



The Role of Media Entertainment in Managing Stress among Malaysian Students: Escapism vs Adaptive Coping Strategies

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ABSTRACT

This research critically examines how students at a private university in Malaysia, employ media entertainment as a coping mechanism for academic stress. It delves into the intricate dynamics of media's dual role, functioning as a potential stress alleviator through adaptive coping strategies and concurrently posing challenges related to distraction and procrastination through escapism. The research objectives involve examining the correlation between escapism and stress as well as, exploring the relationship between adaptive coping strategies and stress. The study also attempts to investigate potential gender-based differences in stress levels. This study employs a correlational quantitative research design that utilizes, convenience sampling to gather responses from a targeted population comprising of students from a private university in Malaysia. The sample size includes 370 students (185 male, 185 female), representative of all seven faculties in the University. The research instruments used in this study comprise the Escapism Scale (ES), Coping Scale (CS), and Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). The data analysis is done using inferential statistical methods. The study's results indicate that there was no significant relationship between escapism and stress, $r(368) = .01, p > .85$. However, a significant relationship ($r = .21, p < .001$) has emerged between adaptive coping strategy and stress, signifying that media entertainment, when used as an adaptive coping strategy, correlates with a reduction in stress levels. Moreover, the study's findings also indicate that media entertainment plays a role in coping with stress, particularly among male students, who experience higher stress levels than their female counterparts.

Keywords: Media Entertainment, Academic Stress, Coping Mechanisms, Escapism, Gender Differences

1. Introduction

In the demanding world of higher education, college students often face high levels of stress due to rigorous coursework, exams, and other academic pressures. To counteract this stress and promote a balanced and healthy lifestyle, many students turn to media entertainment as a form of relaxation (Manh, 2023). The media and entertainment industry serves a dual role in the coping mechanisms of individuals, particularly students, as either a form of escapism, or an adaptive coping strategy.

In previous studies, it has been stated that private university students in Malaysia experience academic stress. The findings showed that 88% of the university students confirmed that studies are the main cause of their stress, while 78% admitted facing moderate stress level (Ramachandiran & Dhanal, 2018). Factors that contributed to stress among private university students were financial burden, family problems, peer pressure, and academic load (Othman et al., 2013; Ramachandiran & Dhanapal, 2018). Although there are a lot of aspects that affect students stress, it is undeniable that students face academic stress and academic responsibilities such as managing their workload. It has been presented that classroom coursework and exams has affected university students and the results showed high levels of chronic stress (Pozos-Radillo et al., 2014). When trying to deal with academic stress, university students turn to mass media entertainment as coping strategy to overcome their feeling of stress, but prolonged use of mass media entertainment may result in escapism, procrastination of work that leads to increased stress. It has been shown in previous studies that binge-watching of mass media entertainment had led to distraction from studies and an interruption in one's academic performance which led to impact on their well-being including lack of productivity, and emotional disturbance (Chambliss et al., 2017; Dhanuka & Bohra, 2019). In a positive perspective, mass media entertainment helps to decrease stress level as an adaptive coping strategy. It was highlighted that mass media entertainment for university students is associated with leisure and sensation-seeking (Runali & Patricia, 2022). Considering the popularity of mass media platforms such as YouTube taking the first place, following Netflix as second, and Disney+ as third place in Malaysia (Similarweb, 2022), conducted a research study to see if mass media entertainment helps private university students overcome stress or increase stress due to prolong usage that result to procrastination.

Escapism is often defined as temporarily getting away from unpleasant situations or thoughts (Anna, 2020). This can help greatly in a short period but can increase the risk of becoming more anxious than before as the task at hand was being procrastinated. Students may seek solace in movies, television

shows, music, or other forms of entertainment to momentarily distance themselves from academic stressors. Engaging in the immersive experience of escaping reality and immersing oneself in a fictional realm is a source of joy for numerous individuals (Green et al., 2004; Moscardo, 2020). Watching a TV series is more than a passive activity; it can be interpreted as an intentional quest for enjoyable moments woven into a narrative (Woodside, 2010). Isolation, loneliness, and poor use of digital technology have all been associated with problematic use of these platforms (Tokunaga and Rains, 2010; Nowland et al., 2018; Moretta and Buodo, 2020). Digital technologies provide a plethora of diverse online settings. The Internet is the common technological foundation for all these technologies, including social networking, online video games, and streaming services that are essential for binge-watching habits. People who have trouble controlling their binge-watching tend to have trouble coping with loneliness (Yee, 2006; Masur et al., 2014; Gao et al., 2017; Starosta and Izydorczyk, 2020). Thus, a few studies indicate that binge-watching can be viewed as a useful means of escaping reality because it encourages travel experiences (Wagner, 2016), which helps people avoid the unpleasant feelings associated with loneliness—at least momentarily. Therefore, it makes sense to identify escapism as the primary psychological aspect among those that define the complex concept of problematic use of Internet-related technologies, leading to binge-watching behavior as a coping mechanism in response to loneliness (Pontes and Griffiths, 2017). Escapism has long been recognized as a psychological tactic used by people to divert their attention from problems in their real lives (Young et al., 2017).

