

Study of Internet usage and its relation to the feelings of Loneliness

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Abstract: The technological advancement is an ever-going process in an endeavor to enhance the skill of the people and to make life more comfortable. A look into the past experiences shows that though things have originated and evolved from time to time, yet the overuse or overemphasis has led to varying problems. Similarly, 21 st century witnessed the origin of computer which developed into mobile phones and became inseparable part of life. There are many repercussions of use of mobile phones. Though communication at the lightning speed was made a reality via email and online social media, yet it affected the personal relationships and home environment. It challenged the social nature of the human beings. It made the person withdraw from the physical world to the virtual world. The question is that do the people who perceive themselves to be lonely are heavy internet users or vice versa. So, the present study was conducted to find out the relation between internet addiction and perceived loneliness. For this purpose, internet addiction test by Young and perceived loneliness scale by Jha was administered to 265 college boys and girls. The correlation coefficient was calculated using Pearson Product moment method according to which the two variables were found to be positively correlated.

Keywords: internet, addiction, perceived, loneliness, relationship

Internet in simple words is a connection between two or more computers through satellite. The data is transferred from one place to another place in the world through satellites orbiting in the space. The transfer of data has become so efficient that it takes hardly a millisecond to send any information across millions of miles. Earlier internet connection could only be established through computers. With the introduction of wireless technology and the modern smart phone, computer is no longer necessary. In this way, a medium of transferring information which was once just an imagination is now a necessity. Though internet has facilitated many tasks, yet it has become a threat to the interpersonal interactions and mutual relationships. Internet has shortened the distance across the globe but has widened the distances among mutual interactions. The traditional Indian home setting in which everybody used to sit together and interact has changed to everybody sitting online without being aware of others around. The most affected age group is the children. The time in which the moral values were imparted by the elders has been substituted with the televisions and specifically cartoons. With the joint family system disintegrating to nuclear family system, both parents working and the necessity of using internet, very little time is spent by the family and friends together leading to feelings of loneliness. Perceived Loneliness

The WHO has defined health as complete biological, social and psychological wellbeing. The rapid scientific development influences the social set up as well as the lifestyle which is directly associated with the psychological well-being. The review of literature of the western developed societies reflects an increase in loneliness with increase in industrial and technological development. The traditions, customs, values, social institutions and network of social relationship are challenged with materialistic and individualistic way of life of the modern and swift people of the developed culture. This change in thinking leads to feelings of loneliness.

Loneliness can be defined as individual's perceptions leading to feeling of lacking close interpersonal relations. In other words, loneliness is the feeling experienced when an individual lack or is not able to establish strong social relations, especially when he desires them. Peplau and Perlman (1982) defined "loneliness as the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's network of social relations is deficient in some way". According to Sullivan "the unpleasant experience that rises from unfulfilled intimate or close interpersonal needs can be called loneliness." Michela, Peplau, & Weeks (1982) explain "loneliness is the unpleasant experience of individuals brought about by the realisation that a gap exists between the expected and actual results in relation to the social network model." Russell, Peplau, & Fergusson, (1978) believe that "loneliness is a subjective social isolation state stemming from a person's painful experience of not being accepted by others." Three approaches to loneliness can be enumerated as follows:

1. The first approach lays stress on individual's inherent need for close and trustworthy relationship.
2. The next approach emphasizes the persons' ability to perceive and judge their social relations.
3. The last approach regarding perception of loneliness focuses on the role of insufficient social reinforcement as the main reason behind experiencing loneliness by any individual.

So, loneliness is a subjective discomfort felt by anybody when the social relations lack some important feature. This deficiency can be qualitative or quantitative. Having a smaller number of friends than desired or having no friends is the quantitative aspect. On the other hand, having many friends but lacking the warmth of close relationship refers to the qualitative aspect of loneliness. Loneliness is not an external attribute. It is related to feelings from the core of the heart. An individual can feel lonely in a party or among a group of people. Young (1982) was of the view that feeling of loneliness is related to the feeling of exclusion from a group or feeling of not being wanted by the people around or inability to share feelings, opinions etc. with others around.

