

Chapter 22

Loneliness and Internet Addiction Among University Students

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ABSTRACT

The present study was designed to determine the relationship between loneliness and Internet addiction, based on a sample of young generation from Turkey. Participants in this study were students of the Hacettepe University in Ankara, Turkey (n = 440). Findings show that there is a statistically significant relationship ($p < 0.05$) between students' Internet addiction and only the grade they are studying. According to the correlation analysis, it was found that there is a negative relationship between the loneliness of students and the time they spend on the internet, and a positive relationship between internet addiction and age of students. Moreover, it was found that the age, time spent on the Internet and loneliness of university students were important determinants of Internet addiction.

INTRODUCTION

Advances in technology have made the Internet an indispensable part of our lives. The Internet brings the world so close together today, by its positive aspects such as conducting research, performing business transactions & communications, accessing library journals, and communicating with social relations, etc. (Sukunesan, 1999). However, it has also turned out to be an important source of risk. In spite of the widely perceived merits of this tool, psychologists and educators have been aware of the negative impacts of its use, especially the over or misuse (Bricolo, Gentile, Smelser and Serpelloni, 2007; Greenfield, 2000; Hur, 2006).

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-8900-6.ch022

BACKGROUND

Internet Addiction

Excessive Internet use is discussed by many researchers with different concepts. “Internet Addiction” (Young and Rodgers, 1998), “Internet Dependency” (Wang, 2001), “Pathological Internet Use” (Davis, 2001), “Problematic Internet Use” (Kaltiala-Heino, Lintonen and Rimpela, 2004), “Internet Abuse” (Young and Case, 2004), “Excessive Internet Use” (Yang et al., 2005), “Internet Addiction Disorder” (Gonzalez, 2002), are many of these. Griffiths (2000) has described Internet addiction as a kind of technology addiction and a behavioral addiction similar to a gambling habit. Internet addiction can be defined in general as excessive use of the Internet; it is the inability to resist the desire to use it, loss of the importance of time spent without being connected to it, extreme nervousness and aggression when deprived of it, and increased deterioration of one’s business, social, and family life (Young, 2004).

The literature suggests that there are several components of Internet addiction. Young (1999), while collecting the component for Internet addiction under 8 headings, argued that of these eight component, a person could be regarded as addicted who matched five of them. These component are: (a) excessive thoughts related to the Internet, thinking about the Internet; (b) an increasing proportion of Internet use is expected for pleasure; (c) unsuccessful attempts at quitting or decreasing Internet use; (d) restlessness, depression, or anger occur in the absence of Internet usage; (e) being online longer than planned; (f) experiencing problems with family, school, work, and friends due to excessive Internet usage; (g) lying to others (family, friends, therapist, etc.) about time spent on the Internet; (h) using the Internet to get away from negative feelings or to escape from problems. According Block (2008) 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.

In literature, there are a number of studies demonstrating the relationship between Internet addiction and the Internet use purposes. When the findings of these studies (Ceyhan, 2008; Ceyhan & Ceyhan, 2008; Leung, 2004; Keser Özcan & Buzlu, 2007; Kesici & Şahin, 2009; Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2003; Yang & Tung, 2007) are taken into consideration, it is seen that the Internet use purpose acts as a significant determiner in distinguishing unhealthy/problematic Internet users from healthy users in terms of their Internet use, and the Internet users who do not have problematic Internet use behavior prefer to use the Internet primarily to obtain information, while problematic Internet users tend to use the Internet more for entertainment, social activities, and interactive virtual games.

Researchers have described a wide range impacts of Internet addiction such as excessive amounts of time spent online, feeling that the world outside of the Internet is boring, becoming irritated if disturbed while online, and decreased social interaction with “real” people (Kraut et al., 1998). They have also characterized Internet addiction by psychomotor agitation, anxiety, craving (Ferraro, Caci, D’Amico, and Di Blasi, 2007), loss of control, intolerance, withdrawal, impairment of function, reduced decision-making ability (Ko, Yen, Chen, Chen, and Yen, 2005), and migraine or headache, sleep pattern disrupt etc (Jeon, 2005; You, 2007; Yang and Tung, 2007). Moreover, Shapira et al. (2000) stated that Internet addiction might result in financial problems.

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