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## **Conditions Surrounding Digital Stress Among Adults**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Since the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, human mobility became limited as response to the curbing of the coronavirus disease. The traditional way of providing services were transitioned to digital methods, employing online work operations and even work-from-home schemes. Through a purposive sampling method, this study employed a Sequential Explanatory design to determine the experiences of employed adults on digital stress, strategies to cope with their digital stress, outcomes of their coping strategies, identified causal conditions, and desired recommendations to aid their stress. Results showed that majority of the participants are digitally stressed and the conditions leading to their stress include dealing with technical difficulties, distractions, anxiety, and intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts. These conditions result to indolence, skewed sense of identity, and misconceptions among peers in the digital sphere. Participants employ various coping strategies to deal with these negative experiences, and these include multitasking, engaging in physical activities, and regulating their emotions. The outcomes of employing these coping strategies included regained focus in doing their tasks, productivity at work, and better emotional responses. Despite the stress and negative experiences they come across using digital technology, results also reported that it also somehow assisted participants in various positive ways especially in maintaining social connectivity, flexibility and accessibility for information at work, and overall improvement of the quality of their work outputs. Using a Grounded Theory approach, a theoretical model was developed reflecting these conditions surrounding digital stress among employed adults.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Digital Stress; Use of Digital Technology ;Work-from-Home*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, banks, grocery stores, and even hospitals have transitioned to online delivery of services as means to continue operations. According to the recent article by Aamer Baig (2021), global surveys showed that we have vaulted five years forward in digital adoption in a matter of just few months in 2020. More importantly, most schools have pivoted to a hundred percent online learning and digital classrooms. This new normal setup clearly shows the soaring demand for digital technology and voluntarily or not, this has made majority of the people adapt to the use of digital technology to be able to keep up.

As digital technology becomes more and more of a necessity, a greater number of people around the world are now using the internet with 4.54 billion internet users as of today—a 7% increase from last year, only at the first half of 2020. In relation to this, a new study published in the Canadian Journal of Psychiatry said that social media use and screen time can make adolescents more vulnerable to the effects of digital stress such as increase in depression and anxiety. Digital technology is defined as the electronic tools, systems, devices and resources that generate stores or process data (Krishnadas & Renganathan, 2021). Distinctive examples include social media, online games, multimedia and mobile phones. Digital technology also involves working principles, processes, and standards which apply to the technology industry (Mousa & Kalonde, 2019). The widespread use of digital technologies is in the form of computers, laptops, tablets, smartphones, and mobile phones. The main purpose of digital technology is to enable individuals to collaboratively work towards the achievement of common goals, enhance employee productivity, employee satisfaction and employee retention and improvement of skills, abilities and expertise amongst the human resources (Kapur, 2018).

Moreover, digital stress, by definition, is the stress caused by any interaction in emails, texts, social media, chat rooms and forums that can affect the person negatively. With the unprecedented struck of the coronavirus, many employees—government and private—were forced to work and deliver services from their homes. Considering the high demand of digital technology usage today and the challenges that come with it for employed adults (e.g., lack of resources, unstable internet connection, lack of utilities), there is an assumption that digital stress could also stretch to more alarmingly rates.

The results of this research endeavor may be used as basis in formulation of policies in the implementation of remote working or ‘work-from-home’ modalities and other conditions and/or strategies that have significant effects to the individual’s productivity and mental health as an employee.

## **1. METHODOLOGY**

### **1.1. Research Design**

This study employed a mixed method design using a Sequential Explanatory approach. For Phase I, a survey was conducted to obtain the quantitative representation of digital stress status of the respondents which includes the factors leading to digital stress, awareness and level of digital stress. For Phase II, a qualitative study using the Grounded Theory of Glaser & Strauss (1967) was used to identify the conditions surrounding digital stress among employees. The grounded theory helped develop a model that described the experiences, coping strategies and its underlying concepts that support the baseline of the phenomenon being studied.

### **1.2. Participants**

The participants of this study were adult employees from both private and government institutions. Participants selected were those whose ages are between 18 to 55 years old and are residing and employed at Catbalogan City, Samar. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), people with ages ranging from 18-35 years old are considered young

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adults, and 26-55 years old are middle-aged adults. In choosing the participants, the researchers first selectively chose which among the industries in Catbalogan City have the most active users of digital technology. Upon identification, all employees under these industries were administered with an online survey to determine their experiences of digital stress. Through a purposive sampling technique, the participants who had the most negative experiences in using digital technology and devices were contacted for in-depth interviews.

