Internet Addiction Among Youth

Nour elhouda Arbi [1]

[1]: ''Echahid Hamma Lakhdar'' University (El Oued), Algeria, Laboratory of Social Development and Society Service, arbi-nourelhouda@univ-eloued.dz

Abstract:

The present research paper aims to explore the phenomenon of Internet addiction, which emerged alongside modern technologies and their increasing influence on the human mind, making it difficult for individuals to function without them, as they have become essential to daily life. The article discusses the symptoms and types of Internet addiction, followed by an examination of the key factors that drive individuals toward addiction. Finally, it highlights the impact of addiction on mental, physical, and social health, which forms the core of the research and presents the most important therapeutic approaches for addressing this issue.

Keywords:

Internet addiction, youth, technology.

Statement of the problem

Internet addiction, also referred to as pathological Internet use, is a contemporary phenomenon that emerged with the rise of computers and their diverse applications. This phenomenon was fueled by society's pursuit of informational dominance, which provided individuals of all ages with easy access to the digital world, encouraging them to engage in this compulsive behavior. Over time, the dynamics of human interaction shifted dramatically—from spending long hours with family and friends to devoting even more time to the Internet and its related platforms. These platforms became an escape from life's pressures, anxiety, depression, and other negative emotions, transforming the Internet into a form of emotional relief. Gradually, people developed an unconscious and increasing dependency on it. This dependency brought about significant psychological and physical effects, distancing individuals, particularly young people, from real-world social interactions. As the group most open to embracing new technologies and trends, youth have become especially vulnerable to the grip of Internet addiction.

Youth represents a social stage that follows adolescence, during which clear signs of social, psychological, and biological maturity begin to emerge. Despite this maturation, the role of socialization agents, such as the family, school, religious institutions, peers, media, and other societal organizations, remains crucial in shaping and guiding young individuals through this phase. Given the rapid economic and social transformations in society, youth are particularly receptive and eager to engage with these changes, making them more susceptible to both positive and negative influences. In light of this, we can raise the following questions:

- What are the underlying causes of pathological Internet addiction among young people?

- What are the impacts of pathological Internet addiction on youth

Significance of research:

The significance of this research stems from the critical role the Internet plays in the daily lives of young people, offering a wealth of opportunities and information. However, its misuse can have negative consequences, particularly for youth. Therefore, it is essential to raise awareness about the positive aspects and opportunities provided by the Internet while establishing guidelines for its responsible use.

Objectives of the research:

- To identify the factors that contribute to young people's excessive Internet use.
- To recognize the symptoms associated with daily Internet consumption.
- To understand the effects of pathological Internet addiction on the mental and physical well-being of young people.
- To explore therapeutic methods aimed at reducing or overcoming Internet addiction.

Previous studies:

The extensive study conducted by **Kraut (1981)**, which spanned two years, aimed to examine **the effects of Internet use among young people**. The research was carried out in Pennsylvania, USA, on a sample of 169 youth identified as Internet addicts. The study revealed significant findings, most notably that there are negative psychological and social consequences associated with excessive Internet use. It was found that the more time young people spent online, the lower their levels of social activity became, accompanied by an increase in feelings of social isolation and depression.

Halley M. Pontes et al. (2014) conducted a study titled **Internet Addiction and Isolation in Adolescent Children** at the University of Nottingham, under the auspices of the Lisboa Center, in Spain. The study aimed to explore the extent of problems caused by Internet addiction in children and adolescents, focusing on the social, demographic, and behavioral characteristics of this group and how they are affected by this addiction. Additionally, the study sought to develop a model capable of predicting Internet addiction at an educational and teaching level. The research sample included 131 schools, and the findings revealed that a significant portion of participants suffered from Internet addiction. Furthermore, the study demonstrated a link between Internet addiction and social isolation among the participants. The results also indicated that addiction could be predicted based on three key variables: weekly Internet usage, social isolation, and specific behavioral patterns.