Internet addiction

Addiction has both psychological and physical features. Physical dependence can be defined as too much dependence on certain substance. The dependence is to such an extent that its absence leads to withdrawal symptoms. Though initially the substance is a source of pleasure to the user but later the substance is required only to reduce the anxiety induced by the absence of that substance leading to compulsive behavior. Psychological dependence includes behavioral symptoms like insomnia, irritability, cravings etc.

Rooij and Eijnden, 2007 described the criteria of internet addiction or compulsive internet usage as:

1. Continuing using internet in spite of desire to stop or cut down.
2. Feeling awful when not able to use internet.
3. Using internet to avoid negative feelings.
4. Always being preoccupied with using internet.
5. Conflicts related to internet use (Meerkert, Eijnden, Vermulst, & Garretsen, 2009).

The internet addiction unlike substance addiction is associated with psychological dependence. Unlike the other forms of addiction, it is very difficult to determine the border line between the use and addiction of internet. Internet addiction disorder (IAD) is a serious problem being faced by the 21st century. Addiction can be defined as “compulsive uncontrollable dependence on a substance, habit, or practice to such a degree that cessation causes severe emotional, mental, or physiological reactions” (Mosby, 1998). Internet addiction disorder (IAD) was first labelled as mental disorder in the year 1995 by Ivan Goldberg (Eppright, Allwood, Stern, & Theiss, 1999; Garrison & Long, 1995). The first research on internet addiction which was also published in APA, was done by Young, 1996. It was described as one’s helplessness to resist the urge to be on-line, resulting in prolonged usage of internet that affects the normal activities of day to day life and reflected in experiences of distress, lesser interest in educational or vocational activities and harmed relationships (Aboujaoude, 2010; Douglas, et al., 2008; Kuss, Griffiths, Karila, & Billeux, 2013). The main causes behind internet addiction disorder includes online gaming, online shopping, pornography and social networking, gambling etc. Research from the clinical studies has pointed out that individuals addicted to internet share the basic symptoms like hardness, withdrawal symptoms and relapse (Beard & Wolf, 2001; Young K. S., 1998) along-with the psychiatric co-morbidity, which includes ADHD i.e. attention deficit hyperactive disorder attention, anxiety related problems, sleep irregularities, and obsessive-compulsive behavior (Ko, Yen, Yen, Chen, & Chen, 2012; Yen, Ko, Yen, Wu, & Yang, 2007; Bernardi & Pallanti, 2009). Hence being addicted to internet is an index of the extent to which the day to day life is hindered due to internet usage (Fitzpatrick, 2008). Internet Addiction is a omnipresent issue irrespective of culture, race, age and gender. The widespread uses of internet include being online for books, knowledge and doing course to shopping and paying bills, fee etc. Such activities are not the part of addiction. The addictive tasks include online games, gambling, social networking etc. Internet addiction may be behind psychological problems like lack of social interactions, and bodily problems that include cervical, back ache, etc. (Saisan, Smith, Robinson, & Segal, 2013). Internet addiction can also cause major problems like damage to the brain in adolescents and youth (Wagn, 2012).

The advent of computer and internet were of such immense utility for the society that to label its use as addiction was not desired. Internet use varies from sending mails to buying and selling products online. In a time when the traffic makes it difficult to go to market for everything requirements internet provides a rescue by providing an option to do shopping on the online stores and receive products at home through courier. This not only saves time

but also travel expenses and risk of accidents etc. So, Internet use had all the uses which could easily mask the symptoms of internet addiction. This makes it difficult to identify or diagnose internet addiction. The initial attempt to infer internet addiction began by focusing on the duration of online activities. 40 to 80 hours of online activity was taken to be an indication of addiction. (Young K. S., 1998). Continuous use of internet for long time periods influenced the sleep pattern, lead to increased fatigue along with rise in consumption of caffeine products like tea, coffee etc. The prolonged usage of internet leads to sleep problems, increased feelings of tiredness which in turn raises the consumption of caffeine drinks like tea, coffee etc. In order to diagnose internet addiction, a criterion was required, and the best option was to diagnose it according to the available criteria of the nearest disorder. Following this idea, pathological gambling was adjudged as the most similar disorder and so the DSM-IV criterion was used to define it. The first screening tool developed to screen Internet Addiction was developed by Young in 1998 and named Internet Addiction Diagnostic Questionnaire (IADQ). Based on this diagnostic tool, non-essential Internet use like non-business or non-academic were evaluated. When the subject answered on the dependent side without any correlation with mania or hypomania episodes for over a period of six months was considered addicted. The screening items included information about handling responsibilities, social life and the amount of demand or secrecy about internet addiction. All these efforts, lead to the inclusion of Internet Use Gaming Disorder in the Section 1.3 of the DSM-V. The large volume of research by the researchers in this area made the American Psychological Association recognize and classify internet disorder (Block, 2008).

