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Emotional Coping and Sleep Quality: The Role of Night-Time YouTube Viewing Among Working Adults

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Abstract: Abstract

This research investigates the association between emotional coping via night-time YouTube consumption and sleep disturbances among working adults aged 25 to 65 years. Amidst rising digital engagement, YouTube serves not only as a source of entertainment but also as a tool for managing stress, emotional exhaustion, and psychological distress. The primary aim of this study was to determine whether emotionally motivated YouTube use during night hours is significantly linked to disruptions in sleep.

A quantitative, non-experimental correlational design was utilized. Data were gathered through an online survey administered to 100 participants, with 82 individuals (N = 82) meeting the inclusion criteria of regular night-time YouTube usage (post-9 PM, at least three times weekly). The study employed self-developed measures, including the Night-Time YouTube Usage and Emotional Coping Scale and the Sleep Quality and Sleep Disturbance Scale

Pearson's correlation analysis demonstrated a statistically significant moderate positive correlation between emotional coping through night-time YouTube viewing and sleep disturbance, $r(78) = .49$, $p < .001$. This finding suggests that greater emotional dependence on YouTube during night hours is associated with adverse sleep outcomes, such as delayed sleep onset, diminished sleep quality, and heightened daytime fatigue. Nonetheless, the correlational design precludes causal inferences.

These results emphasize the psychological relevance of digitally mediated coping strategies and their impact on sleep health. The study highlights the importance of addressing emotionally driven digital behaviors within mental health interventions, sleep hygiene protocols, and digital well-being initiatives.

Keywords: Emotional coping, Night-time YouTube use, Sleep disturbance, Digital coping, Sleep quality

I. Introduction

Digital media platforms have become integral to modern life, exerting significant influence not only on communication and entertainment but also on psychological functioning and emotional processes (Han et al., 2024; Montag & Walla, 2016). Increasingly, individuals utilize digital media as a tool for emotional regulation, stress alleviation, and distraction from everyday demands (Kross et al., 2013; Lund et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2019). Among these platforms, YouTube holds a unique position due to its continuous content availability, algorithmically driven recommendations, and autoplay features, which collectively promote extended and often passive consumption (Han et al., 2024). These structural elements complicate disengagement and contribute to prolonged viewing behaviors, particularly during late-night periods.

From a psychological standpoint, such usage patterns exemplify emotion-focused coping strategies, wherein individuals engage in behaviors aimed at managing emotional distress without directly confronting its underlying causes. Emerging research indicates that digital media consumption is increasingly motivated by emotional needs, including stress reduction, mood regulation, escapism, and avoidance of negative affect (Scott et al., 2019; van den Eijnden et al., 2021). Although these behaviors may offer temporary relief, excessive or emotionally driven engagement has been linked to maladaptive outcomes such as binge-watching, procrastination, and patterns resembling dependency (Exelmans & Van den Bulck, 2017; Zhao & Kou, 2024).

The nocturnal period constitutes a particularly significant phase for engagement with digital media, as individuals frequently resort to platforms such as YouTube to alleviate stress accumulated throughout the day. This phenomenon is especially pronounced among adults aged 25 to 65, who are often subject to occupational demands, financial obligations, and cognitive overload, factors that collectively shape their coping mechanisms (Büssing et al., 2010). Within this context, nighttime consumption of YouTube content may serve as an accessible and low-effort strategy for emotional disengagement. Nonetheless, such behavior may concurrently disrupt the physiological and psychological processes essential for sleep initiation and restorative rest.

Extensive empirical evidence has established a correlation between late-night digital media use and adverse sleep outcomes, including delayed sleep onset, diminished sleep quality, and heightened daytime fatigue (Gradisar et al., 2013; Han et al., 2024; Kroese et al., 2014).These effects are attributed to both physiological factors, such as circadian rhythm perturbations, and psychological factors, including cognitive stimulation, emotional arousal, and bedtime procrastination (Exelmans & Van den Bulck, 2017). Moreover, recent research suggests that media use characterized by emotional engagement or dependency-like patterns exhibits a stronger association with sleep disturbances compared to general usage behaviors (Han et al., 2024).

Despite the increasing scholarly attention to this domain, the majority of studies have predominantly concentrated on metrics such as screen time and usage frequency, with comparatively less emphasis on the emotional motivations driving digital media engagement. This represents a critical lacuna, given that emotionally motivated media use constitutes a distinct psychological process wherein individuals employ digital platforms as a means of distress regulation rather than for neutral consumption (Verma et al., 2023). Additionally, a paradox arises from the common perception of digital media as a relaxing and sleep-facilitating tool, which stands in contrast to consistent empirical findings linking nocturnal media use to impaired sleep outcomes ((Kortesoja et al., 2023; Scott et al., 2019).

Addressing these identified gaps, the current study seeks to investigate the association between emotional coping via nocturnal YouTube consumption and sleep disturbances in working adults aged 25 to 65 years. By framing YouTube usage as an emotionally motivated coping mechanism, this research aims to enhance the nuanced comprehension of digital behaviors and their potential impacts on sleep health and psychological well-being.

An expanding corpus of research has demonstrated a robust correlation between digital media consumption and disturbances in sleep, especially during the pre-sleep period. Empirical studies have revealed that exposure to screens late at night is associated with delayed sleep onset, diminished sleep quality, and heightened daytime fatigue (Gradisar et al., 2013).In addition to the duration of media use, content that elicits strong emotional engagement has been shown to elevate cognitive and emotional arousal, thereby disrupting normal sleep processes (Exelmans & Van den Bulck, 2017; Han et al., 2024).Moreover, recent findings indicate that digital media use driven by emotional motives or exhibiting dependency-like characteristics is more strongly linked to sleep disturbances than general patterns of use (van den Eijnden et al., 2021). Despite these insights, there remains a paucity of research investigating digital media as a mechanism for emotional coping, particularly with regard to nocturnal YouTube consumption among working adults. This gap underscores the necessity of the current study.

Iii. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, non-experimental, correlational, and cross-sectional research design. Such a design was deemed suitable given the primary aim of investigating the association between emotional coping via night-time YouTube consumption and sleep disturbances among working adults, without the manipulation of any variables. The correlational approach facilitates the examination of the direction and magnitude of relationships between naturally occurring variables within real-world contexts. Additionally, the cross-sectional framework involved data collection at a single time point, thereby enabling the capture of prevailing behavioral patterns related to digital media use and sleep outcomes.

3.2 Variables of the Study

The investigation focused on two principal variables:

Independent Variable (IV):

Emotional coping through night-time YouTube viewing, operationally defined as the degree to which individuals engage with YouTube after 9 PM for purposes of emotional regulation, stress alleviation, distraction, and psychological escapism.

Dependent Variable (DV):

Sleep disturbance, conceptualized as disruptions in sleep patterns, including delayed sleep onset, diminished sleep quality, daytime fatigue, and lack of morning refreshment.

3.3 Population and Sample

The target population consisted of working adults aged between 25 and 65 years who engage in night-time YouTube viewing. This demographic was selected due to their heightened exposure to occupational and psychosocial stressors, which may predispose them to utilize digital media as a coping mechanism. Data were collected via an online survey, yielding 100 responses. Following the application of inclusion criteria and data screening procedures, the final sample comprised 82 participants (N = 82). This sample size is considered sufficient to conduct correlational analyses with adequate statistical power to detect significant relationships between the variables under study.

3.4 Sampling Technique

A convenience sampling strategy was utilized, with participants recruited through online platforms and participating voluntarily based on availability and willingness. While this approach facilitated efficient data collection, it may constrain the generalizability of the findings due to potential sampling biases inherent in non-probability sampling methods.

3.5 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria:

- Adults aged 25 years and older
- Individuals who use YouTube after 9 PM
- Minimum frequency of YouTube usage of at least three times per week
- Provision of informed consent
- Completion of all questionnaire items

Exclusion Criteria:

- Individuals younger than 25 years
- Non-users of night-time YouTube
- Incomplete or inconsistent questionnaire responses
- Participants not meeting the specified usage frequency criteria

3.6 Data Collection Instruments

Data were gathered utilizing a structured, self-administered online questionnaire developed via Google Forms. The instrument comprised the following sections:

Demographic Information Form

This section captured variables including age, gender, and employment status.