Conversely, the media and entertainment industry also provide a platform for adaptive coping strategies, where individuals employ cognitive and behavioral efforts to effectively manage and address the challenges posed by stress. An adaptive coping strategy is defined as a strategy that includes cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage stressful conditions or associated emotional distress (Carina & Donald, 2017). In our contemporary, media-saturated landscape, the reliance on various forms of media as a coping mechanism appears to have become increasingly widespread (Nabi et al., 2017). Communication scholars are currently debating how the mediatization of daily life could lead to more stress because of the rise in phenomena such as technostress, information overload, permanent pressure to communicate, and a growing "fear of missing out" (e.g., Halfmann & Rieger, 2019; Reinecke et al., 2017; Van der Schuur et al., 2019). Contrary to popular belief, the media may be a useful tool for managing stress in daily life in addition to being a source of stress. Media use for coping may have increased in our media-saturated society (Nabi et al., 2017). For example, social media platforms can be used to obtain social support (Frison & Eggermont, 2015), and playing video games can help you relax and forget about everyday problems. While blogs and health websites can be used for information seeking and problem resolution, shows can be used as a means of escape from stressful life situations (Anderson et al., 1996). (Chung & Kim, 2008). The widespread use of smartphones has increased access to these services (Hoffner & Lee, 2015; Schneider et al., 2018), particularly for day-to-day coping. In this situation, media entertainment serves as a driving tool, allowing people to divert their stress into productive endeavors. Examples of this include employing entertainment as a reward system for completing academic assignments or using inspirational content to promote a positive mindset.

The importance of this study is that it benefits students who may get to know that media entertainment can be a tool to help cope with stress. Students may also find alternate ways to overcome their stress such as exercise or just by talking to others. Several studies conducted on stress, academic stress, coping strategy and media use have had different focus and results. A study conducted by Syed, Abdul, and Musharaf (2020) explores the experiences and coping strategies of Pakistani female doctoral students adjusting to life in Malaysia, highlighting their use of activities like binge-watching, social networking, faith-based practices, and travel to manage stress and homesickness during the initial 'settling-in phase'. Another study by Dickson, Joshua and Mavis (2020), reviewed current studies on academic stress, its causes, effects, and management, highlighting that effective stress management can enhance academic and professional outcomes. A study conducted by Tengku and Aini (2023) explored the predictors of binge-watching tendencies among Malaysian university students, revealing that parasocial interaction mediates the relationship between loneliness and binge-watching tendencies. Research conducted by Lai and Cheah (2020), studied internet browsing to cope with stress, but this study has raised concern about internet addiction. Furthermore, Nurul, Sherina, Mehrnoosh and Norsidawati (2021) found that students experienced anxiety due to academic pressure such as assessment, grading system and various teaching methods. While another study conducted by Saiful, Nurma, and Azhar (2021) discussed on academic stress leading to burnout among medical students. Lastly, in relation to media, a study by Husairi and Syuhaidi (2021) on social media usage patterns among university students suggested that social media can be beneficial as a tool of information for their studies.

The rationale behind conducting this study is that there is an increasing realization of the necessity of knowing how students cope with stress, particularly in relation to their media consumption patterns. Although a number of coping methods and their impacts on students' stress management have been studied in the past, little is known about the unique function that media entertainment—like binge-watching and social networking—plays in supporting both escapism and adaptive coping mechanisms. The interplay between escapism and adaptive coping strategies within the realm of media and entertainment underscores its nuanced role in shaping individuals' responses to stress.

The objective of this research was to study the correlation between media entertainment as a form of escapism and its role as an adaptive coping strategy in alleviating stress among students at a private university in Malaysia.

2. Literature Review

Escapism

Escapism is a mental diversion with entertainment or recreation, as an "escape" from the perceived unpleasant or banal aspects of daily life (Educalingo, 2022). In simple terms, escapism is a method used to distract ourselves and think about other things during stressful situations. In contemporary times, adolescents have commonly turned to escapism, which was particularly evident during the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020. The constraints of prolonged home confinement impose significant stress on adolescents, leading to a notable surge in internet usage (Blossom et al., 2020). The internet, offering

avenues for activities such as gaming, social media interaction, and movie viewing, has become a prevalent means of escapism for students. However, the extent to which these online engagements contribute to the overall well-being of adolescents remains uncertain. Heatherton and Baumeister (1991) conducted research exploring the application of escape theory to binge eating within a non-clinical sample of 129 women. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was performed to analyze the alignment between the Escape Model and the obtained data, demonstrating a strong fit between the Escape Model and the data. Interestingly, perfectionism was found to be a strong predictor of unpleasant self-awareness, which in turn had a negative effect. The degree of avoidant coping was predicted by this negative effect, and avoidant coping was highly associated with binge eating. The results of this study have important implications for understanding binge eating and treatment strategies.