Researchers are making efforts to understand the dynamics associated with Internet addiction. It is important to understand how users may be compensating for what they lack in life by using internet. Internet use may be very reinforcing for people with low self-esteem, people who feel social awkwardness, who feel lonely and are depressed.

I-Cube study in 2006 done by the Internet and Mobile Association of India, which included 65000 individuals in a survey in 26 cities in India, found that about 38% of internet users show signs of heavy usage (about 8.2 hours per week). Majority of the internet users are young males, especially college students. The main objectives of going online for Indians are e-mail and instant messaging (98%), job search (51%), banking (32%), bill payment (18%), stock trading (15%) and matrimonial search (15%).

In India, not much research has been conducted on the addiction to internet. A study done on internet addiction among school children in the age group of 16 to 18 years lead to the identification of two groups called dependent and non-dependent internet users. Dependent internet users were those children who spent so much time on internet that the work assigned to them got delayed, used the internet till late hours thus reducing their sleep time and they felt that life will be dull without internet. Thus, such students were on the net for longer time and hence, were lonelier than the students who were not dependent (Nalwa, K.& Anand, A., 2003).

Tools:

1. Perceived Loneliness Scale by Praveen Kumar Jha (2015).

Perceived Loneliness Scale (L-Scale) developed by Jha (1997) was used as a measure of loneliness. It consists of 36 statements on five- point Likert scale from 1 (Fully Agree) to 5 (Fully Disagree). 28 items are positive items and 8 items are negative to be scored from 5 (Fully Agree) to 1 (Fully Disagree). The minimum and maximum range of score is from 36 to 180. Higher the score, more is the loneliness and vice versa.

2. Internet addiction test Young (1998).

With increase in the usage of internet, a device was required to measure it. Internet Addiction Test (IAT) is the first instrument for the assessment of internet addiction. Psychometrically it is a reliable and valid measure which fulfils all the requirements of research instrument. There are 20-items and has five-point Liket scale rating. Based on the score, the addictive behaviour is classified into three categories- mild, moderate and severe impairment.

Results: Table 1 shows the correlation between perceived loneliness and internet addiction. The table reflects that the Pearson product moment correlation between the two variables comes out to be 0.19 which is significant at 0.01 level of significance.

Table 1 Showing Correlation between Perceived Loneliness and Internet Addiction (N=265)

Variables	Coefficient of Correlation
Perceived Loneliness	0.19**
Internet Addiction	

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

This is a significant positive correlation between the two variables. This implies a direct relationship between perceived loneliness and internet addiction. In other words, more the perceived loneliness more is internet addiction.

Discussion: The present study was conducted with an aim to study the relationship between perceived loneliness and internet addiction among adolescents. For this purpose, Perceived Loneliness Scale by Jha and Internet Addiction Test by Young were administered to 265 students of Bathinda. Proportionate representation from all the streams of education like Arts, Science, Commerce, Business Administration, and Computer Applications, Engineering fields of computers, architecture, textile, electrical engineering and electronics engineering was

ensured. The data was pooled, and Pearson's Coefficient of correlation was calculated between the different variables. Significance was tested at alpha equal to 0.05.

The Pearson product moment correlation between Perceived loneliness and Internet addiction comes out to be 0.19 which is significant at $\alpha = 0.01$ level. This implies that there is a significant relationship between loneliness and internet addiction. As the relationship is positive so it implies that more the loneliness more will be internet addiction and lower the loneliness, lower will be internet addiction. Both internet addiction and loneliness have direct relation, but this does not imply causation. These results are in coherence with many studies conducted by researchers from time to time. Internet addiction has been found to be related to depression which in turn is linked to loneliness. This is in accordance with many studies done from time to time. Home Net Study done by Krant, Patterson, Lundmark, