



Short-Form Content Escapism and Distress Intolerance as Predictors of Emotion Regulation Difficulties

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Abstract: The present study examined short-form content escapism and distress intolerance as predictors of emotion regulation difficulties among young adults in urban India. A total of 130 young adults aged 19 to 32 completed three validated self-report measures, the Escapism Scale (Stenseng et al., 2012), the Distress Tolerance Scale (Simons & Gaher, 2005), and the DERS-16 (Bjureberg et al., 2016), the data were analysed using correlation, multiple regression, and mediation analysis. Both factors were significantly associated with emotion regulation difficulties, escapism showed a moderate relationship ($r = .36$) and distress intolerance a strong one ($r = .75$). Together, the two predictors explained 56% of the variance in emotional regulation difficulties, which is a substantial effect for a two-variable model. When examined side by side, distress intolerance was by far the more powerful predictor. Escapism, while meaningfully related on its own, did not add significant predictive power once distress intolerance was accounted for. The two factors also did not operate in a simple chain; escapism did not serve as the pathway through which distress intolerance worsened emotional regulation; both appeared to contribute independently. These findings highlight distress intolerance as a key psychological vulnerability in young adults, and suggest that the motivation behind digital media use, specifically whether people use it to escape discomfort rather than simply relax, carries real psychological significance that warrants clinical attention.

Keywords: *Escapism, Short-Form Content, Distress Intolerance, Emotion Regulation, Young Adults, Urban India, Digital Media, Transdiagnostic*

1. Introduction

Short-form video platforms such as Instagram Reels, TikTok, and YouTube Shorts have become central to how young adults manage negative emotional states. Unlike passive media consumption, escapist use of these platforms is motivated by avoidance of internal discomfort rather than entertainment or information-seeking (Stenseng, Rise, & Kraft, 2012). This motivational distinction matters clinically: self-suppressive escapism, characterized by the desire to escape negative self-awareness, is consistently linked to poorer psychological functioning than self-expansion escapism (Stenseng et al., 2012).

Parallel to the rise of digital escapism, distress intolerance (the perceived inability to endure negative emotional states) has emerged as a transdiagnostic vulnerability factor predicting avoidant coping across anxiety, depression, and impulse control disorders (Leyro, Zvolensky, & Bernstein, 2010). Individuals high in distress intolerance may be disproportionately drawn to short-form content as a rapid emotional escape (Elhai, Dvorak, Levine, & Hall, 2017).

Despite growing empirical interest in both constructs, no prior study has examined short-form content escapism and distress intolerance as combined predictors of emotion regulation difficulties, particularly in a non-Western young adult sample. The present study addresses this gap by testing their individual and joint predictive roles in an Indian urban sample, and examining whether escapism mediates the relationship between distress intolerance and emotion dysregulation.

1.1 Theoretical Clarification of the Variables

1.1.1 Escapism using Short-Form Content.

As a psychological theory, escapism is the propensity to find mental distraction or relief with regard to distasteful reality by being absorbed in entertainment, fantasy, or alternative mental conditioning. It should be noted that the difference between escapism and normal leisure or media consumption is that the former is driven by motivation: the person is not merely pursuing pleasure or entertainment but purposefully pursuing a sense of separation between a stressor, either internal or external. Escapist use in the case of digital media is avoidance with a purpose that is updated as entertainment. The concept of short-form content in the context of this research is algorithmically-selected video content that averages 15 to 90 seconds in length and is presented on mobile-first platforms to be consumed passively and continuously. It is especially the psychological peculiarities of this medium that render it especially pertinent to the investigation of the phenomenon of escapism. It is concise; that is why no one piece of content requires long-term cognitive activity. Its algorithmic delivery

ensures that users do not see the content that is challenging or uncomfortable to them very often. And its dopaminergic reward system, with its foundation on novelty and humor and visual stimulation, sets up a cycle of anticipation and gratification which is extraordinarily efficient in keeping attention busy and negative affect in abeyance, at least in the short term.