### **1.3. Data Gathering Procedure**

Employing the Sequential Explanatory approach, the researchers first administered a survey among purposively selected industries within Catbalogan City, Samar that hold the most active users of digital technology. Data on the list of these establishments were obtained from the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). These industries included both private and government sectors of education and research, engineering, and information and communications technology (ICT). After the surveys, participants were purposively selected on the basis of number of digital stressors ticked. Participants with highest numbers of negative experiences on using digital technology were selected and subjected to in-depth one-on-one interviews.

In-depth interviews allowed the researchers to obtain the participants' experiences, coping strategies, outcomes of their coping strategies, their identified causal conditions of digital stress, and desired recommendations to aid their stress. The in-depth interviews were conducted via phone to follow strict health protocols. The set of data gathered from the interviews were used as basis for the formulation of the theoretical model. Semi-structured, in-depth telephone interviews were made at a time convenient for the participants. They were provided and discussed with the consent and confidentiality of the data they provide. The topic of digital stress was briefly discussed to them and with participants' permission, all interviews were audio-recorded. Semi-structured interview guide was validated by experts in the field of social sciences/psychology. Preliminary interview included participants' age, marital status, years of work experience and current working schedule. This were followed by questions on their experiences of digital stress and followed up by open-ended questions relating to their coping strategies in handling digital stress, outcomes, and desired recommendations. Theoretical saturation was determined after responses have numerously repeated.

### **1.4. Data Analysis**

All the data from the in-depth interviews investigating the participants' experiences on digital stress, type of digital stress experienced, coping strategies on digital stress, outcomes adopting its strategy, and recommendations will be subject to data analysis through thematic analysis. The Six Phases of Braun & Clarke were employed as guide. These phases include: 1) Familiarizing yourself with the data; 2) Generating initial codes; 3) Searching for themes; 4) Reviewing potential themes; 5) Defining and naming themes; and 6) Producing the report.

Validation of themes from experts was sought after the data analysis and before the report writing. This was to ensure that the data was dealt with accurately. All these qualitative accounts were used to explore the factors that constitute digital stress through a theoretical model.

### *1.5. Ethical Consideration*

Ethics approval for this research was sought from the Institutional Research Ethics Review Committee (IRERC). The objectives and voluntary nature of the study was explained to the participants and oral informed consent was obtained before each interview. Confidentiality was assured by using numbers instead of names and removing identifying information from the transcripts. All audio-recording and transcripts were secured and discarded after using the data for analysis.

## 2. RESULTS

The data of this study are divided into two (2) parts: (a) quantitative data which includes the socio-demographic profile of the participants together with their level of awareness towards digital stress; and the (b) qualitative data that emerged from the in-depth interviews conducted relating to the conditions that surround digital stress among adults.

### 2.1. Quantitative Result

Overall, 85 employed adults partook in the conduct of the surveys. Results showed that majority of the respondents are female (62%) while the other portion comprise the males (38%). Moreover, almost half of the respondents come from the education and research sector (49%), the remaining percentages come from the ICT sector (36%), and the engineering sector (15%). These data are reflected in the tables below.

Table 1. Distribution of Participants' Sex

SEX	Frequency	Percentage
Male	32	38%
Female	53	62%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 2. Distribution of Participants' Occupation

JOB TITLE	Frequency	Percentage
Teacher	39	46%
Engineer	13	15%
Researcher/Statistician	2	3%
ICT/Technical Support	31	36%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100%</b>

It was found out that majority of the respondents were slightly aware of the concept of digital stress, and majority of them consider themselves as digitally stressed. Figure 1 shows that 39% of the participants said that they are *slightly aware* of the concept of digital stress, 26% said that they are *extremely aware*, 22% expressed that they are *moderately aware*, 10% said that they are *very aware*, and only 3% confirmed that they are *not at all aware*.

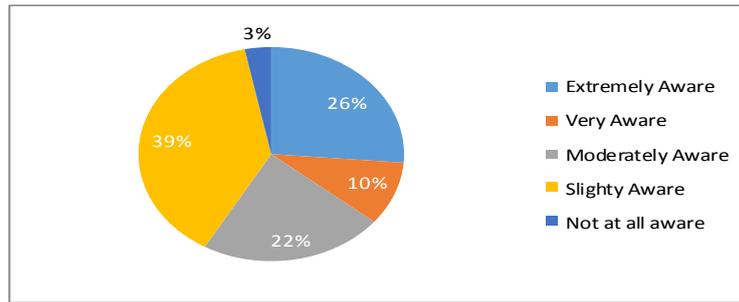


Figure 1: Participants' Awareness on Digital Stress

Moreover, Figure 2 shows that more than half of the respondents asserted that they are digitally stressed (79%) while the other portion says that they do not consider themselves as digitally stressed (21%).