The relationship between stress and anxiety in college students during the early stages of social distancing in March and April 2020 was examined in a recent study (Eden et al., 2020). This study examined how students deliberately used media for coping, using a cross-sectional survey of 459 students from two American colleges. Findings, consistent with escapist media theories, revealed that stressed students sought emotional relief through engaging with hedonically pleasant media unrelated to the pandemic. However, this escapist coping approach was correlated with diminished positive affect and lower mental health scores, indicating potential maladaptive consequences for overall psychological well-being. This study underscores the importance of considering the style and type of media coping, beyond the mere quantity of exposure, in understanding dysfunctional coping strategies during times of heightened stress.

A study among Malaysian undergraduate student found that through virtual reality entertainment which provide a sense of escapism, evoking a positive emotional response affirming its use as a mean to reduce stress (Vicknecsvarran, & Jamali, 2024). Zakaria et al. (2023) also found that one in every three students was hooked to the internet, implying that internet addiction is highly connected with psychological problems such as stress and despair, and that individuals with hyperactivity condition are more likely to be addicted. The relationship between stress and internet addiction is likely to be reciprocal as people with stress probably use the virtual world and the internet to escape psychological pressure, or maybe internet addicts are more likely to develop these conditions due of their reliance on the internet (Gholamian et al., 2017).

Adaptive coping strategy

Holahan, Ragan, & Moos (2017) explored adaptive coping, encompassing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage stress and emotional distress. They found that active coping strategies, like problem-solving, enhance adaptation to life stressors, acting as protective factors. However, the study noted that avoidance coping, including denial and wishful thinking, is linked to increased psychological distress. Overall, coping styles not only influence resilience but also may entail vulnerabilities, impacting both psychological well-being and, indirectly, physical health.

Boursier et al. (2021) investigated TV series watching behaviors, motivations, and their links to depression, stress, and anxiety during the COVID-19 lockdown in Italian adults. The study, involving 715 participants, found increased TV series watching, especially among women experiencing higher anxiety and stress levels. Both healthy and problematic TV series watching were influenced by anxiety symptoms and escapism motivation, suggesting a coping strategy during the lockdown. Notably, enrichment motives acted as a protective factor against uncontrolled watching behaviors. The findings caution against pathologizing heightened online activities during distressing situations.

Wolfers and Schneider (2021) discovered that mobile phones, television, internet services, games, and social media present diverse and abundant opportunities for managing stress in daily life. The utilization of these media for coping has been examined across various disciplines, leading to disparate and disconnected research perspectives. In an effort to enhance integration, they conducted a scoping review, identifying a total of 318 articles meeting the inclusion criteria. Three primary perspectives on media use for coping were discerned: (1) stress and coping, (2) mood management and emotion regulation, and (3) media addiction and problematic media use. Each perspective contributed uniquely to understanding different facets of utilizing media for coping. The authors proposed advancements aimed at integrating perspectives and providing guidance for future research on coping through media.

Eltanahy et al. (2023) conducted a study on medical students in Malaysia established that there is an "increased utilization of emotion and avoidant-focused coping styles as the perceived stress level increases. The utilization of an emotion-focused coping style increased by a total of 17.99% while, the utilization of an avoidant-focused coping style increased by a total of 38.81% from low to high perceived stress levels. Depending on the nature of duress and the environment that one is in, they may employ different set of coping mechanism to endure the psychological distress even though it may not be particularly effective to combat a certain scenario such as using media entertainment as a distraction upon encountering academic stress. Students with optimism tendency were found to adopt a more effective coping strategy than students who are low in optimism, and with resilience intact with one character, its significant role are more likely connected with effective coping behaviours among optimistic undergraduates (Yeo & Yap, 2023). Coping strategies are not predetermined; rather, they differ according to sociocultural elements such geography, social circles, gender, and age. It is also greatly impacted by an individual's past experiences. Agosmustaram & Weng Onn (2023) study on Malaysian young adults who faced bullying during their school years found that immediate coping methods during bullying can be maladaptive, emphasising the significance of profound post bullying cognitive strategies. Furthermore, cognitive reappraisal in overcoming adversity is important, as suppressing emotions could potentially have negative implications. The emphasis the need of letting go and moving on are significant as adaptive forms of coping strategy.

Stress

Stress is the feeling of being overwhelmed or unable to cope with mental or emotional pressure (Mental Health Foundation, 2021). The term 'stress' originated from the field of physics, describing the interplay between an applied force and the resistance opposing it. Hans Selye (1907-1982) introduced this term into the medical realm, defining it as the "nonspecific response of the body to any demand." Recognized as the 'father of stress research,' Selye diverged from his predecessors by eschewing the study of specific disease signs and symptoms. Instead, he focused on comprehending the universal

reactions of individuals to illness (Tan & Yip, 2018). According to Lazarus RS and Folkman S (1984) “psychological stress is a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being”. In their Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, they posit that stress results from individuals’ cognitive appraisals of situations and their perceived ability to cope. This model highlights two key appraisals—primary, which evaluates the significance of an event, and secondary, which assesses coping resources. The model underscores the dynamic interplay between these cognitive processes and coping efforts in managing stress.

Aghababian et al. (2021) investigated the relationship between COVID-related stress and binge-watching behaviors by considering variations based on body weight. In a cross-sectional online survey with 466 adults, participants reported increased binge-watching frequency during the pandemic, with high binge-watching rates rising from 14.6% to 33.0%. Binge-watching episodes also extended from 3.26 ± 1.89 to 3.92 ± 2.08 h. This increase was most notable in individuals with obesity and high stress levels. Those reporting high stress levels exhibited more eating during binge-watching, increased negative emotional triggers, consequences, and perceived lack of control. The findings emphasized the surge in binge-watching during the pandemic, particularly among those with elevated COVID-related stress, underscoring the need for interventions to address potential obesogenic impacts during stressful periods. In another study conducted by Fernandes et al. (2020) investigated the influence of lockdown on adolescents’ internet patterns, contrasting them with their behaviors before the pandemic. This study aimed to investigate the interconnections among gaming addiction, internet utilization, and concerns related to COVID-19. Adolescents from diverse countries, including India, Malaysia, Mexico, and the United Kingdom, participated in online surveys distributed through social media and youth networks. The survey covered aspects such as internet usage, engagement with social media, gaming, feelings of depression, loneliness, escapism, and anxieties related to COVID-19.

Stress that predominantly stems from environment is considered as a “significant determinant of depression in adolescents the people especially student in Malaysia”, (Yahya et al., 2017, as cited in Azman et al., 2023). A prior study found that stress levels among Malaysian undergraduate students ranged from 12.9% to 21.6%. (Teh et al., 2015). According to Hassan et al. (2023), “In Malaysia, female students can be said to be more psychologically stressed than male students because of the local cultural influence that sees men as stronger and not weaker. When it is associated with psychological stress, female students may prefer to hide rather than share their problems with others”. Although the study does not dispute that males also have the risk of facing more life stress than female. Left unsupervised, stress would lead to various psychological issues as there has been found a positive relationship between stress, suicidal ideation and suicidal attempt in which female tend to record higher suicidal ideation compared to male during the Covid-19 outbreak (Phuah & Low, 2023).

The outcomes indicated a general escalation in adolescents’ engagement with social media platforms and streaming services. Furthermore, those exhibiting high scores in gaming addiction, compulsive internet use, and social media involvement reported heightened levels of depression, loneliness, escapism, poor sleep quality, and pandemic-induced anxiety. The results underscored the considerable impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on adolescent internet usage and psychosocial well-being, transcending geographical boundaries. This study highlights the imperative of addressing pandemic-induced distress to mitigate the repercussions of maladaptive coping mechanisms.

The present investigation is prompted by the enduring reliance on entertainment as both an adaptive coping mechanism and a channel for escapism among student cohorts. Despite an extensive body of literature delving into these dynamics, a conspicuous research lacuna exists, particularly in the context of university students in Malaysia, with a specific focus on media and entertainment. This study endeavors to redress this scholarly gap and contribute substantive insights into the intricate interplay between escapism and adaptive coping strategies among university students within the Malaysian milieu, specifically in the aftermath of the COVID era. This study aims to elucidate the nuanced role of media entertainment in shaping individuals’ responses to stress, focusing on students enrolled at a private university in Malaysia.

The proposed hypotheses for this study are as follows:

- H1: There is a significant relationship between escapism and stress.
- H2: There is a significant relationship between adaptive coping strategies and stress.
- H3: There was a significant mean difference between gender and stress.

3. Research Methodology

This study used a correlational quantitative research design and a survey as the primary instrument for data collection. The first independent variable identified in this study is escapism, which was measured using the Escapism Scale developed by Wei Gao, Zhaopeng Liu, and Jingyuan Li (2017). This scale comprises four items, employing a 4-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree.” For this study, the original four items were retained, with adjustments made to align them with the study’s focus.

The second independent variable identified in this research is adaptive coping strategy, evaluated using the Coping Scale developed by Hamby, Grych, and Banyard (2013). The scale is used to assess cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of handling a problem. The scale consists of 13 items based on a 4-point Likert scale from “Mostly true” to “Not true”. All 13 items were adopted in this study.

The third is the dependent variable that has been identified in the study is stress. This variable is measured using the Perceived Stress Scale, devised by Cohen (1983). This scale is specifically designed to gauge an individual’s stress levels. It comprises 10 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from “Never” to “Very often.” Only seven items were adopted in this study.

The initial segment of the survey focused on demographics followed by three sections dedicated to the three questionnaires as mentioned above. The sample for this study is Undergraduate students from six faculties in a private university in Malaysia. This study uses a sample of 370 students out of a total population of 12,000 students. The sample size was calculated based on the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table. This study uses a convenience sampling method.

Data collection involved distributing 880 questionnaires via Google forms in Whatsapp groups. Data was also collected by meeting prospective respondents face- to face on campus. In accordance with the third hypothesis, which sought to study the relationship between gender and stress, an equal number of respondents from both genders were invited to do the survey. Out of the 880 questionnaires distributed, 389 responses were received, with 19 of those containing missing answers. Using the survey response rate calculation $370/880 \times 100$ the response rate is at 42%.