The short-form content is thus operationalized in this research as the motivated consumption of short-form digital video platforms as a form of escaping negative emotional states, stressors, or unpleasant self-awareness. This is in line with the self-suppression aspect of escapism that was determined by Stenseng, Rise, and Kraft (2012), which is escape driven by the need to avoid and not the need to develop or discover.

1.1.2 Distress Intolerance

The distress intolerance condition is the state of the felt inability to endure negative emotional or physical affective states that also might or might not contain anxiety, sorrow, frustration, boredom, and uncertainty (Simons and Gaher, 2005). It is an essential mental construct, but is not founded on objective emotional resilience, but in the subjective assessment of self-capacity to handle it. An individual high in distress intolerance does not necessarily experience more intense emotions than others; rather, they perceive those emotions as unbearable, and this appraisal drives extreme avoidance behaviour.

This construct has been increasingly referred to as transdiagnostic vulnerability factor i.e. it is a factor that predisposes development of psychological problems but is not limited to any specific type of disease but is instead a factor that influences many other forms of diagnosis. The study by Keough, Riccardi, Timpano, Mitchell, and Schmidt (2010) established that distress intolerance was a significant predictor of both anxiety and depression symptoms, above and beyond other presumed vulnerability factors. The distress intolerance, in its turn, is the issue of particular interest in the context of the present study because it can serve as a psychological rationale explaining why some individuals may be especially concerned with the association with the use of the escapist media. In the case when someone holds a primary belief that he or she will be unable to endure an emotional suffering, a convenient, easy escape will not only be a want, but will be a psychological necessity.

1.1.3 Emotion Regulation Difficulties

Emotion regulation is a concept which entails the manners through which the individuals regulate what they feel, when they feel, how they feel and express themselves (Gross, 1998). There is a healthy array of emotion regulation processes, such as cognitive reappraisal that are adaptively applied with situational demand that involve problem-solving,

emotional acceptance and social support-seeking. The inability to control the process of emotions, in turn, suggests the absence of such ability.

One of the most detailed and most used conceptualizations of the emotion regulation problems has been presented by Gratz and Roemer (2004) in a multidimensional construct, which consists of six distinct domains such as, lack of emotional awareness, lack of emotional clarity, non-acceptance of emotional responses, limited access to effective regulation strategies, difficulty implementing goal-directed behavior when distressed and control of impulses when negative emotions appear. The concept has also proven to be of immense importance in the fact that emotional dysregulation is not a unidimensional and uniform impairment, but a collection of interrelated troubles that can be manifested in various ways across different persons and situations.

1.2 Theoretical Background

The theoretical frameworks that have been used in the current study are complementary, and these three theories combined provide a comprehensive understanding of how the use of escapist short form content and intolerance of distress can cause difficulties in emotion regulation.

1.2.1 Gross Process Model of Emotion Regulation (1998)

The Process Model of Emotion Regulation by James Gross (1998) is to date the most relevant theoretical framework of the affective science. The model differentiates between the antecedent-based strategies that can intervene earlier in the emotional response process before an entire emotion has been produced and the response-based strategies which can intervene later when an emotional response has already been triggered. An antecedent-based strategy, which relates to redefinition of the meaning of an emotionally provoking situation, known as cognitive reappraisal, is deemed to be adaptive since it alters the whole path that an emotion takes since its initial occurrences. Response-focused maladaptive behavioral strategies, including expressive suppression and behavioral avoidance, are maladaptive in that they do not change the original experiencing emotion, but only suppress or remain unaware of it, consuming a lot of cognitive space and actually intensifying the original emotional one over time.

In this context, the escapism of short-form content can be interpreted as a kind of attentional deployment, which is an antecedent-based approach that shifts attention, so as not to focus on an emotionally stimulating stimulus or internal condition. Although the attentional deployment may be adaptive in some situations, prevalent and automatic application of this response as a means of dealing with distress does not allow more flexible and efficient

development of regulatory repertoires, which eventually leads to the problems of regulators of emotions outlined by Gratz and Roemer (2004).