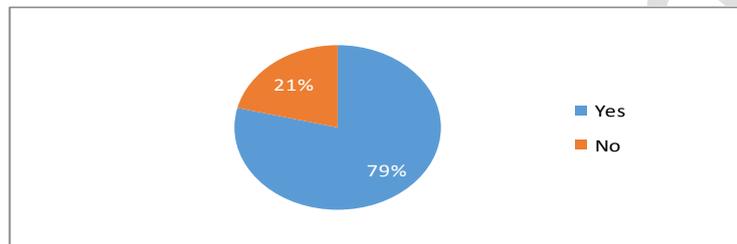


Figure 2: Distribution of Participants' considering themselves as Digitally Stress

Participants were also asked to identify some conditions detailed by the researchers that relate to their negative experiences on using digital technology. Their responses, as shown in the figure below, show that majority of them get frustrated over (1) slow internet connection and (2) computer lags. Other notable negative experiences include (3) being bothered by negative posts online; (4) getting distracted using social media when doing work online; (5) changes in moods when using digital technology; and (6) getting affected over interpersonal conflicts online.

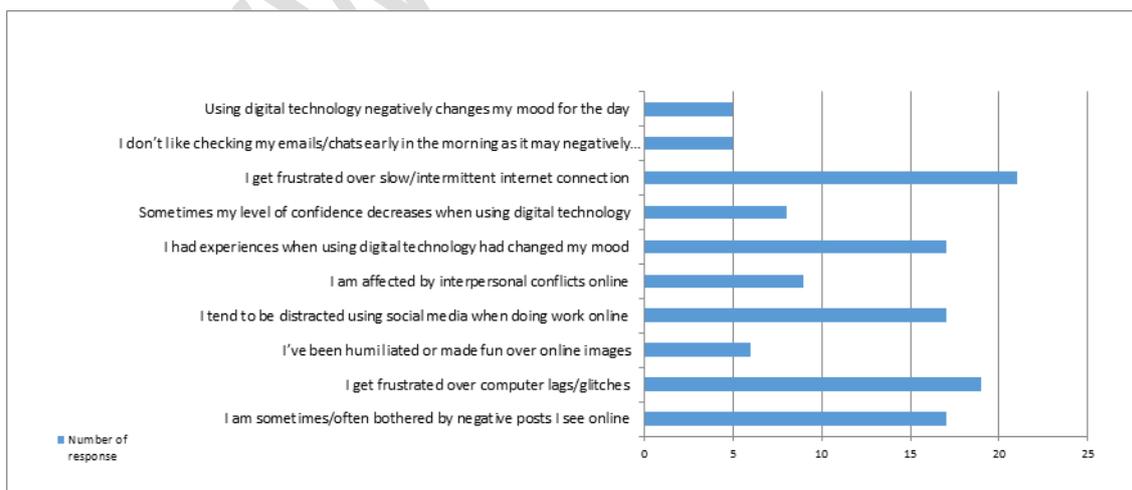


Figure 3: Distribution of Participants' Responses on the use of Digital Technology

### 3.2. Qualitative Results

Using a qualitative approach of one-on-one in-depth interviews, additional data were collected exploring further experiences of the participants on using digital technologies and how these contribute to their stress. Based on the analyses, five (5) major themes exuded namely: (a) Advantages and disadvantages of using digital technology; (b) Conditions leading to digital stress and; (c) Coping strategies; (d) Outcomes of coping strategies; (e) Recommendations to aid digital stress.

Table 3: Summary of Qualitative Results

THEMES	SUBTHEMES
Advantages of using digital technology	<i>(1) Flexibility at work; provides (2) fast and enhanced data sources, allows for (3) social connectivity and (4) improves the quality of their work.</i>
Disadvantages of using digital technology	<i>(1) Indolence, (2) misconceptions, and (3) skewed sense of identity.</i>
Conditions Leading to Digital Stress	<i>(1) Technical Difficulties which includes poor internet penetration, computer lagging and glitches; (2) Anxiety; (3) Distractions and; (4) Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Conflicts</i>
Coping Strategies Aiding Digital Stress	<i>(1) Multitasking (2) Engagement in Physical Activities and; (3) Emotional Regulation</i>
Outcomes of Strategies Employed	<i>(1) Regained Focus at Tasks (2) Better Emotional Responses and; (3) Increased Productivity</i>
Deemed Recommendations	<i>(1) Mental Well-Being Programs and; (2) Physical Wellness</i>

#### 3.2.1. Theme 1: Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Digital Technology

The first theme emphasized the pros and cons that heavy users of digital technology experience. Since the advent of pandemic, the demand for digital technology became heightened for both personal and professional purposes. From the analyses, it can be understood that usage of digital technology is two faceted—digital technology can offer beneficial results to its users; however, it can also result to detrimental outcomes derived from negative experiences.