Night-Time YouTube Usage and Emotional Coping Scale (Self-Developed)

This scale evaluated:

- The frequency and duration of YouTube usage during nighttime hours
- The types of content consumed
- Emotional motivations underlying usage (e.g., stress alleviation, distraction, relaxation)
- Emotional dependence and habitual viewing behaviors

Sleep Quality and Sleep Disturbance Scale (Self-Developed)

This scale assessed:

- Sleep latency (the duration required to initiate sleep)
- Subjective sleep quality
- Occurrence of nocturnal disturbances
- Daytime fatigue
- Morning refreshment levels

All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “Never” (1) to “Always” (5).

3.7 Reliability and Validity

Validity:

Content validity was established by ensuring alignment of questionnaire items with established theoretical frameworks related to emotional coping, digital behavior, and sleep psychology. The scales were constructed based on a comprehensive review of pertinent literature to maintain conceptual coherence.

Reliability:

Reliability was supported through the use of a consistent Likert-scale response format, systematic item sequencing, and clear operational definitions of variables. Nonetheless, as the instruments were self-developed, formal statistical assessments of reliability (e.g., Cronbach’s alpha) were not conducted, which is acknowledged as a limitation of the study.

3.8 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process was executed systematically and in accordance with ethical standards. The questionnaire was disseminated online via Google Forms.

Participants were initially presented with a digital informed consent form detailing:

- The study’s purpose
- The voluntary nature of participation
- Assurance of response confidentiality
- The right to withdraw at any point without penalty

Only participants who provided informed consent were permitted to proceed with the questionnaire. The survey link was distributed through various online platforms, and responses were automatically recorded.

Following data collection, responses were screened against inclusion criteria. Eligible data were then organized and prepared for subsequent statistical analysis.

3.9 Statistical Analysis

Quantitative data analysis was performed employing appropriate statistical techniques:

Descriptive Statistics:

Means and standard deviations were calculated to summarize participant demographics and variable distributions.

Inferential Statistics:

Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was utilized to examine the relationship between emotional coping via nighttime YouTube viewing and sleep disturbances. This method was selected due to the continuous nature of the variables and the objective of assessing the strength and direction of their association.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

The study conformed to established ethical research guidelines. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity were rigorously maintained, with no personally identifiable information collected.

Participants were informed that their responses would be used exclusively for academic purposes. The study did not involve any form of deception, coercion, or psychological harm.

Iv. Results And Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Overview

The present study examined data obtained from 82 participants who satisfied the inclusion criteria of consistent nocturnal YouTube usage. Descriptive statistical analyses were conducted to elucidate overarching patterns in emotional coping mechanisms and sleep disturbance phenomena.

Participants exhibited diverse degrees of emotional dependence on YouTube as a means for stress alleviation, relaxation, distraction, and emotional disengagement. Correspondingly, sleep-related outcomes revealed the occurrence of disturbances, including prolonged sleep latency, diminished subjective sleep quality, and heightened levels of daytime fatigue.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the study variables. The mean score for emotional coping through night-time YouTube viewing (M = 3.42, SD = 0.68) indicates a moderate level of emotional reliance on digital media among participants. Similarly, the mean score for sleep disturbance (M = 3.15, SD = 0.72) suggests the presence of noticeable sleep-related issues within the sample.

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Emotional Coping (YouTube)	3.42	0.68
Sleep Disturbance	3.15	0.72

4.2 Correlation Analysis

To investigate the association between emotional coping via night-time YouTube usage and sleep disturbance, Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was calculated.

The analysis yielded the following result: $r(78) = 0.49$, $p < 0.001$

This finding demonstrates a moderate, positive, and statistically significant correlation between emotional coping and sleep disturbance. The strength of this correlation suggests that although emotional coping through YouTube is not the sole determinant of sleep disturbance, it constitutes a significant contributing factor. The positive correlation indicates that higher levels of emotional reliance on YouTube are associated with increased sleep disturbance.

Table 2 shows the Pearson correlation between emotional coping through night-time YouTube viewing and sleep disturbance. The results indicate a statistically significant moderate positive correlation (r = 0.49,

$p < 0.001$), suggesting that higher emotional reliance on YouTube is associated with greater sleep disturbance.

Variables	1	2
1. Emotional Coping (YouTube)	—	0.49**
2. Sleep Disturbance	0.49**	—

V. Discussion

The current investigation sought to explore the association between emotional coping via nocturnal YouTube consumption and sleep disturbances among adults aged 25 to 65 years. The results indicated a statistically significant moderate positive correlation between emotionally motivated YouTube usage and sleep disruption, suggesting that increased emotional dependence on digital media during nighttime correlates with adverse sleep outcomes. Specifically, participants who reported utilizing YouTube for stress alleviation, emotional escapism, or distraction also experienced diminished sleep quality, heightened daytime fatigue, and reduced feelings of morning refreshment.