1.2.2 The Acceptance and Commitment Theory (Hayes et al., 1999)

The psychological framework called Acceptance and commitment Theory (ACT) was developed by Hayes, Strosahl and Wilson (1999) who posit that the psychological suffering should primarily be influenced not by the existence of negative thoughts and emotions but by the actual avoidance of the experience: not able to stay in touch with unpleasant internal experiences and the attempts made to evade or suppress them. The stronger one tries to avoid the distress of oneself, the more deeply one is bound to psychological troubles, according to ACT structure of things. Avoidant behaviors offer temporary relief but support the assumption that distress is unbearable and thus preserves the conversing distress intolerance that drives the avoidance behavior in the first place.

This forms a self-perpetuating cycle which is closely applicable to the current study. A person with high distress intolerance would resort to escapist short-term content to ease the emotional pain. The avoidance behavior is proved right, which does not only lead to belief that distress cannot be tolerated, but also rewards the behavior. Cyclically, this situation frustrates the acquisition of real emotion regulation skill resulting in the complications of awareness, acceptance and adaptive coping as it is posited in the Gratz and Roemer (2004) model.

1.2.3 Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973)

The Uses and Gratifications Theory, first developed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973) is a theoretical discussion model upon which media consumption can be viewed as a motivated and active behavior based towards researching the fulfillment of certain psychological needs. This theory poses people as the volitional entities who choose and exploit media in seeking to satisfy their needs such as entertainment, information, social bonding, personal identity, and tension release instead of viewing audiences as passive receivers of media artifacts. The presence of escapism has constantly been one of the most salient gratification that has been pursued by media use in numerous empirical studies carried out in this tradition.

Applying the Uses and Gratifications Theory to short-form content, one can understand why individuals with high distress intolerance are drawn to these platforms in a disproportionate manner. In cases where the need driving media use is not entertainment but avoidance of emotional discomfort, the effects of sustained media use extend beyond simple

time spent being entertained; they involve the active repression of emotional awareness and the erosion of coping competence.

2. Review of Literature

Gross (1998) developed the process model of emotion regulation, which outlines five families of regulatory strategies, namely, selection of the situation, situation modification, attentional deployment, cognitive reappraisal, and response modulation. Cognitive reappraisal experimentally was correlated with less affective experience and less physiological arousal, and suppression with lesser expression and greater sympathetic activation, showing that regulation strategies vary significantly in their adaptive value.

Gratz and Roemer (2004) came up with a multidimensional conceptualisation of emotion dysregulation including non-acceptance of emotions, deficiency in goal-directed behavior, impulse control problems, inaccessibility to regulation strategies, and insufficient emotional awareness and clarity, using the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS).

Aldao et al. (2010), in their meta-analysis of 241 studies found that maladaptive strategies such as rumination, suppression, and avoidance, worry to be significantly greater in their connection with anxiety and depression than adaptive alternatives, which revealed clinically significant importance of regulatory deficits.

Miller and Racine (2022) found lack of emotional clarity the single strongest and most consistent predictor of impulsive behaviors in a university sample (N = 238, 69% female), including problematic alcohol use, drug use, risky sexual activity, binge eating, and non-suicidal self-injury, which remained predictive even after controlling measures of other dimensions of dysregulation.

Weiss et al. (2012) developed emotion dysregulation as a transdiagnostic pathway connecting psychological distress to a set of maladaptive behavioral consequences, such as substance use, risky sexuality, self-injury, and aggression, which, according to the authors, tend to be short-term regulatory interventions that facilitate dysregulatory behaviors in the long term.

Stenseng et al. (2012) developed a two-dimensional model distinguishing between self-expansion and self-suppression escapism, in which positive engagement and personal growth by the former led to lower well-being, strong negative affect, and intense emotional struggles by the latter. The validity of such distinction to digital media was also proven by Kircaburun and Griffiths (2019) who revealed that the escapism considerably mediated the product of

social presence and problematic use of Instagram (N = 333, aged 14-23) and the ultimate model laser-guided 49% of the variance in problematic use (RMSEA =.06, CFI =.99).

Singh et al. (2025) in their study found that the association between emotion regulation difficulties (ERDs) and the disrupting effects of use of short-form video (SFV) was mediated by escapism in Indian university students (N =303) with conscientiousness modulating the ERDs-to-escapism mediation but high conscientiousness reduced the conversion of regulatory difficulties to escapist SFV use.