The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has pivoted our society's traditional way of providing services. As response to curbing the spread of the disease, human mobility became limited leading to increased engagement on digital technology use. Majority of the participants affirmed that by incorporating these digital technologies to their personal and social

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endeavors, it showed positive effects that enabled them to carry out their responsibilities especially in this time of pandemic.

### **3.2.1.1. Subtheme A: Social Connectivity.**

A notable and dominant reason reported by the participants as one of the positive effects of utilizing these digital technologies is for social connectivity. It was constantly confirmed by them that it was a huge necessity for them to stay productive at work, and maintain connectivity with family and friends.

- *“Bisan waray face-to-face classes, may interaction gihap kami han akon mga students. (Even without the face-to-face mode of classes, my students and I can still interact) [Participant 7]*
- *“Dako gud an naging bulig ha akon—kay an social media—especially during han lockdown kay nakaka-istorya ko gihap akon mga friends and family kahit papano.” (Social media really helped me a lot especially during lockdown because I was able to communicate with my friends and family somehow) [Participant 3]*
- *“I was able to maintain a constant communication with my family, friends and colleagues even when we were physically apart.” [Participant 8]*

### **3.2.1.2. Subtheme B: Flexibility**

Participants reported that the use of digital technology, especially at work, allowed them flexibility. Tasks and responsibilities are performed at the comfort of their respective homes, and they can comply outputs and deliverables without the need to physically report to their offices.

- *“I use digital technologies mostly for my work which is very convenient. It does not require me to report physically to the office just to give update or status of my project or any work-related concerns.” [Participant 8]*
- *“One great thing that I can attest using these digital technologies is that I can be flexible, indeed. As long as I have internet connection, I can perform my tasks anywhere and anytime.” [Participant 2]*
- *“Mas napadali an amon work. We realized in the office that there could be a lot of tasks that don’t need to be talked about in a meeting. Yana, instead of meetings, our boss just sends emails or reminders in the chat room, which is way more convenient and less draining.” (Our work became easier. We realized in the office that there could be a lot of tasks that don’t need to be talked about in a meeting. Instead of physical meetings, our boss just sends us now emails or reminders in the chat room, which is way more convenient and less draining) [Participant 1]*

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### **3.2.1.3. Subtheme C: Fast and Enhanced Data Sources**

Aside from the flexibility that these digital technologies offer as affirmed by the participants, another beneficial aspect they reported was its ability to generate fast and enhanced data sources which is a big support both in their personal and work-related concerns. In a study conducted by Hannula & Lönnqvist (2011) that examined the effects of ICT on employees' productivity, it was proved that increased productivity was obtained when ICT is used entirely in a creative manner. However, ICT can also lead to impediments when misused.

- *“As a researcher, dako gud na bulig ine na mga digital technologies kay nakakag-access ako mga information which is essential for my study. Even in social media for example, nakakakuha ako mga useful information pinaagi han mga vlogs and posts na ginsi-share nira sugad hine nga mga platforms.” (As a researcher, digital technologies are a big help because I easily can access information that are essential for my research study. Even in social media for example, I can obtain useful information through vlogs and posts people share on their platforms) [Participant 3]*
- *“Maupay hiya kay nagiging bulig gihap para mapadali an trabaho. (Digital technology assists me and makes my work easier). Information and data are centralized and accessible.” [Participant 1]*

### **3.2.1.4. Subtheme D: Improved Quality of Work**

Participants also shared their experiences on improving their work quality through use of digital technologies. These permit them to have interactive discussions and forums that assist their performances in fulfilling their work-related concerns.

- *“Personally, digital technology helps me provide competent outputs at work. Exclusive chat groups and online forums have been very helpful in the projects we are working on. Digital technology undeniably provides speed and efficiency.” [Participant 1]*

On the other hand, the results also confirm that using digital technologies can impede well-being of employed adults. Factors leading to the negative side experienced by these participants include indolence, misconceptions and skewed sense of identity that practically affects their demeanor.

### **3.2.1.5. Subtheme E: Contributes Indolence**

Digital technologies offer a dynamic feature that allows users to enjoy it at a maximum degree. Not only does it allow social connectivity but also serves as an avenue for entertainment and other personal comforts. However, using these digital technologies, especially when working, can also lead to distractions that can affect employees' productivity. Participants shared that they get distracted from their office work when they start browsing in social and this occupies most of their time—leading to procrastination and laziness.