The **Kassi Study** (2018), titled **Psychological and Social Effects of Internet Use Among Adolescent Students in the City of Constantine - An Exploratory Study**, aimed to investigate the psychological and social consequences of Internet use among adolescent students. The research centered around the core question: *What are the psychological and social effects of Internet use on*

adolescent students? To address this, a questionnaire was developed and administered to a sample of 150 male and female adolescents from Constantine, selected through a deliberate sampling method. The study found that adolescents who spent long hours daily on the Internet, particularly on electronic communication sites, often lost track of time. This immersion led to disturbances in their family lives, neglect of social and academic responsibilities, and feelings of loneliness and social isolation. Additionally, the study revealed that prolonged Internet use contributed to a deterioration in moral values and an increased tolerance for behaviors considered forbidden.

Fouzia Abdullah Al Ali's study (2012), titled *The Social and Psychological Effects of the Internet on Youth in the United Arab Emirates: A Field Study on Students of the University of Sharjah*, aimed to investigate the social and psychological impacts of Internet use on students at the College of Communication, University of Sharjah. The research sought to understand students' impressions of Internet use, along with their positive and negative perceptions, particularly among frequent users. The importance of this study lies in recognizing university students as a vital part of society, characterized by their quest for information and the exploration of their world. Their desire to seek diverse information and experiences has increased the demand for Internet usage as a modern technological tool. The study also aimed to uncover the social, educational, and psychological effects of Internet use on university students. Using a comprehensive survey method, the researcher gathered data from a sample of 200 students, employing personal interviews for data collection. The findings revealed that Internet use contributes to social isolation, addiction, and secrecy among students. Additionally, it highlighted that families are often unaware of the social risks associated with Internet use, with many students using the Internet as an escape from personal problems. Based on these findings, the researcher recommended ongoing monitoring of children's Internet use and encouraging parents to engage with their children about the sites they visit, especially since many students indicated that their parents actively follow up on their online activities.

Rabi'a's 2003 study, titled *Internet Addiction in Light of Some Variables*, aimed to explore the negative effects of Internet addiction and identify the preferred Internet sites among young people. The sample included 150 university students—104 males and 46 females—divided into two groups: 32 identified as Internet addicts and 108 as non-addicts. The research employed two instruments developed by the researcher: an Internet usage motives form and an Internet addiction scale. The findings revealed statistically significant differences between the two groups, with addicts showing a higher average intensity of motives for Internet use and spending more daily hours online. While no significant differences were found regarding general information searching, addicts were more likely to use the Internet for freedom of expression and satisfying unmet desires, as well as for staying connected with friends. These results highlight the distinct motivations and behaviors associated with Internet addiction among young people.

Comments on previous studies:

The presentation of previous studies has significantly aided in formulating and refining the focus of the current research, clarifying the concepts related to the topic, and illuminating the

methodological approaches utilized in theoretical studies, as well as providing relevant references on Internet addiction.

In terms of similarities and differences, the objectives of this study align with those of prior research, as all have investigated the social and psychological effects of Internet addiction. However, distinct categories were explored across various studies: for example, Halley M. Pontes's research focused on adolescent children, while Kraut's (1981) study examined psychosocial effects specifically on young people. Both Kassi (2018) and Fawzia Abdullah Al Ali (2012) studies, while sharing similar objectives with the current research, employed a field study approach, whereas the present study is theoretical. Furthermore, these two studies targeted specific demographic groups— adolescent students and youth, respectively. In contrast, the 2003 study on Internet addiction examined different variables but shared the overarching goal of understanding the negative effects of Internet addiction on young people in general.

1. Research Concepts

1.1. The concept of addiction:

Lexically, addiction is defined as persisting in something or depending on it. (Khalil, 2002), it is a condition that results from excessive and intensive consumption of a natural or synthetic substance, leading the individual to become both physically and psychologically dependent on it. (Kassim, 2010)

It is also defined as the inability of a person to do without something, regardless of what that thing is, as long as it meets the other criteria for addiction. If the individual abstains from it, they may experience withdrawal symptoms, which can lead to serious problems. (Allah, n.d.)

Furthermore, it can be described as "a state of continued use of certain substances or engagement in specific activities to escape from an undesirable reality, achieve a state of euphoria, or alleviate feelings of sadness and depression. This includes addiction to things beyond drugs." (Nabulsi, 2004)

1.2. The concept of the Internet:

The Internet is a widely used communication tool that connects a vast number of computers and serves an information function, offering a range of services and information in various formats, including data, news, images, sound, recordings, video, and radio and television programs. It allows individuals to navigate freely between its sites, benefiting both individuals and institutions across different levels and fields, with growth driven by subscribed members. (Darwish, 2016)

The term "Internet" is an abbreviation of the English phrase "international network," which refers to the global information network that connects various networks across many countries through telephone lines and satellites, facilitating the exchange of information. (Darwish, 2016)

1.3. The concept of Internet Addiction:

The terms "Internet addiction" and "Internet addiction disorder" first emerged in 1995 when O'Neill published an article titled *The Magic of "Online Life"* in *The New York Times*. This was followed by

William Goldberg's suggestion that Internet addiction could indeed be classified as a distinct disorder. It is important to note that the term "pathological immersion in the Internet" is associated with various names, including Internet addiction, technology addiction, Internet dependence, Internet misuse, computer dependence, computer addiction, excessive Internet use (Braiam, 2015), compulsive Internet use, Internet dependency, and Internet obsession. (Al-Assimi, 2010)

Internet addiction is akin to addiction to any other substance or behavior and is defined as "excessive use of the Internet, leading to almost complete dependence on it. This means that the Internet becomes the individual's primary focus, and they experience a longing for it if prevented from using it, becoming a prisoner to it." (Hamid, n.d.)

Abu Bakr defines it as the "pathological use of the Internet without regard to the amounts of money spent on it, resulting in behavioral disorders." (Madhkor, 2019-2020) It can also be characterized as a form of excessive use of the information network (the Internet), where an individual loses the ability to control impulses directed toward using this technology, often spending around eight hours a day online without a clear or specific purpose. (Yousuf)

Carl Jung defines Internet addiction as "a disorder of impulse control that does not involve intoxicants." (Maijel, 2016) Young describes Internet addiction as a disorder characterized by excessive use, where the individual finds it difficult to manage their Internet use, resulting in psychological, academic, professional, and social problems. (Debili, 2015-2016)

Compulsive Internet use is characterized by an individual's inability to stop using the Internet; they cannot resist this behavior or control their urges and find themselves compelled to use it without an actual urgent need. (Debili, 2015-2016) Procedurally, it aligns with Muhammad Ali's definition (2010, p. 51) as "the individual's continuous habit of spending extended periods browsing the Internet and viewing preferred sites."

2. Types of Pathological Internet Addiction

Internet addiction manifests in various forms. Five types have been described:

1. **Sexual Addiction (Cyber Sexual Addiction)**: This type is associated with the individual's emotional satisfaction or psychological distress, leading them to browse pornographic sites or engage in sexual activities online. Criteria established by Patrick Kartz include:
   - Continuation of watching pornographic sites.
   - Inability to control sexual desire.
   - Achieving sexual satisfaction through masturbation.
2. **Social Media Addiction**: This refers to an addiction to unnecessary chatting, with Facebook being the most visited site, boasting 60 million users, a number that continues to rise. (Houssein, 2017)
3. **Secret Relationship Addiction**: This occurs when individuals form multiple electronic relationships, potentially leading to infidelity via the Internet. (Malal, 2021)
4. **Addiction to Visual Sex (In Secret)**: This involves spending excessive hours watching pornographic films or images to a degree that it becomes uncontrollable.

5. **Excessive Game-Playing Addiction**: This addiction pertains to playing video games on computers or PlayStation, often manifesting in behaviors such as gambling or seeking quick, unethical profits. (Hatraf, 2020)

6. **Computer Addiction**: This involves excessive use of electronic games or PlayStation, which are appealing due to their suspenseful and exciting content. (Houssein, 2017)

7. **Financial Addiction**: This refers to spending money online on non-essential items, such as gambling, entering auctions, or trading in financial markets.