4.Results And Discussion

4.1. Demographic Characteristics

A total of 370 respondents participated in this study, and it consisted of an equal number of male (185) and female (185) students. Descriptive analysis of demographic characteristics is shown in Table 1.

The figure below shows that 22 respondents (5.9%) were from the age range 18–20 218 respondents (58.9%) were from the age range 21–23, 127 respondents (34.3%) were from the age range 24– 26, and lastly 3 respondents (0.8%) were from the age range 27 and above. The highest data collected in age range were from respondents aged 21–23 (58.9%) and lowest were from those aged 27 and above. (0.8%)

Table 1- Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N=370)

Gender

	Frequency	%
Male	185	49.5
Female	185	49.5

Age

	Frequency	%
18-20	22	5.9
21-23	218	58.8
24-26	127	34.2
27 and above	3	.8

Validity

Validity, defined as the accuracy with which a concept is measured in quantitative research (Roberta, 2015), is crucial for ensuring the reliability of study instruments. Prior investigations by Wei Gao, Zhaopeng Liu, and Jingyuan Li (2017) demonstrated the high reliability and validity of the Escapism Scale (ES). Likewise, studies conducted by Hamby, Grych, and Banyard (2013) attested to the excellent reliability and validity of the Coping Scale. Additionally, Sheldon Cohen (1983) confirmed the high reliability and validity of the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). In the current study, 24 items were utilized, comprising 4 items from the Escapism Scale (ES), 13 items from the Coping Scale, and 7 items from the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). Three items from the Perceived Stress Scale were omitted, based on their impact on the scale's Cronbach value during the pilot study. This adjustment was made to ensure the robustness of the measurement instruments used in the study.

Reliability Statistics

Reliability refers to the consistency or stability of a measurement, which is when a test or an instrument is conducted, and the results obtained are repeated. The objective of reliability is to minimize chance errors in collecting data (Daniel & Frederick, 2018). The Cronbach alpha coefficient is an approach that is always used as an internal consistency measure. Hinton, P.R. (2014) has indicated four reliability cut-off points: excellent reliability (>.90), high reliability (.70 - .90), moderate reliability (.50 - .70), and low reliability (.50). For this study, as indicated in Table 2, the total number of items used was 24 items, excluding the demographic items ($\alpha = .77$). The Escapism Scale (ES) has four items ($\alpha = .89$), the Coping Scale has thirteen items ($\alpha = .72$), and the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) has seven items ($\alpha = .79$).

Table 2- Reliability analysis Cronbach's alpha

Reliability Statistics

Variable	Cronbach's alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
Escapism Scale (ES)	.898	4
Coping Scale	.711	13
Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)	.785	7

Descriptive Statistics

The variables in this study were analysed using SPSS. The resulting table summarizes the fundamental metrics, including mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values, obtained through this analytical procedure.

Table 3 - Item-Total Percentage of Escapism Scale (ES)

No. Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
Media entertainment helps me escape the world of reality.	0%	0.3%	27.6%	72.2%	3.72
Media entertainment helps me escape from problems and pressures.	0.3%	0.5%	25.9%	73.2%	3.72
Media entertainment helps me to escape from unpleasant things that are worrisome.	0.3%	0.5%	21.1%	78.1%	3.77
Media entertainment makes me feel as if I am in a different world from reality.	0.3%	1.4%	18.6%	79.7%	3.78

According to Table 3, the data indicates that participants had a strong preference for the escapism component, particularly when it comes to the immersive and transforming elements of media entertainment. The fact that a sizable majority choose "Strongly Agree" in response to the third and fourth questions demonstrates the power of media entertainment in giving an escape from harsh reality. Furthermore, the consensus on remarks about escaping from reality and reducing issues and pressures underlines the importance of media entertainment as a form of psychological distraction.

Table 3.1- Group Statistics of Differences between Genders on Media Entertainment as Escapism

Escapism Scale (ES) Statistics

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Escapism Scale	Female	185	14.98	1.367	7	16
	Male	185	15.00	1.319		

Table 3.1 shows data on gender disparities in media entertainment as escapism collected from undergraduate students. The mean score for females was 14.98 (SD=1.37), while males scored 15.00 (SD=1.32), indicating a noticeable difference between genders. Additionally, the standard deviation for females was larger than that of males, suggesting greater variability in scores among females. The range of scores ranged from a minimum of 7 to a maximum of 16, showcasing the breadth of responses within the sample.

