cognitive overload, emotional fatigue, social comparison, and pressure to stay responsive (Yang et al. (2021), Nick et al. (2022), and Chen et al. (2023). Recent studies also identified problematic internet use as a predictor of emotional exhaustion and stress among young adults (Dadi et al. (2024) and Tang et al. (2024). In the Philippine context, the result aligns with findings that Filipino students experience stress and mental fatigue due to prolonged screen exposure and social media pressure (Balberan and Bengwasan (2024), Baticulon et al. (2021), and Cleofas (2022). Overall, the result confirms that digital stress is both a local and global concern, especially when young adults experience information overload, fear of missing out, and online social expectations. Research synthesizing over 292,000 participants also confirms that high screen use is linked to anxiety, depression, and emotional problems (Noetel et al., 2024).

3.1.3 Combined Effect of Constant Online Connectivity and Emotional Quotient on Stress Level

The model testing the combined effect of constant online connectivity and emotional quotient on stress level was statistically significant, with an F-test value of 4.13 and a p-value of 0.009. The R^2 value was 0.126, indicating that 12.6% of the variance in stress level was explained by the combined variables and their interaction. This reflects a weak-to-moderate effect. The finding shows that the model as a whole significantly explained stress level, but the amount of explained variance was limited. This suggests that constant online connectivity and emotional quotient are relevant to stress, but they do not fully account for young adults' stress experiences. Other factors not included in the model may also contribute to stress, such as coping strategies, digital boundaries, social support, academic pressure, and patterns of online use.

3.1.4 Moderating Role of Emotional Quotient

The analysis showed that constant online connectivity significantly predicted stress level, with an F-value of 9.531 and a p-value of 0.003. However, emotional quotient did not significantly predict stress level, with an F-value of 1.392 and a p-value of 0.241. The interaction between constant online connectivity and emotional quotient was also not significant, with an F-value of 0.754 and a p-value of 0.388. This means that emotional quotient did not moderate the relationship between constant online connectivity and stress level. This result differs from previous studies that described emotional intelligence as a protective factor against stress. Earlier research found that individuals with higher emotional intelligence usually show stronger emotional regulation, better coping strategies, and greater resilience in stressful situations (Bermejo-Martins et al.

(2021), Sánchez-Álvarez et al. (2022), and Keefer et al. (2023). However, the present findings suggest that emotional intelligence alone may not be enough to reduce stress caused by constant online availability, immediate response expectations, and digital demands. In relation to the I-PACE model, the result implies that stress outcomes are shaped not only by personal characteristics such as emotional intelligence but also by situational and environmental pressures connected to continuous online engagement.

3.2 Overall Interpretation of the Findings

The overall findings show that constant online connectivity is significantly related to higher stress levels among young adults, while emotional quotient did not significantly reduce stress or change the relationship between online connectivity and stress. Although emotional quotient remains important for psychological well-being, it did not function as a moderating or buffering variable in the present sample. These findings emphasize that digital stress may operate as a persistent and powerful stressor among young adults. The pressure to remain available, respond quickly, manage online expectations, and engage continuously with digital platforms may affect stress levels regardless of emotional regulation ability. The results suggest the need to examine other protective factors, including digital self-control, social support, coping strategies, and online boundary management, to better understand how young adults adapt to the psychological demands of constant connectivity.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concluded that young adults in Laguna are highly engaged in online activities, reflecting the broader trend of constant digital connectivity in daily communication, academic work, and social interaction. The findings showed that constant online connectivity significantly contributes to increased stress levels, suggesting that continuous online availability, academic pressure, social media expectations, and prolonged screen exposure heighten young adults' psychological stress. However, emotional quotient did not significantly influence stress levels and did not moderate the relationship between online connectivity and stress, indicating that digital pressure may affect young adults regardless of their emotional intelligence. Overall, the study emphasizes that while digital technology provides important benefits, excessive and unmanaged online engagement may negatively affect young adults' psychological well-being.

Based on the findings, young adults should be encouraged to develop healthier online habits and better boundaries between online and offline activities to reduce the stress associated with constant connectivity. Educational institutions, guidance counselors, and youth-support professionals may use the findings to strengthen awareness of digital stress and provide support for young adults managing online demands. Future research should further examine other possible coping factors, such as social support, lifestyle behaviors, digital self-control, coping strategies, and online boundary management, since emotional quotient alone did not significantly reduce or moderate stress related to constant online connectivity.

The study was limited to 90 young adult respondents from Laguna who were selected through convenience sampling, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. The research focused only on constant online connectivity, emotional quotient, and stress level, and the results showed that emotional quotient did not explain or moderate the relationship between online connectivity and stress. Other factors that may influence digital-related stress, such as coping strategies, social support, digital boundaries, lifestyle behaviors, and patterns of online use, were not directly examined.

Compliance with ethical standards

The study complied with institutional ethical standards for research involving human participants. Permission was secured before data collection, participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents, with parental consent secured for minors. The confidentiality and anonymity of participants were protected, and all data were handled in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173) and used solely for academic purposes. The authors declare that there was no conflict of interest in the conduct of the study, acknowledge the contributions of all individuals and institutions that supported the research, and affirm their responsibility for the integrity, originality, and copyright ownership of the manuscript.

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