- *“There were instances when while I am working, my initial plan was just to chat my colleagues to ask something about work but later I realized that I lost track of the time.*

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Unconsciously, I was endlessly browsing and so I already delayed my work.” [Participant 8]

- “*Baga nahuhubya ka danay magtrabaho pag nakita ka mga content na nakakakuha hit imo interest.* (Somehow, I feel laziness at work when I see a content that gets my interest) [Participant 5]

### **3.2.1.6. Subtheme F: Creates Misconception**

Due to lack of emotional expressions of messages, using digital technology sometimes led to misconceptions. It was confirmed by the participants following this statement.

- “*I think the most stressful part is receiving emails or chats at work because sometimes digitally mediated messages sound stern and unkind. But I also think I just have a tendency to overthink it. Diri gad ada nag-iisog, formal la talaga siguro an message but still, it’s stressful.*” (For me, the most stressful part is receiving emails or chats at work because sometimes digitally mediated messages sound stern and unkind. But I also think I just have a tendency to overthink it. I don’t think [my colleagues] are mad at me, maybe the message it just too formal. But still, it’s stressful) [Participant 2]
- “*Siguro dida han nag-away kami ak ka-opisina. Na misinterpret kasi niya an akon message kay kasabot niya nag iisog ako. Awkward man liwat magbutang ako mga emoji para masireng nga dire ako nag-iisog.*” (I think, it was when I had a fight with my officemate. It’s because she misinterpreted my message thinking that I was frustrated. Well, it was awkward for me to put emojis in my message just to inform that I’m not mad) [Participant 7]

### **3.2.1.2. Subtheme G: Facilitates Skewed Sense of Identity**

Participants shared how the use of digital technology can affect them negatively in a way that it gives them a false and unrealistic apprehension of themselves, including the values they deem to be right. Additionally, they also reported that by engaging to these digital technologies, social media in particular, leads them to compare themselves and their status with what they see online.

- “Unfortunately, I noticed that I am comparing my lifestyle with other people online. Every time I see posts from my friends living their good lives, I feel a bit inferior.” [Participant 10]
- “Sometimes I question my values, but most of the times social media makes me think that other people are *bobo* [stupid] because of the nonsense they share online especially about politics.” [Participant 4]

These findings are supported by a study conducted by Alzahrani & Back (2014) scrutinizing the impact of social media use on personality development. Alzahrani & Back concluded that such modality can have a notable effect on the personality development in a way that these platforms not only create unrealistic standards but also triggers mental-related issues among users. The authors also added that unrestrained usage of social media manifest unfavorable ends among users especially to adolescent groups considering the developmental phase of that age hence, exposure to unrealistic standards of appearance can result to inauthentic self-perception.

### **3.2.2. Theme 2: Conditions Leading to Digital Stress**

Participants were also asked about the conditions leading to their state of being digitally stressed. Based on the survey, majority of the respondents affirmed that they were digitally stressed. During the in-depth interview, participants were asked to expound their responses on the conditions they deemed as contributors to the digital stress they experience.

#### **3.2.2.1. Subtheme A: Technical Difficulties**

It was revealed that technical difficulties including internet connection and computer glitches were the dominant factors that contribute to their digital stress. The unstable and poor services given by network providers heightened the participants' distress when dealing with work.

- *“It internet it akon dako na problem. Nakakatrigger talaga hiya; stress labi na kun may ginhihimo ako na urgent tapos maluya pa it connection. (My biggest problem is the internet connection. It is seriously triggering and stressful especially when I have an urgent output to complete) [Participant 7]*
- *“Minsan an issue talaga an akon laptop. Kasi at my work, I use applications that require high-performing devices. In my case where I depend mostly on my laptop which is outdated, it's stressing kay nagha-hang.” (Sometimes it's my laptop that's the issue. At my work, I use applications that require high-performing devices so since my laptop is outdated, it lags) [Participant 2]*

According to a study by Bean (2017), it was revealed that experiencing technical faults and poor service connection can result to decreased productivity of employees and lost working hours. This finding was supported by this present study wherein participants remarked that such factors can also have a significant effect in their performance.

#### **3.2.2.2. Subtheme B: Anxiety**

Some respondents revealed that they get anxious over digital messages concerning work. They admitted that work-related emails change their mood and so some participants avoid browsing their emails to escape feelings of anxiety.