Elhai et al. (2017) found consistent links between problematic smartphone use and both depression and anxiety, identifying that non-social, content-consumption aspects were most implicated in these associations. These findings suggest that passive, escapism-driven media consumption may carry particular psychological risk relative to interactive or social forms of digital engagement.

Leyro et al. (2010) showed that low DI was a predictor of avoidant coping in the context of substance use, anxiety, mood, and personality disorder conditions as a motivational intensifier that increased the pressure to get out of negative inner conditioned ways. Keough et al. (2010) also established that DI had a distinct association with all the assessed anxiety symptom dimensions such as panic, generalized anxiety, social anxiety and obsessive-compulsive symptoms above and beyond shared variance with anxiety sensitivity (N = 418).

McHugh et al. (2011) directly tested the joint effect of DI and emotion regulation in predicting avoidance by showing that both in isolation and interaction constructs predicted avoidance behaviour in a clinical (n = 100) and non-clinical (n = 300) sample, highest avoidance predictability being demonstrated through the combination of high DI with low regulatory skills.

Elhai et al. (2018) have reported longitudinal results associated with low distress tolerance in relation to problematic smartphone use within a one-month period (N = 261), and distress tolerance serves as a complete mediator between anxiety sensitivity and compulsive platform use ($b = [?].27, p < .001$).

3. Methodology

3.1 Aim

The objective of the current research is to check escapism with short-form content and distress intolerance as predictors of difficulty in emotion regulation in young adults.

3.2 Objectives

- To examine the relationship between short-form content escapism and emotion regulation difficulties in young adults.
- To examine the relationship between distress intolerance and emotion regulation difficulties in young adults.
- To test the individual and combined predictive roles of escapism and distress intolerance on emotion regulation difficulties.
- To examine whether short-form content escapism mediates the relationship between distress intolerance and emotion regulation difficulties.
- To identify the correlation between distress intolerance and escapism with short-form content among a young adult population.

3.3 Hypotheses

H1: Escapism through short-form content will positively correlate with emotion regulation difficulties.

H2: Distress intolerance will positively correlate with emotion regulation difficulties.

H3: Escapism through short-form content will significantly predict emotion regulation difficulties.

H4: Distress intolerance will significantly predict emotion regulation difficulties.

H5: The combination of escapism and distress intolerance will significantly predict emotion regulation difficulties.

H6: Escapism through short-form content will mediate the relationship between distress intolerance and emotion regulation difficulties.

H7: Distress intolerance and escapism through short-form content will significantly correlate with each other.

3.4 Variables

Independent Variables:

- Escapism in Short Form Content.
- Distress Intolerance

Dependent Variable:

- Problems in Emotion Regulation.

3.5 Research Design

A non-experimental, cross-sectional design was adopted, with data collected at a single point in time through an online self-report survey. Correlational and multiple regression

analyses were used to examine relationships and predictive values among variables, while mediation analysis explored the role of escapism through short-form content in linking distress intolerance and emotion regulation problems. This design was considered appropriate as it allows for the naturalistic examination of psychological constructs without experimental manipulation.

3.6 Sample

Participants were recruited as 130 young adults (73 males, 56 females, 1 preferred not to say; M age = 24.08 years, SD = 3.58, range 19-32) residing in urban India through convenient and snowball sampling. The sample comprised undergraduates (46.2%), postgraduates (27.7%), working professionals (22.3%), and others (3.8%). Most participants lived with family (53.8%). All reported using short-form video content for at least one hour per day.

3.7 Description of Tools Used

3.7.1 Escapism Scale (Stenseng et al., 2012)

The Escapism Scale measures motivational orientations underlying escapist engagement through two subscales, Self-Expansion and Self-Suppression Escapism, each rated on a five-point Likert scale. The Self-Suppression subscale was utilized in this study in alignment with its theoretical framework. The scale demonstrates strong internal consistency (α = 0.84 – 0.94) and adequate construct validity through confirmatory factor analysis (CFI = .91, $RMSEA$ = .079).