Table 4- Item-Total Percentage of the Coping Scale (CS)

No. Items	Not True	A Little True	Somewhat True	Mostly True	Mean
When dealing with a problem, I spend time trying to understand what happened.	0%	4.3%	61.4%	34.3%	3.30
When dealing with a problem, I try to see the positive side of the situation.	0.3%	8.1%	60.5%	31.1%	3.22
When dealing with a problem, I try to step back from the problem and think about it from a different perspective.	0%	9.7%	55.9%	34.3%	3.25

When dealing with a problem, I consider several alternatives.	10.3%	52.4%	37.3%	3.27	
When dealing with a problem, I try to see the humor in it.	28.9%	32.2%	25.1%	13.8%	2.24
When dealing with a problem, I think about what it might talk about the bigger lifestyle changes I should make.	0.8%	8.4%	55.9%	34.9%	3.25
When dealing with a problem, I often wait it out and see if it does not take care of itself.	2.2%	9.7%	52.4%	35.7%	3.22
When dealing with a problem, I often try to remember that the problem is not as serious as it seems.	1.1%	11.6%	46.8%	40.5%	3.27
When dealing with a problem, I often use hobbies such as media entertainment to help me get through a tough time.	0.5%	6.8%	47%	45.7%	3.38
When dealing with a problem, I make jokes about it or try to make light of it.	41.6%	21.4%	24.3%	12.7%	2.08
When dealing with a problem, I compromise.	1.1%	6.2%	47.8%	44.9%	3.36
When dealing with a problem, I take steps to take better care of myself and my family for the future.	0.5%	5.7%	44.1%	49.7%	3.43
When dealing with a problem, I work on making things better for the future by changing my habits, such as diet, exercise, budgeting, or staying in close contact with people I care about.	1.6%	5.9%	39.7%	52.7%	3.44

Table 4 demonstrates substantial trends in respondents' coping mechanisms. Items 12 and 13 received the most "Mostly True" responses, demonstrating a proactive strategy centered on self-care and future progress. In contrast, comedy-related coping tactics earned a majority of "Not True" replies, demonstrating a preference for practical coping approaches over humor. These findings add to our understanding of coping behaviours in the surveyed group.

Table 4.1- Group Statistics of Differences between Genders on Media Entertainment as Adaptive Coping Strategy

Coping Scale (CS) Statistics

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Coping Scale	Female	185	40.46	5.068	27	52
	Male	185	40.94	4.142		

Table 4.1 provides insights into gender disparities in mass media entertainment as escapism among undergraduate students. The mean score for females was 40.46 (SD=5.07), slightly lower than the mean score of 40.94 for males (SD=4.14), indicating a statistically significant difference. Furthermore, the standard deviation for females was higher than that of males, suggesting greater variability in scores among females. The range of scores ranged from a minimum of 27 to a maximum of 52, illustrating the diversity of responses within the sample.

Table 5- Item-Total Percentage of Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)

No. Items	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Fairly Often	Very Often	Mean
In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something unexpected	0.3%	1.1%	33.5%	46.8%	18.4%	2.82

In the last month, how often have you felt that you failed to control the important things in your life?	0.8%	4.9%	33.8%	45.9%	14.6%	2.69
In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and "stressed"?	0%	3.2%	32.4%	46.5%	17.8%	2.79
In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with the things that you had to do?	0.5%	2.7%	32.2%	48.6%	15.9%	2.77
In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritation in your life?	0%	4.9%	25.9%	50.3%	18.9%	1.17
In the last month, how often have you been angered by that were outside your control?	0.3%	3.2%	30.0%	45.9%	20.5%	2.83
In the last month, how often have you felt that difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?	0.5%	4.3%	22.2%	41.9%	31.1%	2.99

According to Table 5, respondents regularly experienced rage and overwhelming difficulties, as indicated by high "Very Often" responses to the sixth and seventh items on the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). In contrast, they generally claimed moderate competence in dealing with duties and managing irritation, as seen by the prevalence of "Fairly Often" responses to relevant questions. This indicates a complex link between perceived stress and coping methods among participants.

Table 5.1- Group Statistics of Differences between Genders on Stress

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) Statistics

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Perceived Stress Scale Female	185	17.74	2.996		
Male	185	18.36	2.786	8	25

Table 5.1 shows statistics on gender differences in mass media enjoyment as escapism acquired from undergraduate students. The mean female score was 17.74 (SD=2.99), while the male score was 18.36 (SD=2.79). This shows that the mean score and standard deviation were different in the female and male categories. The typical score for females is lower than for males. Females have a larger standard deviation than males. The minimum score was 8, and the maximum score was 25.

Table 6-Independent Samples Test of the Differences between Gender on Stress

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances					t-test for Equality of Means	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	
Perceived Stress Scale	Equal variances assumed	.313	.576	-2.049	368	.041	-.616	
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.049	366.079	.041	-.616	

Table 6 shows the results of an independent samples t-test investigating gender differences and stress. The Levene's test for equality of variances reveals correlation between the groups, allowing for the analysis shown in the top row. The results revealed that there was a significant mean difference between gender and stress, $t(368) = -2.05$, $p = .041$. As a result, it has been established that there is a significant mean difference in gender and stress among undergraduate students at a private university in Malaysia.

Table 7- Stress, Escapism, and Adaptive Coping Strategy

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Stress	8	25	18.05	2.906
Media Entertainment as Escapism	7	16	14.99	1.341
Media Entertainment as Adaptive Coping Strategy	27	52	40.70	4.628

Table 7 shows that the independent variable, adaptive coping strategy, had the highest value in all categories, with a minimum of 27 and a maximum of 52. The mean was 40.70, with a standard deviation of 4.628. The second independent variable, escapism, has a minimum of 7 and a maximum of 16, with a mean of 14.99. The standard deviation was computed as 1.341. The dependent variable, stress, ranged from 8 to 25, with an average value of 18.05 and a standard deviation of 2.906.

Correlation Analysis

The correlation test serves as a tool to assess the strength of a linear connection between two variables, aiding in the quantification and evaluation of the influence and coherence among independent, dependent, and moderating variables. This is a demonstrated method for calculating and gaging the potency of the relationship between these variables. Correlation analysis is employed to scrutinize binary associations or connections between variables, as highlighted by Zou et al. (2003).

Pearson correlation analysis of escapism and stress

The first research objective was to identify the relationship between escapism and stress. Pearson's correlation analysis indicated no significant relationship between escapism and stress, $r(368) = .01, p > .85$, as indicated in Table 8. Consequently, the results do not support the first hypothesis, confirming that escapism does not have a positive relationship with stress.

Table 8- Pearson Correlation Analysis of Escapism and Stress (N=370)

		Media Entertainment as Escapism	
		Stress	
Media Entertainment as Escapism	Pearson Correlation	1	.010
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.850
	N	370	370
Stress	Pearson Correlation	.010	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.850	
	N	370	370

Pearson correlation analysis of adaptive coping strategies and stress

The second research objective was to determine the relationship between adaptive coping strategies and stress. Table 9 presents the correlation analysis of the Coping Scale and the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). Pearson correlation results indicated a significant relationship between adaptive coping strategies and stress, $r(368) = .21, p < .001$. Based on these results, the second hypothesis stating that there is a positive relationship between adaptive coping strategies and stress is supported.

Table 9- Pearson Correlation Analysis of Adaptive Coping Strategy and Stress (N=370)

		Media Entertainment as an Adaptive Coping Strategy	Stress
Pearson Correlation		1	.208**

Media Entertainment as an Adaptive Coping Strategy	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	370	370
Stress	Pearson Correlation	.208**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	370	370

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Independent t-test between gender and stress

Table 10 presents the t-test analysis of gender and stress. The independent-samples t-test showed a significant mean difference between gender and stress, $t(368) = -2.05$, $p = .041$, supporting the third hypothesis, which posited that there is a significant mean difference between gender and stress.

Table 10- Independent T-test between Gender and Stress (N=370)

<i>Group Statistics</i>					
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Stress	Female	185	17.74	2.996	.220
	Male	185	18.36	2.786	.205

Discussion

This study investigated the impact of media entertainment on stress levels among undergraduate students in a private university in Malaysia. The initial objective was to explore the relationship between escapism and stress. Surprisingly, the results did not reveal a statistically significant connection between escapism and stress. The findings did not reveal a statistically significant connection between escapism and stress, in contrast with prior studies positing a salient link between media engagement and stress relief (Spruance et al., 2017; Sarfraz et al., 2019; Flayelle et al., 2020). This outcome prompts a meticulous exploration of the complex dynamics that characterize this association. It is imperative to acknowledge the intricate nature of this relationship, which is influenced by variables such as the nature of media content, individual differences, and the context of consumption (Nabi et al., 2022). The absence of a statistically significant correlation between escapism and stress signifies that the initial study objective was not met, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted factors influencing the impact of media on psychological well-being.

Moving on to the second objective, the investigation focused on discerning the correlation between adaptive coping strategies and stress. The results revealed a substantial and noteworthy relationship, aligning with existing literature emphasizing the pivotal role of adaptive coping mechanisms in stress mitigation (Boursier et al., 2022; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Students' adept in employing effective coping mechanisms such as problem-solving, seeking social support, or positive reframing exhibited lower stress levels than those resorting to maladaptive strategies such as avoidance or substance use (Flayelle et al., 2019). The observed positive correlation between adaptive coping strategies and reduced stress levels underscores the importance of promoting effective coping mechanisms among students.

The third objective sought to unveil gender-based disparities in stress levels, with the results indicating a significant mean difference. This echoes prior research positing gender as a salient factor influencing stress experiences (Prowse et al., 2021). Societal expectations, gender roles, and hormonal differences contribute to variations in how males and females perceive and cope with stressors (Bermejo-Franco et al., 2022). However, it is imperative to recognize that the observed gender differences in stress may be influenced by cultural and contextual factors specific to the study location. Cross-cultural studies have consistently highlighted variations in stressors and coping mechanisms among different societies (Matud et al., 2019; Gashaw et al., 2021). Therefore, understanding the cultural context is crucial when interpreting gender-related findings in stress research. The outcomes of the present study demonstrated a significant mean difference in stress between genders, with females exhibiting a higher level of tolerance to stress than male students.