8. **Cognitive Addiction (Internet Information Burden)**: This is characterized by an addiction to searching for information through websites and databases. (Al-Astal, 2011)

3. Stages of Internet Addiction

Psychologist Grohol identified three stages of Internet addiction in a model presented in 2003:

1. **Enchantment or Obsession**: This stage occurs when the individual is a newcomer to the Internet, actively engaging in new activities. During this phase, the individual seeks to expand their social network, particularly on platforms like Facebook, to increase the number of followers and interactions on their personal page and content. This stage is highly addictive and serves as a warning sign that the individual may progress to the next stage.

2. **Disillusionment Stage**: In this stage, individuals continue to show interest in the activities they used to engage in, but they may also begin to feel a sense of disillusionment. Despite this, they retain a curiosity to explore new content and experiences online.

3. **Balance Stage**: This stage represents a more balanced approach to Internet use, where the individual engages with the Internet at various times without excessive dependence. However, it is important to note that these stages can cycle and repeat if the individual discovers new, exciting activities. (Maijel, 2016)

4. Causes of Internet addiction:

There are numerous reasons why the Internet can lead to addiction. Even creating a single account can result in individuals spending entire days browsing online. The key factors that drive individuals toward addiction include:

1. **Family Problems**: When parental involvement is lacking, individuals may experience a form of social disorder, prompting them to seek out an online environment that compensates for their emotional deprivation.

2. **Emptiness**: Emptiness is often seen as the individual's primary enemy. It arises from an inability to appreciate the value of time and utilize it effectively, leading many to view the Internet, particularly platforms like Facebook, as a source of entertainment and time-wasting.

3. **Curiosity**: Social media thrives on attraction and offers a wealth of ideas and information, which piques individuals' curiosity and encourages them to experiment and engage online. (Qadouri & Balarabi, 2021, p. 9)

4. **Escape**: For those struggling with addiction, the Internet serves as a refuge from reality, allowing them to live in a world of illusion and fantasy. (Houssein, 2017)

Additionally, other contributing factors include:

- A sense of **confidentiality and comfort** in online interactions.
- The ability to **unleash hidden desires** and express them through chat rooms.
- An outlet for **discharging anger and aggression** towards others.
- A means to alleviate **daily stress and anxiety**. (Salima, 2015)

During the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association in Boston, Massachusetts, researcher and psychologist David Greenfield presented significant findings from a study involving 17,250 Internet users. He discovered that approximately 6% of these users exhibit various forms of Internet addiction. This phenomenon can be attributed to the social nature of electronic communication facilitated by computers and mobile devices. The ease of interaction with others online reinforces the notion that some individuals find it challenging to quit using the Internet. The Internet offers chat rooms and bulletin boards that enable social connections with people from different parts of the world, creating a sense of community in the absence of real-life interactions. These online platforms help satisfy emotional and psychological needs, providing connections that are often perceived as more intimate and less threatening than those formed in face-to-face relationships. (Al-Rashed, 2014)

5. Effects of excessive Internet use among the youth:

Social and familial effects:

The Internet has become a significant concern for Arab families, particularly due to the prevalence of chat rooms frequented by children and teenagers. Sociologists have noted that excessive Internet use often leads to family members neglecting their household responsibilities and diminishing communication among them. Internet addiction has been a major factor in the disintegration of family ties, creating rifts between parents and children. Marital relationships are also affected, with partners feeling betrayed; wives of addicted husbands have been labeled "Internet widows." This issue was highlighted in Kimberly Young's study presented at the American Psychological Association conference in 1997 (Salima, 2015).

Furthermore, a study by Putnam in the United States confirmed that widespread Internet use correlates with a decline in civic integration and community participation. Psychologists assert that compulsive Internet use negatively impacts interest in public affairs, leading individuals to lose their ability to engage spontaneously over time (Salima, 2015).

As a tool for global connectivity, the Internet also exposes individuals to negative social, cultural, and religious influences. Certain online pages promote vice and obscenity, undermining societal values, spreading prohibitions, and eroding cultural and religious boundaries. This includes exposure to pornographic and gambling groups, which incite corruption (Hatraf, 2020).