- *“I get anxious a lot when I receive emails or chat ha messenger about work na ginfa-follow-up ako. It's also on me kay di ko man liwat natatapos pa an akon tasks so often times, I don't read my emails or chats para diri ma-stress.” (I get anxious a lot over emails and chats related to work. It's also on me because I still haven't finished the tasks assigned to me so oftentimes, I just don't read my emails and chats so I won't get stressed) [Participant 1]*
- *“Nakaka-change talaga hin mood mag-check hin emails. (Checking emails can really change one's mood) What I do is I schedule my email-checking after 5pm so I have to deal with those tomorrow.” [Participant 8]*

### 3.2.2.3. *Subtheme C: Distractions*

Some participants guiltily admitted that they get so engaged on browsing at social media platforms and this is one of the reasons that they procrastinate or fail to meet deadlines at work.

- “As I have mentioned earlier, I get easily distracted with posts online. It’s stressing for me because I need to keep up with my tasks and solve the delay that I caused because I have been engaging too much of my time in social media.” [Participant 3]
- “Danay kay occupied ka na duro hit imo gintatrabaho tapos tigda la may ma-call ha imo, ma-iistorbo ka gud.” (Sometimes when I’m focused on my work then suddenly a call comes up, that ruins my productivity) [Participant 6]

According to a survey conducted by CareerBuilder (as cited by Holmes, 2021) that aims to identify factors that affect productivity, social media landed as fourth in the top 10 major distractions at the workplace. The results of the study showed that more than half of the 2, 175 employees affirmed that they were bothered by constant usage of their devices while 48% confirmed internet browsing.

### 3.2.2.4. *Subtheme D: Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Conflict*

Merchant (2012) explained that intrapersonal conflict occurs when our goals, values and beliefs diverge. Participants of this study shared that contents and shared posts online that deviate from their values and standards are stress-provoking situations for them that ultimately contribute to their experience of digital stress. Consequently, participants also expressed that intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts caused by lack of emotional connection, differing values and unhealthy comparisons further lead them to feelings of distress.

- “Dire mo maiiwasan talaga na maka-encounter mga posts na para ha imo waray kwenta sanglit maii-stress ka talaga especially yana nga mag e-eleksyon.” (I can’t avoid posts that causes me stress especially that the election season is coming) [Participant 4]
- “Makita ka danay mga post ha imo mga friends about ira achievements, lifestyle, ngan iba pa tapos ikaw, nabibilin na siring pa.” (Sometimes I see posts of my friends about their achievements, lifestyle and other things and here I am, left behind as they say) [Participant 6]
- “Bothering hiya sobra kay danay namimisinterpret it imo message hit imo receiver asay pa pagchat la. Danay dire ka naiinitindihan or dire kamo nagkakaintindihay.” (It’s bothersome because sometimes my messages are misinterpreted especially at chat rooms. Sometimes the person I talk to misunderstands me.) [Participant 2]

### 3.2.3. *Theme 3: Coping strategies Aiding Digital Stress*

The third theme highlights the coping strategies the participants employ in addressing their stress. Mainly, the participants multitask, engage in physical activities and regulate their emotions when faced with digital challenges.

### **3.2.3.1. Subtheme A: Multitask**

As distractions contribute to the stress felt by the participants, they have consequently expounded that multitasking is one of their ways to alleviate their distress.

- *“Well, there’s nothing I can do about the distractions. Personally, I just do my things simultaneously so that I can still complete my tasks despite my engagement in social media. As I finish my tasks, I was also able satisfy my personal interest.”* [Participant 8]

### **3.2.3.2. Subtheme B: Engage in Physical Activities**

Some participants also share that engaging in physical activities is another way to cope with their stress. They added that it does not only it mitigate their distress but also helps them to improve their vigor.

- *“Pag feeling ko masyado na toxic it mga nakikita ko online, naiwas la anay ako paggamit hine na mga platforms instead, nagba-biking ako. In a sense, maupay hiya kay maiibanan imo stress pagkinompara hit imo mga nakikita online. Ngan mas na iimprove pa lugod imo health physically.”* (Whenever I feel like what I consume online gets too toxic, I temporarily avoid using these digital platforms and instead, I go biking. Not only does it mitigates my stress, it also improved my physical health) [Participant 1]
- *“Every weekend, I play volleyball with my friends. I think it’s a good way to release stress associated from using these technologies. Doing this makes me unbothered with conflicts that can trigger my stress online. Nagkakaada kapa lugod time makaupod imo mga friends personally.”* (And it allows me to bond with my friends) [Participant 10]
- *“Pag grabi ngani it kahinay it internet, grabi gud akon stress asay pa pag malain it panahon. Akon hihimo, ginlilibang ko nala akon sarili panipig hit mga trabahoon ha balay. Maupay pa lugod kay naiibanan akon mga ligpiton.”* (When I get too stressed over slow internet connection, especially during bad weather conditions, I just do household chores) [Participant 3]

### **3.2.3.3. Subtheme C: Emotional Regulation**

By definition, the term refers to taking full-control of our own emotional condition. As cited by Ong & Thompson (2019), emotional regulation is a set regulatory processes that can be employed to readdress intensified emotions and control or mitigate the magnitude, latency, and duration of emotions. When faced with distressing situation, people tend to modify their emotional state in order to facilitate action. Participants of this present study shared that regulating their intense emotions has resulted to positive effects. By acknowledging their negative emotional state, they are able to provide resolutions that help them perform their tasks more efficiently despite the stressful situation.

- “I try to calm myself every time I get very stressed from using these digital technologies. I take a break for a while. I entertain myself, I talk to my friends or eat good food. That way, I feel a sense of relief and that makes me continue with the projects I’m working on.” [Participant 6]
- “I listen to relaxing music, rest for a while and take a deep breath. These help me a lot in managing my anger whenever my laptop lags. I know that if I will let my anger get the best of me, it will only lead me to bigger problems.” [Participant 2]

### **3.2.4. Theme 4: Outcomes of strategies employed**

Participants were also asked about the outcomes they observed after employing the aforementioned coping strategies. Their responses are summarized into three: (1) regained focus at tasks; (2) better emotional responses; and (2) productivity at work.

#### **3.2.4.1. Subtheme A: Regained Focus at Tasks**

- “After ko mag-biking (after biking), I start to get more productive at work and I have better focus.” [Participant 1]
- “Mas nakakag-trabaho na ako ka-human ko mag-relax. Kesa naman magpinadayon pag-trabaho na stressed ka na, taking a break first helps. (I am more productive after relaxation. I prefer that rather than continuing work on a stressed state. Taking a break first helps) [Participant 10]

#### **3.2.4.2. Subtheme B: Better Emotional Responses**

- “Well, I feel better afterwards. When I give time to regulate my feelings, my head is clearer afterwards and I respond better to the situation. *Maaram man ako na waray maupay na mananabo kun mapadara ako hit akon frustration* (I know that getting carried away by my frustrations won’t do me good)” [Participant 5]

#### **3.2.4.3. Subtheme C: Productivity at Work**

As participants employ multitasking, takes the time to engage in physical activities and regulate their emotions, they expressed evidence of continued productivity as they do their tasks. Despite the negative experiences, participants reported that they were able to continue and complete their tasks.

- “Multitasking still allows me to be productive. *Bisan la nagka-cram ngan procrastinate, nakakatapos man gihap trabahoon* (I cram and procrastinate a lot but I still finish my tasks somehow).” [Participant 2]

### **3.2.5. Theme 5: Deemed Recommendations Aiding Digital Stress**

During the individual interviews, the participants were also asked about their desired and suggested recommendations to aid digital stress. Their responses include: (1) mental well-being programs, and (2) promotion of physical wellness to help people aid digital stress.

#### **3.2.5.1. Subtheme A: Mental Well-Being Programs**

A handful of the participants cited mental well-being initiatives as their desired recommendations to aid digital stress. Some participants expressed how the workplace play a big responsibility in upfronting mental health programs for their employees.

- *“I also think companies should be mindful of the stress employees get from the workplace. They should be responsible in conducting mental health initiatives for their employees and see to it that their employees are healthy and stress-free.” [Participant 8]*
- *“Siguro dapat liwat kita maglikay ha sobra nga consumption of the digital world. (We must also avoid unhealthy consumption of the digital sphere) It is also up to us to take care of our own mental health.” [Participant 4]*