3.7.2 Distress Tolerance Scale (Simons & Gaher, 2005)

The DTS is a 15-item self-report measure assessing perceived ability to tolerate emotional distress across four subscales: Tolerance, Appraisal, Absorption, and Regulation, rated on a five-point Likert scale. Higher scores reflect greater distress tolerance. The scale demonstrates strong reliability (α = 0.86; subscales: 0.72 – 0.82), adequate test-retest reliability (r = 0.61), and confirmed convergent and discriminant validity.

3.7.3 Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale – Short Form (DERS-16; Bjureberg et al., 2016)

The DERS-16 is a 16-item measure assessing emotion regulation difficulties across five subscales, rated on a five-point Likert scale where higher scores indicate greater difficulties. It demonstrates excellent internal consistency (α = 0.92; subscales: 0.72 – 0.89), high test-retest reliability (r = 0.86), and confirmed construct and cross-cultural validity across multiple language samples.

3.8 Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analysed using Jamovi (Version 2.6.44). Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation), Pearson correlations, multiple regression, and mediation analysis were employed to examine relationships between escapism through short-form content, distress intolerance, and emotion regulation difficulties. A significance level of $p < .05$ was applied throughout.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 4.1 *Descriptive statistics for all study variables.*

Variable	M	SD	Min	Max
Escapism – Short-Form Content (ESC)	41.40	11.00	14	70
Distress Intolerance (DI)	43.50	12.20	15	75
Emotion Regulation Difficulties (DERS-16)	42.40	15.80	16	80

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation.

The Escapism Through Short-Form Content mean score of 41.40 (SD = 11.00), as shown in Table 4.1, had scores ranging from 14 to 70. Distress Intolerance mean= 43.50 (SD=12.20) with a range of 15-75. The mean score of the Emotion Regulation Difficulties was 42.40 (SD = 15.80), where a score between 16 and 80. The standard deviation that is relatively high, i.e. that of Emotion Regulation Difficulties (SD = 15.80) portrays that this variable has more variation in the sample.

4.2 Assumption Testing

4.2.1 Normality

Shapiro-Wilk tests and Q-Q plots indicated acceptable normality across all three variables. Given the sample size of $N = 130$, the Central Limit Theorem further supports the robustness of regression estimates against minor departures from normality.

4.2.2 Multicollinearity

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and Tolerance values were examined for both predictors. Table 4.2 presents the collinearity statistics.

Table 4.2 *Collinearity Statistics for Predictor Variables*

Predictor	Tolerance	VIF
Escapism – Short-Form Content	0.717	1.40
Distress Intolerance	0.717	1.40

Note. VIF = Variance Inflation Factor. VIF < 5 and Tolerance > 0.20 indicate no multicollinearity concern.

Both predictors yielded a VIF of 1.40 and Tolerance of 0.717, confirming the absence of problematic multicollinearity in the regression model.

4.2.3 Homoscedasticity and Independence of Residuals

Visual inspection of the residuals vs. fitted values plot revealed no systematic patterns, confirming the assumption of homoscedasticity. The Durbin-Watson statistic (DW = 1.77) confirmed independence of residuals, satisfying the required assumptions for multiple regression.

4.3 Correlational Analysis

Pearson product-moment correlations were computed to examine bivariate relationships among escapism through short-form content, distress intolerance, and emotion regulation difficulties. Table 4.3 presents the full correlation matrix.

Table 4.3 *Correlation Matrix for Escapism, Distress Intolerance, and Emotion Regulation Difficulties*

Variable	1. ESC	2. DI	3. DERS	M	SD
1. Escapism (ESC)	—			41.40	11.00
2. Distress Intolerance (DI)	.532**	—		43.50	12.20
3. Emotion Regulation (DERS)	.360**	.750**	—	42.40	15.80

Note. ** $p < .001$.

A significant positive correlation was found between escapism through short-form content and emotion regulation difficulties ($r = .360$, $df = 128$, $p < .001$), indicating that greater escapism is associated with more pronounced emotion regulation difficulties. This finding supports H1.

A strong positive correlation emerged between distress intolerance and emotion regulation difficulties ($r = .750$, $df = 128$, $p < .001$), representing the largest bivariate association in the study. Higher distress intolerance was strongly associated with greater emotion regulation difficulties, supporting H2.

A significant positive correlation was also found between escapism through short-form content and distress intolerance ($r = .532$, $df = 128$, $p < .001$), suggesting that individuals with higher distress intolerance tend to report greater escapist use of short-form content. This supports H7.

4.4 Multiple Regression Analysis

A simultaneous multiple regression was conducted to assess the individual and combined predictive roles of escapism through short-form content and distress intolerance on emotion regulation difficulties.

4.4.1 Model Fit

Table 4.4 Model Fit Summary for Multiple Regression

Model	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	df1	df2	p
Escapism + Distress Intolerance	0.564	0.557	82.10	2	127	< .001

Note. $N = 130$. Dependent variable: Emotion Regulation Difficulties (DERS-16 Total)

The overall regression model was statistically significant ($F(2, 127) = 82.10$, $p < .001$), explaining 56.4% of the variance in emotion regulation difficulties ($R^2 = .564$, Adjusted $R^2 = .557$). This finding supports H5.

4.4.2 Model Coefficients

Table 4.5 Regression Coefficients for Predictors of Emotion Regulation Difficulties

Predictor	B	SE	t	p	β (Standardized)
Intercept	1.689	3.986	0.424	.672	—
Escapism (Short-Form Content)	-0.077	0.099	-0.780	.437	-.054
Distress Intolerance	1.009	0.090	11.246	< .001	.778

Note. B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; β = standardized regression coefficient. Dependent variable: Emotion Regulation Difficulties (DERS-16 Total).

Distress intolerance was a significant independent predictor of emotion regulation difficulties ($B = 1.009$, $SE = 0.090$, $t = 11.246$, $p < .001$, $\beta = .778$), supporting H4. Each unit increase in distress intolerance corresponded to approximately 1.009 unit increase in emotion regulation difficulties, controlling for escapism. The standardized coefficient ($\beta = .778$) confirms distress intolerance as a strong predictor of the outcome.

Escapism through short-form content did not retain independent predictive significance when distress intolerance was included in the model ($B = -0.077$, $SE = 0.099$, $t = -0.780$, $p = .437$, $\beta = -.054$), thus H3 was not supported in the regression context. Notably, the bivariate

correlation between escapism and emotion regulation difficulties remained significant ($r = .360, p < .001$).

4.5 Mediation Analysis

A bootstrapped mediation analysis (5,000 resamples) was conducted using the medmod package in Jamovi, with distress intolerance as the predictor, escapism through short-form content as the proposed mediator, and emotion regulation difficulties as the outcome variable. This ordering was theoretically grounded in the proposition that distress intolerance, as a dispositional trait, precedes and motivates escapist media behaviors, which in turn may compound difficulties in emotion regulation (Leyro et al., 2010; Stenseng et al., 2012). Table 4.6 presents the mediation estimates.

Table 4.6 *Mediation Analysis: Short-Form Content Escapism as Mediator Between Distress Intolerance and Emotion Regulation Difficulties*

Effect	B	SE	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Indirect (via ESC)	−0.037	0.050	−0.131	0.070
Direct (DI → DERS)	1.009	0.079	0.859	1.163
Total (DI → DERS)	0.972	0.061	0.851	1.100

Note. Bootstrapped CIs based on 5,000 resamples. CI crossing zero indicates non-significance.

The total effect of distress intolerance on emotion regulation difficulties was significant ($B = 0.972, SE = 0.061, 95\% CI [0.851, 1.100]$). The direct effect, controlling for escapism, also remained significant ($B = 1.009, SE = 0.079, 95\% CI [0.859, 1.163]$). However, the indirect effect via escapism was non-significant ($B = -0.037, SE = 0.050, 95\% CI [-0.131, 0.070]$), as the confidence interval crossed zero. H6 was therefore not supported.

These results indicate that escapism through short-form content does not function as a sequential mediator between distress intolerance and emotion regulation difficulties. Rather, the two predictors appear to operate through parallel and independent pathways to emotional dysregulation.