Additionally, there are connections between Internet use and various social problems, such as:

- Depression and social isolation
- Alienation
- Lack of social skills due to insufficient communication with others

- Decreased or lost social support
- Social maladjustment
- Sexual and social deviations
- Low social adjustment (Hatehat, 2021).

Health effects :

- **Frequent Fatigue:**

  One of the most significant effects of Internet technology is what is known as "repetitive strain injuries" (RSIs), also referred to as functional use symptoms or upper extremity dysfunction. RSIs are defined as injuries that impact the wrists, hands, and neck due to pressure on the muscle groups caused by rapid movements. Individuals who type on a computer keyboard at rates of up to 31,200 keystrokes per hour account for approximately 13% of those suffering from repetitive stress injuries (Al-Laban, 2002).

- **Radiation and Electromagnetic Fields:**

  The primary risk associated with electromagnetic radiation stems from the excessive use of electronic devices, particularly smartphones connected to the Internet. Prolonged exposure to these devices can lead to various health issues due to the light waves they emit. Reports indicate that individuals with high exposure to electromagnetic fields are more susceptible to Alzheimer's disease. In one study involving mice, prolonged exposure to a high-frequency electromagnetic field directed at the head resulted in the activation and division of certain brain cells, leading to the development of cancerous cells. This highlights the detrimental effects of such radiation. Moreover, excessive technology use can impair concentration, cause headaches, and contribute to heart disease (Al-Laban, 2002).

Psychological Effects:

Internet addiction is linked to several psychological disorders, including sleep disorders, mania, social anxiety, bulimia, eating disorders, alcohol abuse, mood disorders, marital dissatisfaction, burnout, childhood trauma, general depression, attention deficit disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, pathological gambling, and sexual addiction (Al-Arnout, 2005). Additionally, it can immerse individuals in an alternate imaginary world, blurring the lines between reality and illusion, ultimately diminishing their ability to develop a healthy psychological identity capable of engaging with society and the realities of life (Al-Momani, 2015).

Educational Effects:

Internet addiction can lead to a range of negative educational outcomes, including a lower academic level, reduced daily study time, and insufficient preparation for exams, which ultimately results in poor performance.

5. Symptoms of Internet Addiction:

The American Psychiatric Association has identified the following symptoms of online addiction:

- Dissatisfaction with the amount of time spent surfing the Internet.
- Neglect of family, work, and professional responsibilities.
- Resorting to excessive sleep after prolonged and stressful browsing sessions.
- Manifestations of psychological reactions, such as tremors and constant finger movements.
- Experiences of anxiety and depression.
- An obsessive focus on Internet-related thoughts (Al-Masri, 2016).

Staying online for extended periods negatively impacts the mental, physical, and social health of young people. Numerous studies conducted by social and psychological researchers have established a link between excessive Internet use and feelings of fatigue and insomnia, as well as adverse effects on social relationships. However, similar to how people transitioned from television to the Internet when alternatives emerged, they can also seek healthier alternatives to Internet usage. Engaging in sports, enrolling in vocational training institutions, and acquiring manual skills are examples of such alternatives. While it may not be feasible to eliminate Internet use, as it has become an integral part of our lives, it is essential to use it more healthily.

Conclusion:

The current study aimed to uncover the factors that lead young people to immerse themselves in the Internet and the subsequent physical and psychological effects. It found that constant Internet use, particularly without designated time limits, significantly exacerbates psychological issues in young individuals, including depression, psychological maladjustment, fatigue, insomnia, and social consequences such as isolation, alienation, and social maladjustment. Furthermore, excessive Internet use contributes to various risks impacting social security, including the erosion of identity, values, and morals, as well as the proliferation of obscenity, vice, and violence. Given these findings, it is crucial to enhance social awareness among young people through seminars and forums aimed at educating them about the potential dangers and effects of Internet addiction. This can be achieved by collaborating with schools, universities, and civil society organizations to implement awareness campaigns and ongoing support in this area.

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