These outcomes corroborate and extend prior research on digital media consumption and sleep by underscoring the importance of emotional motivation, rather than solely the frequency or duration of use. While earlier studies have established a link between late-night screen exposure and sleep disturbances, the present study emphasizes that the underlying reasons for digital media engagement may be equally, if not more, consequential. Emotionally driven interaction appears to exacerbate the detrimental effects on sleep by amplifying cognitive and emotional arousal during the pre-sleep period.

A key mechanism underlying this relationship involves cognitive and emotional arousal prior to sleep onset. Engagement with YouTube content—particularly material that is emotionally evocative, immersive, or personally salient—can intensify mental activity and delay the progression to a sleep-ready state. This aligns with findings by (Exelmans & Van den Bulck, 2017), who demonstrated that binge-watching behavior is linked to poorer sleep quality and increased fatigue, effects largely mediated by pre-sleep cognitive arousal. Similarly, emotionally engaging digital content has been found to sustain attention and emotional activation, thereby disrupting both sleep initiation and maintenance (Han et al., 2024).

The results of this study can be interpreted through the lens of Uses and Gratifications Theory, which asserts that individuals actively engage with media to satisfy psychological needs such as mood regulation, escapism, and coping (Katz, 1960). Within the context of the current research, nocturnal YouTube consumption appears to serve as an emotion-focused coping mechanism, enabling individuals to temporarily disengage from stressors and negative affective states. However, this form of coping may prove maladaptive over time, as it prolongs media engagement and postpones the emotional down-regulation necessary for initiating sleep.

A critical contribution of this study lies in differentiating between general media usage and emotionally motivated or dependent use. Participants who reported a stronger emotional reliance on YouTube—for instance, using it to relax, unwind, or facilitate sleep—exhibited greater disturbances in sleep quality and increased daytime dysfunction. These findings are consistent with prior research on problematic and dependency-like digital media use, which identifies difficulty disengaging from media platforms as a significant predictor of sleep disturbances (Han et al., 2024).Thus, the qualitative aspects of media engagement, particularly emotional dependence, appear to play a pivotal role in influencing sleep-related outcomes.

Moreover, the observed relationship between night-time YouTube use and subsequent daytime fatigue and diminished morning refreshment underscores the necessity of conceptualizing sleep as a multidimensional construct. Aligning with established frameworks such as the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index, the present findings suggest that sleep disturbances encompass not only reduced duration but also impaired restorative processes and compromised daytime functioning (Carpi, 2025). Consequently, even

when individuals achieve an ostensibly sufficient quantity of sleep, emotionally driven digital engagement may undermine the restorative quality of that sleep.

Another salient aspect of the findings pertains to extended and immersive viewing behaviors, characterized by prolonged usage and diminished awareness of time passage. These patterns resemble binge-watching phenomena and are linked to heightened sleep disturbances. This association may be partially explained by the concept of bedtime procrastination, wherein individuals defer sleep in favor of continued engagement with rewarding digital content. In the present context, such behavior appears to be emotionally motivated, with individuals utilizing YouTube not solely for entertainment but also as a strategy to avoid stress or intrusive thoughts.

Collectively, the findings suggest the existence of a potential cyclical pattern. Emotional stress or fatigue may prompt individuals to engage in nocturnal YouTube viewing as a coping strategy. While this may afford temporary relief, it concurrently elevates cognitive arousal and delays sleep onset, culminating in diminished sleep quality and increased fatigue the following day. This, in turn, may exacerbate emotional vulnerability and reinforce dependence on digital coping mechanisms, thereby perpetuating the cycle.

In summary, this study emphasizes that night-time YouTube use should not be regarded merely as a neutral or habitual activity but rather as an emotionally driven coping process with significant implications for sleep health and psychological well-being. By shifting the analytical focus from mere screen time to the emotional functions of media engagement, the present findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of digital media use in contemporary adult populations.

VI. Conclusion

This study investigated the association between emotional coping via night-time YouTube consumption and sleep disturbances among working adults aged 25 to 65 years. The results demonstrated a significant moderate positive correlation between emotionally motivated use of YouTube and sleep disruption, suggesting that increased emotional dependence on digital media during nighttime correlates with diminished sleep quality, heightened daytime fatigue, and decreased morning alertness.

Crucially, the findings underscore that digital media usage should be conceptualized not merely in terms of duration or frequency but also with regard to its underlying psychological functions. Night-time YouTube viewing appears to function as an emotion-focused coping strategy, offering transient alleviation from stress and emotional distress. Nevertheless, this coping mechanism may impede pre-sleep relaxation processes and adversely affect the restorative aspects of sleep.

In sum, the present findings advance a more sophisticated understanding of digital behavior by highlighting the influence of emotional motivations on sleep-related outcomes. They indicate that emotionally driven engagement with digital media constitutes a subtle yet meaningful risk factor for sleep disturbances and diminished well-being among contemporary adult populations.

Vii. Implications

The present study's findings bear significant implications across clinical, behavioral, and public health spheres.

Clinically, the results underscore the necessity for mental health practitioners to incorporate assessments of digital media usage patterns—particularly those driven by emotional motivations—when evaluating sleep disturbances and emotional well-being. Integrating discussions regarding nocturnal media consumption into therapeutic and counseling frameworks may enhance the efficacy of treatment interventions.

Regarding sleep hygiene, the study accentuates the critical importance of minimizing emotionally charged digital engagement prior to bedtime. Interventions designed to improve sleep quality should

extend beyond mere screen time reduction to address the underlying emotional drivers of media use, promoting adaptive coping mechanisms such as relaxation exercises or structured pre-sleep routines.

From the perspective of digital well-being, the findings highlight the imperative for increased awareness about the potential consequences of emotionally motivated media consumption. Encouraging mindful and deliberate use of digital platforms may mitigate the development of dependency-like behaviors and alleviate sleep-related disturbances.

At a macro level, these results hold public health significance in light of the rising incidence of both sleep disorders and digital media dependence. Educational campaigns and workplace wellness initiatives could benefit from incorporating guidance on healthy digital habits and their interplay with sleep quality and overall functioning.

Viii. Limitations

Notwithstanding its contributions, this study is subject to several limitations that warrant consideration when interpreting the results.

Firstly, the cross-sectional design precludes the establishment of causal inferences between emotional coping via YouTube use and sleep disturbances. Future investigations employing longitudinal or experimental methodologies are necessary to elucidate the directionality of these relationships.

Secondly, reliance on self-reported data may introduce response biases, including potential inaccuracies in the reporting of media consumption behaviors and sleep patterns. The incorporation of objective measures, such as digital usage tracking and polysomnographic sleep assessments, would enhance data precision.

Thirdly, the use of convenience sampling restricts the generalizability of the findings, as the sample may not adequately represent diverse demographic or occupational populations.

Moreover, the employment of self-constructed scales lacking formal psychometric validation may compromise the reliability and validity of the measurements. Subsequent research should prioritize the utilization or development of standardized instruments with established psychometric properties.

Finally, the exclusive focus on YouTube neglects the potential influence of other digital platforms, which may also contribute to sleep disturbances and warrant examination in future studies.

Ix. Future Research Directions

Subsequent investigations may extend the current study’s findings through several critical avenues.

Longitudinal research designs are essential to elucidate the causal dynamics between emotionally driven digital media usage and sleep disturbances over extended periods. Additionally, experimental methodologies could provide controlled assessments of the effects of nocturnal media exposure on sleep parameters.

Future research should also prioritize the inclusion of larger, more heterogeneous samples to improve the external validity and generalizability of results across diverse demographic groups, cultural settings, and occupational categories.

A pertinent area for further inquiry involves comparative analyses of different digital media platforms, assessing whether various types—such as social networking sites, streaming services, and short-form video applications—differentially influence sleep outcomes based on their content characteristics and user engagement patterns.

Moreover, advancing the development and validation of standardized instruments to measure digital coping behaviors would facilitate more accurate evaluation of emotional motivations and patterns of dependency.

Finally, intervention-based studies are warranted to evaluate the efficacy of digital detoxification protocols, sleep hygiene interventions, and alternative coping strategies, thereby bridging empirical findings with practical approaches aimed at enhancing sleep quality and overall well-being.

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