Implications

The correlation analysis conducted in this study did not reveal any evidence supporting the relationship between escapism and stress, thus challenging the premises of the Escape theory (Heatherton & Baumister, 1991). The Escape theory primarily focuses on motivations behind binge eating, are variant from the investigation of this study which primarily focuses on media entertainment as a means of stress alleviation. Instead, the framework of Self-escape Theory, which describes individuals' aspirations to avoid unfavorable self-perceptions, appears to be more relevant to the observed interactions between escapism and stress (Roy, 1990). Individuals who are facing high levels of stress are more likely to seek distraction and escapism. This inference is consistent with the idea that increased stress levels cause a greater proclivity to seek escape methods.

However, it is critical to recognize the preliminary nature of these findings. The current findings lack strong empirical evidence to support the claim that escapism effectively reduces stress in pupils. More research is needed to unravel the intricate interplay between escapism, stress, and coping strategies, which will contribute to a better understanding of individual adaptive responses to stressors.

Furthermore, correlation analysis shows a favorable association between adaptive coping method and stress. The findings confirm Sigmund Freud's Sublimation Theory (1936). The theory focuses on the constructive technique of relieving stress through non-harmful activities. According to the data, media entertainment is one of the effective stress-reduction measures for pupils. As a result, the study's findings, which show a link between adaptive coping strategies and stress, lend support to Sublimation Theory. The study emphasizes the significance of addressing children's usage of media entertainment to cope with stress. While it can be beneficial, restrictions are required to avoid overreliance. Escapism, while desirable in moderation, can lead to disregarding obligations. Thus, the study seeks to assess whether media entertainment is a beneficial or detrimental strategy for coping.

Limitations

Despite its valuable contributions, this study has inherent limitations. The use of a cross-sectional design prevents the establishment of causal relationships, and the exclusive focus on a single institution in Malaysia, raises concerns about generalizability. To enhance robustness, future research should consider longitudinal designs and broader sample inclusivity. Methodologically, relying on self-report measures introduces potential response biases, prompting the consideration of objective stress indicators for a more comprehensive comprehension. In addition, the study did not thoroughly explore specific cultural determinants influencing stress experiences, indicating a potential avenue for future investigations to delve into the intersection of cultural factors with coping mechanisms and stress perceptions.

Future Direction of Study

Future studies are advised to increase the size of sample. The research can be broadened and to be more focused on students from various universities from all parts of Malaysia. If a study were to be conducted on students from various universities, there will be stronger evidence to prove the hypothesis if it has a significant relationship or not. The accuracy of the results will be concrete. The second future direction of study is that if a mixed method approach were conducted, there would be more views on how students handle their stress in studies. If more details, information, and specific information on how students handle stress is gathered, it is more likely stronger to prove its claims. Lastly, more variables can be implemented in this study to provide a more in-depth relations between other coping ways that could help in relieving stress among students that correlates with escapism, adaptive coping strategy, and stress.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this investigation sheds light on the nuanced relationship between media entertainment, coping strategies, and gender in the context of student stress. This study has only succeeded in achieving two of its three objectives, which were to examine how undergraduate students in a private university in Malaysia relate to media entertainment as a coping mechanism and as an escape from stress. The absence of a significant link between escapism and stress emphasizes the need for a comprehensive understanding of the diverse factors influencing the impact of media on psychological well-being. The positive correlation between adaptive coping strategies and lower stress levels underscores the importance of promoting effective coping mechanisms among students. Additionally, acknowledging gender-based disparities in stress experiences highlights the need for tailored interventions that consider individual differences within diverse cultural contexts. The study showed that media entertainment can aid in stress management and may be especially beneficial for male students, who tend to experience higher levels of stress than female students. The results indicated a strong association between the two, even if further research is still needed to determine whether media entertainment might help elevate or lower stress.

Appendix A: Questionnaire

Variables	Research Items
Escapism Scale (ES)	Media entertainment helps me escape from the world of reality.
	Media Entertainment as Escapism
	Media entertainment helps me escape from things that are unpleasant and worrisome.
Coping Scale (CS)	Media entertainment makes me feel as if I am in a different world of reality.
	When dealing with a problem, I spend time trying to understand what happened.
	When dealing with a problem, I try to see the positive side of the situation.

	When dealing with a problem, I try to step back from the problem and think about it from a different point of view.
	When dealing with a problem, I consider several alternatives for handling the problem.
	When dealing with a problem, I try to see the humour in it.
	When dealing with a problem, I think about what it might say about bigger lifestyle changes I need to make.
Media Entertainment as Adaptive Coping Strategy	When dealing with a problem, I often wait it out and see if it doesn't take care of itself.
	When dealing with a problem, I often try to remember that the problem is not as serious as it seems.
	When dealing with a problem, I often use hobbies such as media entertainment to help me get through a tough time.
	When dealing with a problem, I make jokes about it or try to make light of it.
	When dealing with a problem, I make compromises.
	When dealing with a problem, I take steps to take better care of myself and my family for the future.
	When dealing with a problem, I work on making things better for the future by changing my habits, such as diet, exercise, budgeting, or staying in closer touch with people I care about.
Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)	
	In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?
	In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?
Stress	In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and "stressed"?
	In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?
	In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?
	In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that were outside of your control?
	In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

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