Roots in Crisis: A Multifactorial Study of Emotional Negligence, Digital Addiction, and Consciousness Drift Among Indian Adolescents

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Abstract

This study investigates the emotional collapse among Indian adolescents aged 10 to 18, driven by digital addiction, societal negligence, peer influence, and systemic disregard for ethical grooming. Employing a qualitative narrative design—comprising 40 student journals, 25 parent-child interviews, and media-incident analysis conducted over January–March 2025—the research explores how distraction escalates into identity confusion, impulsive behaviour, moral drift, and emotional unemployment. The paper analyses real-life examples and WHO mental health data and concludes with actionable recommendations for curriculum reform and systemic emotional support.

Keywords: Emotional negligence, digital addiction, gambling apps, academic bias, consciousness drift, adolescent suicide, media anxiety, behavioural collapse

1. Introduction

India's adolescents, aged 10–18, are growing up amidst an overwhelming digital landscape paired with inadequate emotional and ethical support systems. While screen exposure, gaming content, and entertainment media dominate their routines, structured conversations about values, purpose, and regulation remain absent both at school and at home.

"India's youth are its greatest strength—but where are they being led?"

As these children transition into adulthood, the loss of inner direction becomes evident—not in academic scores alone, but in behavioural volatility, addiction patterns, and career paralysis. **This study asks: How do digital immersion, ethical neglect, and unchecked media influence converge to undermine emotional stability and future readiness among Indian adolescents aged 10–18?

2. Literature Review
2.1 Emotional Foundations
2.1.1 Emotional Neglect and Developmental Paralysis

Webb (2023) emphasizes that childhood emotional neglect disrupts neural regulation and identity clarity. In many Indian households, open emotional discourse is rare, leaving adolescents with unprocessed feelings and reactive behaviours.

2.1.2 Global Mental Health Snapshot

The World Health Organization (2021) reports that 14% of adolescents worldwide experience diagnosable mental health conditions. In India, estimates suggest up to 10% of school-goers exhibit signs of screen-

related anxiety and depression.

2.2 Digital Impacts

2.2.1 Digital Addiction and Behavioural Fragmentation

Sweeting et al. (2012) describe how overstimulation from short-form platforms and mobile gaming fosters impulsivity and fractured attention spans.

2.2.2 Gambling, Peer Influence, and Risk Identities

The Smile Foundation (2025) notes that unmonitored peer groups often stimulate early gambling and substance use, driven by emotional voids rather than deliberate rebellion.2.3 Peer Influence and Risk Identity Formation

2.4 Academic Bias and Voice Suppression

European Proceedings (2019) argue that non-topper students are frequently denied speaking opportunities and leadership roles, contributing to social withdrawal and diminished self-confidence.

2.5 Misinformation and Emotional Collapse

Robinson (2023) reports that youth exposed to economic news—like layoffs or recession fears—often internalize hopelessness, especially when schools lack media literacy interventions.

2.6 WHO Mental Health Indicators

The World Health Organization (2021) reports that one in seven adolescents suffers from mental health conditions, many rooted in digital overstimulation, content anxiety, and lack of parental support. These patterns mirror emotional breakdowns reported in India post-gaming and betting-related incidents.

2.7 Continuity with Existing Research

Chinthada (2025) in *Beyond Distraction* identified delayed self-realization among youth as a product of emotional silence and societal pressure. This paper builds on that foundation, exploring how distraction deepens into emotional and moral deterioration when left unaddressed during adolescence.

2.8 Existing Frameworks and Gaps

2.8.1 Academic Bias and Voice Suppression

2.8.2 Misinformation and Emotional Collapse

2.8.3 Continuity with "Beyond Distraction" (Chinthada, 2025)

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative narrative approach to capture lived experiences and behavioural patterns among adolescents. Narrative mapping allows for rich, contextual insights into how digital immersion and emotional neglect intersect.

3.2 Participants

A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit:

40 adolescents (ages 10–18), balanced for gender and drawn equally from two schools in   Punjab and two schools in Andhra Pradesh.

15 parents (one per adolescent subgroup) to provide familial context.

10 educators (teachers or counsellors) with at least 3 years of experience in adolescent development.

Inclusion criteria for adolescents: enrolled in Grades 6–12, regular smartphone/internet access, and willingness to maintain a daily journal.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

characteristic	n	%
Age 10–13	16	40%
Age 14–18	24	60%
Boys	22	55%
Girls	18	45%
Region: Punjab	20	50%
Region: Andhra Pradesh	20	50%

3.3 Data Collection

Data were gathered over three months (January–March 2025) using the following tools and volumes:

- **Daily Screen-Time Logs:** 40 logs recording app usage duration and content type.
- **Emotion-Tracking Worksheets**: 80 entries (twice-weekly mood and focus reports).
- **Parent–Child Dialogue Reports:** 30 guided-conversation summaries.
- **Peer Group Behaviour Audits**: 40 observation checklists completed by educators.
- **Local Incident Analyses:** 12 media reports collated, plus semi-structured interviews with five local counsellors.

3.4 Data Analysis

All journals, logs, and interviews were coded thematically in NVivo, following Braun & Clarke's six-phase method (2006):

1. Familiarization with data
2. Generating initial codes (total codes generated = 120)
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes (final themes identified = 6)
6. Producing the report

Inter-rater reliability was assessed (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.82$).

Table 3. Qualitative Coding Summary

Metric	Value
Initial codes generated	120
Final themes identified	6
Inter-rater reliability (Cohen's κ)	0.82
Software used	NVivo

3.5 Ethical Considerations

- **Ethics Approval:** The full study protocol was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee of Lovely Professional University (Approval No. LPU/IEC/2025/03) on 10 January 2025.
- **Informed Consent and Assent:** Written informed consent was obtained from all parents or legal guardians. Adolescents provided written assent prior to participation.
- **Confidentiality and Anonymity:** Participant identities were anonymized using unique codes. All digital records (journals, logs, interview transcripts) are stored on password-protected LPU servers.
- **Right to Withdraw:** Participants and their guardians were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.
- **Data Security:** Only the research team at Lovely Professional University had access to raw data. Aggregated findings are presented without personally identifiable information.
- **Compliance:** Procedures adhered to the LPU Research Ethics Guidelines and to the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

4. Findings and Analysis

This section synthesizes behavioural data, reflection logs, and national media coverage to present a multilayered view of adolescent emotional degradation.

Behaviour	n	%
Daily screen time >3 hrs	28	70%
Exposure to betting/fantasy-sport apps	11	27.5%
Skipped school for digital media content	9	22.5%
Reported mood withdrawal	25	62.5%
Reported sleep disturbances	19	47.5%

4.1 Content Saturation and Identity Fragmentation

Students reported watching IPL matches, mobile games, and short-form video content for extended periods daily. Emotional fatigue, reduced academic performance, and poor sleep hygiene were common.

Example: A 14-year-old in Rajasthan skipped classes for two weeks to watch IPL live streams, experiencing mood instability and falling grades.

Primary Cause: Lack of parental media boundaries, absence of structured alternatives.

4.2 Gambling Platforms and Emotional Breakdown

Betting platforms linked to fantasy cricket and "instant win" apps emotionally manipulated adolescents through promotional rewards.

Example: In 2023, a 17-year-old boy in Andhra Pradesh died by suicide after losing ₹12,000 in IPL betting, as reported by *The Hindu*. Emotional distress from borrowed money and shame drove the tragedy.

Primary Cause: Emotional exploitation via app design, lack of financial literacy dialogue at home.

4.3 Gaming Dependency and Withdrawal Trauma

Gaming addiction induced emotional and physical strain in several cases.

Example: A Hyderabad teen collapsed in 2022 after a six-hour gaming session. Medical reports attributed the cause to cardiac stress from screen exposure.

Example: A teenager in Mumbai ended his life after his parents restricted his phone access. He displayed symptoms of addiction and withdrawal anxiety.

Primary Cause: Dopamine overstimulation, absence of emotional regulation tools.

4.4 Ethical Disengagement and Social Disrespect

Moral confusion was widespread. Students viewed disciplinary action as punishment, not ethical reinforcement.

Example: A schoolteacher in Punjab noted ethics were limited to celebratory days—like Republic Day—with no integration into daily teaching. Students lacked connection to civic norms and respect-based behaviour.

Primary Cause: Curriculum imbalance, missing ethics modules.

4.5 Confidence Suppression and Identity Withdrawal

Non-topper students expressed that they had never been allowed to speak on stage or lead class projects.

Example: A 15-year-old in Andhra Pradesh described hiding his thoughts despite having creative ideas, believing leadership was reserved for top scorers.

Primary Cause: Visibility bias, performance-based favouritism.

4.6 Anxiety from Misinformation and Media Misclassification

Exposure to headlines about layoffs, economic downturns, and exam failure resulted in disengagement.

Example: A student in Phagwara avoided tech classes after misreading industry layoffs as signs that his career path was doomed.

Primary Cause: Lack of critical media education and supportive career framing.

5. Discussion

The above findings illustrate that Indian adolescents are not just distracted—they are emotionally displaced. They absorb entertainment, competition, and crisis content without tools for introspection or emotional processing. Institutional silence perpetuates this.

WHO's data corroborate the rising mental health burden. Real-life suicides tied to gaming and gambling highlight the immediacy of the issue. Emotional unemployment is no longer abstract—it emerges when children lose internal grounding before they reach adulthood.

6. Recommendations

- **Emotional Literacy Curriculum**: Integrate emotional mapping, dialogue practice, and behavioural awareness from Grade 5.
- **Inclusive Voice Platforms**: Offer expression opportunities for all academic tiers, promoting stage confidence and idea articulation.
- **Media Literacy Modules**: Teach students to decode news, advertisements, and economic trends within context.
- **Parent-Teacher Dialogues**: Schedule workshops on emotional communication, ethics, and behavioural observation.
- **Strict Gambling Regulations**: Prohibit youth-targeted apps and apply age filters with psychological oversight.

"Prioritization reflects feasibility and anticipated reach—curriculum integration affects the largest audience, while regulatory measures require policy action."

7. Conclusion

India's future depends on the consciousness we build not just the content we deliver. Adolescents must be given tools to manage emotions, critique digital influence, and develop personal discipline. The silence surrounding these themes today breeds confusion, addiction, and withdrawal. This paper calls for structured emotional investment from families, educators, and policy bodies before crisis becomes culture. "This study contributes a holistic framework for early emotional intervention—demonstrating that adolescent well-being hinges as much on consciousness cultivation as on cognitive instruction."

8. References

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