5. Discussion

The present study examined escapism through short-form content and distress intolerance as predictors of emotion regulation difficulties in 130 young adults in urban India. Seven hypotheses were tested using Pearson correlation, multiple regression, and bootstrapped mediation analysis. Both independent variables were significantly correlated with emotion

regulation difficulties at the bivariate level. Distress intolerance emerged as the dominant independent predictor ($\beta = .778$), while escapism did not retain predictive significance alongside it. Together, the two predictors explained 56.4% of the variance in emotion regulation difficulties. Mediation analysis indicated that escapism did not significantly mediate the relationship between distress intolerance and emotion regulation, suggesting the two constructs operate through independent pathways.

5.1 Escapism through Short-Form Content and Emotion Regulation Difficulties (H1)

H1 was supported ($r = .360$, $p < .001$), indicating that participants who reported greater escapist use of short-form content also reported more difficulties with emotion regulation. This finding aligns with Stenseng et al.'s (2012) two-dimensional model, in which self-suppressive escapism is associated with poorer psychological functioning. Users who consume short-form content to avoid negative internal states engage in avoidance-based coping, which is consistently linked to emotion regulation deficits (Aldao et al., 2010). These findings are also consistent with Singh et al. (2025), who found that escapism mediated the relationship between emotion regulation difficulties and short-form video disruptions in an Indian university sample.

5.2 Distress Intolerance and Emotion Regulation Difficulties (H2)

H2 was strongly supported ($r = .750$, $p < .001$), representing the strongest bivariate finding in the study. Young adults with higher distress intolerance reported substantially greater difficulties across multiple domains of emotion regulation. This association is theoretically expected given the conceptual overlap between the constructs: distress intolerance reflects a perceived inability to tolerate negative affect (Simons & Gaher, 2005), and emotion regulation difficulties include non-acceptance of emotions and limited regulatory strategies (Gratz & Roemer, 2004). Both are grounded in experiential avoidance (Hayes et al., 1999). The findings replicate and extend those of Leyro et al. (2010) and McHugh et al. (2011) in a non-clinical Indian sample.

5.3 Escapism as an Independent Predictor of Emotion Regulation Difficulties (H3)

H3 was not supported in the multiple regression context ($\beta = -.054$, $p = .437$), despite the significant bivariate correlation. This discrepancy is explained by the substantial shared variance between escapism and distress intolerance ($r = .532$, $p < .001$). When both predictors were modelled simultaneously, distress intolerance ($\beta = .778$) absorbed the predictive variance associated with escapism, rendering it statistically redundant. VIF = 1.40 confirmed that multicollinearity was not problematic, but sufficient shared variance existed to produce a suppression pattern. This is consistent with Elhai et al. (2017), who found that avoidance-motivated digital use was attenuated when dispositional regulatory factors were controlled. The

bivariate significance of escapism underscores its psychological relevance; its independent contribution may emerge when examined at the subscale level or in larger samples.

5.4 Distress Intolerance as an Independent Predictor (H4)

H4 was strongly supported ($\beta = .778$, $p < .001$), confirming distress intolerance as the dominant predictor in the regression model. This result reflects the structural overlap between distress intolerance and the DERS-16 subscales, both of which concern the inability to manage negative emotional experiences. Individuals who perceive distress as unbearable are more likely to exhibit non-acceptance, impulse control difficulties, and limited regulatory strategies, the very dimensions captured by the DERS-16. These findings align with Keough et al. (2010) and Schreiber et al. (2012), and affirm the clinical relevance of distress tolerance-focused interventions such as Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) for young adults with emotion dysregulation.

5.5 Combined Prediction of Emotion Regulation Difficulties (H5)

H5 was supported ($R^2 = .564$, $F(2, 127) = 82.10$, $p < .001$). The combined model explained 56.4% of the variance in emotion regulation difficulties — a substantial effect size for a two-predictor non-clinical model. Although escapism did not contribute independently, its inclusion alongside distress intolerance improved the overall model fit, consistent with the view that avoidance behaviors and dispositional vulnerabilities jointly influence emotional functioning (Weiss et al., 2012; Aldao et al., 2010).

