

Chapter 57

The Association between Internet Addiction and Psychosocial Variables

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ABSTRACT

The past decade has seen plenty of studies focusing on Internet use and Internet addiction. This is because the Internet provides information about variety of topics all over world and is easily accessed. Arguments concerning the association between excessive use and Internet addiction are ongoing. There is not yet a clear, consensus definition of Internet addiction. In this chapter, we discuss previous research and implications for future studies regarding Internet addiction and its most studied psychosocial variables: depression, loneliness, social anxiety, self-esteem, life satisfaction, and social support.

The 20th century was the century of information and communication technologies, but the 21st century is an Internet age in which information all over the world is connected and easily accessed (Bozoglan, Demirer & Sahin, 2013). The Internet provides a new communication medium that enables access to vast amounts of information across a wide variety of topics (Yang & Tung, 2007), which makes it an essential part of modern life and by which it has brought easiness to the present life providing convenience in terms of studying, living, and working (Nalwa & Anand, 2003; Shek & Yu, 2012; Yang et al., 2014). Since the computer networking systems; i.e., the Internet has been used widely for online activities, such as online chatting, gaming, television, and shopping have rapidly emerged (Wang et al., 2013).

Besides the use of the Internet has brought various conveniences to our life, negative effects are also created by addictive behaviors to the Internet pervasively on one's academic, work and family lives as well as social relationships, physical health, and psychological well-being (Shek & Yu, 2012; Yen, Ko, Yen, Wu, & Yang, 2007; Young & Rogers, 1998). Finally, psychosocial problems linked with Internet use have also been observed since the end of the 1990s (Young, 1999), in that Internet addiction has been one of the most serious problems (Yang et al., 2014).

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The first involvement about Internet addiction was made by Young with the adaptation of pathological gambling criteria in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-Fourth Edition (DSM-IV) (Young, 1998a; Young & Rodgers, 1998). Young established that there are growing numbers of people with Internet addiction both in the USA and in other developed countries (Young, 1998b). Then, several studies have used different words to identify Internet addicts such as Internet dependents, problematic Internet users, or pathological Internet users (Davis, 2001; Lin & Tsai, 2002; Shek, Sun, & Yu, 2013).

WHAT IS INTERNET ADDICTION?

There are various views concerning Internet addiction and the definitions of Internet addiction (Gunuc & Dogan, 2013; Shek & Yu, 2012). However, there is an agreement that Internet addiction occurs (Chou, Condon, & Belland, 2005), although there is not a standardized definition of Internet addiction. The term refers to failure to stop the desire for excessive Internet use, feelings of extreme nervousness when deprived of the Internet leading to noticeable sorrow and functional impairment in lives of users such as psychological, social, academic, and/or work difficulties (Young, 1999; Young, 2004; Young, 2007).

Internet addiction is generally defined as a kind of psychological addiction representing the necessity to be on the Internet. Griffiths (2000) describes the term as a kind of technology addiction and a behavioral addiction similar to a gambling habit. Morahan-Martin and Schumacher (2000) define Internet addiction as excessive use of the Internet, failure to control Internet use and as potential to lead serious problem to the life of the individual. Beard and Wolf (2001) identify it as excessive use of the Internet that could cause an individual to have difficulties at home, at work, at school and in social or psychological life. Davis (2001) defined it as a multidimensional syndrome including cognitive, emotional, and behavioral symptoms, causing trouble in handling one's Internet use. Nalwa and Anand (2003) defined Internet addiction as the psychological addiction to the Internet and considered as increasing activities on Internet, unpleasant feelings when offline and increasing tolerance to Internet, finally as denial of the problematic behavior. Internet addiction typically causes to loss of control, withdrawal, weakening of function, to reduce decision-making capability (Ko, Yen, Chen, Chen, & Yen, 2005), and cause to online surfing in spite of negative impacts on social and psychological well-being (Shaw & Black, 2008; Tao et al., 2010).

The common features of these definitions emphasize the length of time on the Internet, and nervousness, restlessness and irritability at times of no Internet use. The literature in general suggests that there are several components of Internet addiction. Block (2008) argues that Internet addiction has four components: (1) excessive Internet use, often associated with a loss of the sense of time or a neglect of basic drives; (2) withdrawal, including feelings of anger, tension, and/or depression when the computer is inaccessible; (3) tolerance, including the need for better computer equipment, more software, or more hours of use; and (4) negative repercussions, including arguments, lying, poor achievement, social isolation, and fatigue.

The researches keep debating whether Internet addiction is a disorder and what kind of a disorder it is. In Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V), it has not been stated that Internet addiction is a disorder. Young (1998a) defined the Internet addiction as the impairment closest "pathological gambling" which is under the headline of impulse control disorder in DSM-IV and which does not include the abuse of any material is. When the negative mental, social, economic, cultural and educational effects caused by the Internet addiction are considered, it is necessary to do further detailed researches to clarify and identify this addiction type.

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