Chapter 20
Personality, Internet Addiction, and Other Technological Addictions:
A Psychological Examination of Personality Traits and Technological Addictions

Zaheer Hussain
University of Derby, UK

Halley M. Pontes
Nottingham Trent University, UK

ABSTRACT

Research into technological addictions, such as Internet addiction, smartphone addiction and social networking addiction has greatly increased. It is important to understand how technological addictions may be related to different personality types and key individual differences associated to personality. This chapter provides empirical and conceptual insights into how technological addictions may be related to different personality types and key individual differences associated to personality. This chapter focuses on a number of technological addictions and illustrates how research and theory in this area has developed in relation to commonly researched personality traits (e.g., extraversion, introversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and narcissism) and key individual differences related to personality (e.g., personality disorders). The complex nature of personality and technological addictions is discussed together with areas for future research.

INTRODUCTION

Recent figures suggest that 40% of the world's population have access to the Internet, worldwide Internet usage has increased with 499 million Internet users in Europe, 647 million users in the Americas, 240 million users in Africa and 1.7 billion users in Asia and the Pacific region (International Telecommunication Union [ITU], 2016). When considering country specific data, 74% of individuals use the

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Internet in the United States of America (USA), 91% in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), 93% in Japan and 89% in South Korea (ITU, 2016). Although Internet use is usually beneficial and advantageous for most people (Howard, Wilding & Guest, 2016; Heo et al. 2015; Roy & Ferguson, 2016; Wiederhold, 2017), increased availability and high penetration rates across the globe can facilitate the emergence of excessive and addictive behaviors related to Internet use. Furthermore, many people appear to display impulsive, narcissistic and aggressive personalities online which can be nurtured by various Internet technologies (Aboujaoude, 2017).

Internet addiction has been defined as "excessive or poorly controlled preoccupations, urges or behaviours regarding computer use and Internet access that lead to impairment or distress" (Weinstein & Lejoyeux, 2010, p277). Studies have systematically shown that excessive use of the Internet can lead to Internet addiction (Durkee et al. 2012; Pontes & Griffiths, 2016a; Pontes & Griffiths, 2017; Lortie & Guitton, 2013), which comprises a heterogeneous spectrum of Internet-related activities with a potential to cause problems for the individual, such as gaming, shopping, gambling, or social networking. In fact, the phenomenon of Internet addiction has been recognized since the mid-1990s as a new type of addiction and a mental health problem that exhibits signs and symptoms like those of other established addictions. Young (1996) and Griffiths (1996) were among the first researchers to investigate Internet addiction from a scientific perspective by publishing case study accounts of individuals who suffered from this condition based on an adapted criterion for pathological gambling as defined in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV; American Psychiatric Association, 1994). In one of the earliest studies published in the field, Young (1998) investigated a sample of 396 dependent Internet users who endorsed a minimum of five out of eight criteria adapted from the diagnostic criteria for pathological gambling in the DSM-IV, and 100 non-dependent Internet users. The results of this study indicated that on average, the dependent users spent eight times more hours online than the controls, and used chat rooms and Multi User Dungeons (MUDs). With regards to online gaming addiction diagnostic approaches, researchers and clinicians are now utilizing the nine diagnostic criteria for Internet Gaming Disorder that was developed by the American Psychiatric Association in the last revision of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.; DSM–5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013). According to the APA (2013), the clinical diagnosis of Internet Gaming Disorder comprises a behavioral pattern encompassing persistent and recurrent use of the Internet to engage in online games, leading to significant impairment or distress over a period of 12 months as specified by the endorsement of at least five out of the following nine criteria: (i) preoccupation with Internet games; (ii) withdrawal symptoms when Internet gaming is taken away; (iii) tolerance, resulting in the need to spend increasing amounts of time engaged in Internet games; (iv) unsuccessful attempts to control participation in Internet games; (v) loss of interest in previous hobbies and entertainment as a result of, and with the exception of, Internet games; (vi) continued excessive use of Internet games despite knowledge of psychosocial problems; (vii) deceiving family members, therapists, or others regarding the amount of Internet gaming; (viii) use of Internet games to escape or relieve negative moods; and (ix) jeopardizing or losing a significant relationship, job, or education or career opportunity because of participation in Internet games (APA, 2013). Given these recent advances, researchers have now developed several standardized psychometric assessment tools to assess both Internet Gaming Disorder (Pontes et al., 2014; Pontes & Griffiths, 2015; Pontes, 2016) and generalized Internet addiction (Pontes & Griffiths, 2016a, 2016b, 2017) based on the nine Internet Gaming Disorder criteria.

Various terms have been used to name the condition of Internet addiction, including compulsive computer use (Black, Belsare, & Schlosser, 1999), Internet dependency (te Wildt, 2011), pathological