5.6 Escapism as a Mediator Between Distress Intolerance and Emotion Regulation Difficulties (H6)

H6 was not supported. Bootstrapped mediation analysis indicated a non-significant indirect effect ($B = -0.037$, 95% CI $[-0.131, 0.070]$), confirming the absence of mediation. The direct effect of distress intolerance remained significant, while the pathway through escapism was negligible. This suggests an independent paths model: distress intolerance exerts its effect through cognitive appraisal and impaired self-regulation, while escapism reflects a correlated behavioral pattern that is not causally downstream of distress intolerance. Consistent with Hayes et al. (1999), both constructs may represent distinct but related features of psychological inflexibility, rather than a sequential chain. Cross-sectional constraints and a moderate sample size ($N = 130$) may also have limited the detection of small indirect effects.

5.7 Distress Intolerance and Escapism through short form content correlation (H7)

The hypothesis seven was confirmed ($r = .532$, $p = .001$), which shows that young adults who have high levels of distress intolerance tend to use short form content as an escapist. This

is in line with the fact that Leyro et al. (2010) postulate distress intolerance to increase the drive to avoid - as distress originates to be intolerable, people resort to quick, easily accessible relief, and short-form content is particularly well-suited to provide it. Elhai et al. (2018) also discovered that distress tolerance is negatively correlated with problems in smartphone use. Critically, this intercorrelation ($r = .532$) also provides the statistical explanation of the non-significant regression result of H3: the stronger predictor, distress intolerance, absorbed the shared predictor, and escapism had no significant contribution of its own. This pattern is rather than a constraint an indication that both variables are likely to represent a vulnerability to avoidance-based coping.

6. Conclusion

A number of conclusions can be drawn in the current study. Above all, distress intolerance is a strong and effective predictor of emotional regulation challenges in young adults, which can validate its status as a transdiagnostic vulnerability factor in a non-clinical developmental sample. This justifies the clinical relevance of distress tolerance-targeted interventions like the Dialectical Behavior Therapy and the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy as an intervention among young adults with dysregulation in emotions.

Second, emotion regulation problems are significantly reported to be correlated with escapism through short-form content at bivariate correlations. This makes the motivation orientation behind the use of digital media, namely, whether it has a self-suppressive role, a psychologically more relevant variable than the frequency of use, and makes short-form content a construct that deserves its specific attention in the studies and clinical evaluation.

Third, it appears that escapism and distress intolerance ($r = .532$) are strongly correlated, indicating that both the constructs might be used to describe a similar avoidance-focused problem-solving model in terms of which individuals who experience that their distress is unbearable seek to find a quick-fix emphasized solution through content of a short-form nature. It means that intolerance to distress training in the form of a tolerance training program could effectively eliminate the paradoxical avoidance behaviors.

Lastly, the insignificant mediation result suggests that escapism is not a chronological action between distress intolerance and emotion control. Instead, the two predictors seem to work in separate directions hence the necessity of considering testable theoretical models that imply parallel to linear correlations between these variables.

6.1 Limitations

- Cross-sectional design: The research is not able to define any temporal or causal connections between variables. Longitudinal designs would help to find out whether escapism and distress intolerance are antecedents of changes in emotion regulation in the long-run.
- Sampling constraints: Convenience and snowball sampling was used to recruit the sample which constitutes mostly young adults in the urban areas and therefore generalizability cannot be achieved with other groups such as the rural population, old adults, and representatives of other ethnic and sociocultural groups.
- Self-report measures: All variables were measured using self-report instruments, which may introduce response bias and social desirability effects. e.g., the information of screen time, in the future research topics.
- Statistical power: $N = 130$, which is sufficient in regression, might not have been large enough to measure small indirect effects in mediation. It is suggested that large samples and bootstrapped confidence intervals be used in further studies.
- Measure validity: The Escapism Scale was initially constructed and tested in a Western culture. Additional validation on Indian young adults samples would be justified to guarantee that the cultural appropriateness is taken of and the psychometric integrity is sound.

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