### **3.2.5.2. Subtheme B: Physical Wellness**

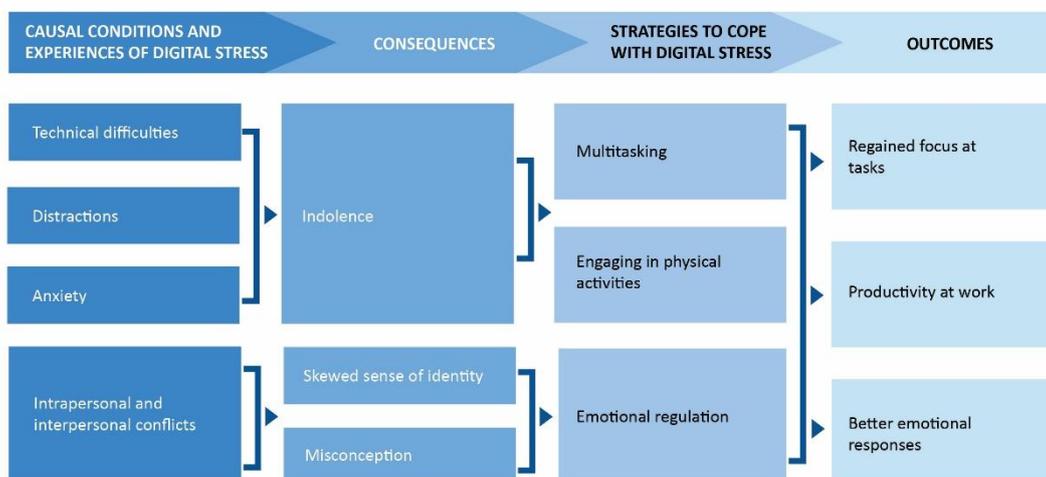
Participants also believe that engaging to the good old physical activities to pursue wellness is one key to aid any type of stress. According to them, not only will it improve mental being, but will also enhance physical well-being.

- *“As for me, since my hobby is biking, I still believe that doing physical activities is a good recommendation to people striving to be digitally stressed-free. It’s good not only for a stress-free mind but will also improve our physical health.” [Participant 1]*
- *“I think maupay nga escape from digital stress an yoga or Zumba. (I think yoga and Zumba are good escape from digital stress) Those are good stress relievers.” [Participant 8]*

## **3. GENERAL PREPOSITION**

This theoretical model explains the link between the conditions that surround employed adults’ digital stress and the causal conditions, experiences, consequences, coping strategies, and outcomes of coping strategies for digital stress. Based on this model, employed adults become digitally stressed due to the following conditions: (1) technical difficulties, (2) distractions, (3) anxiety, and intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts. As participants experience technical difficulties over slow internet connection and computer glitches, and distractions over endless browsing at social media and anxiety, these lead to indolence and feelings laziness. Furthermore, intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts have led to skewed sense of identity, and misconceptions among peers.

To aid this stress, adults employ various coping strategies such as (1) multitasking, (2) engaging on physical activities, and (3) regulating emotions. These coping strategies ultimately led to their (1) regained focus at tasks, (2) productivity at work, and (3) better emotional responses.



*Figure 4. Theoretical model of the conditions surrounding digital stress among employed adults*

## 5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study generally aimed to look at the conditions surrounding digital stress among employed adults especially amid pandemic where use of digital technology has flourished. Specifically, it aimed to (1) explore the informants' experiences on digital stress, (2) find out the informants' conditions leading to digital stress, (3) document the strategies to cope with digital stress and the outcomes of these strategies, and (4) identify the participants' desired recommendations to aid digital stress.

This study employed the Sequential Explanatory design wherein surveys among purposively chosen industries were conducted, followed by in-depth interviews among elected employees under those industries. More specifically, various industries that heavily use digital technology were selected for surveys using a purposive sampling technique. After which, selected survey participants were chosen for one-on-one interviews based on highest number of digital stressors ticked. Data saturation was reached after 10 interviews.

The results of this study showed that the conditions contributing to the digital stress include: technical failures from poor internet penetration and low functioning devices, inevitable distractions emerging from the multi-features offered by these digital technologies, and intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts derived from divergence in personal goals and values of the participants. These conditions led to indolence at work, skewed sense of identity among the participants, and misconceptions among their peers. However, findings also revealed that using digital technologies does not only give them negative experiences but also offer them personal and professional benefits. Notable reasons for sustained engagement in these digital technologies include social connectivity, flexibility and accessibility of information for work, and improved quality of work output with the help of digital technologies. Overall, despite the conditions surrounding digital stress experienced by the participants, they were able to address the challenges by asserting various coping strategies including multitasking, engaging in physical activities, and emotional regulation. The

outcomes of these employed strategies ultimately led them to better focus, better emotional responses, and more productivity at work.

This study proved that a huge portion of employees in Catbalogan experience digital stress. While they have plenty of ways to cope, it is still of paramount concern that these experiences of stress be addressed so as to put forward the mental and physical wellbeing of employees. Considering the high demand of digital technology use today, the results of this study are quality inputs as bases in the formulation of policies concerning the implementation of initiatives that shall put forward the welfare of employees. This may include policies in ‘work-from-home’ modalities and other conditions and/or strategies that have significant effects to the individual’s productivity and mental health as an employee. By discovering the digital stress occurrence and the different conditions surrounding digital stress among individuals, this study intends to influence policy and program formulation processes of local offices/agencies in Samar province, Philippines.

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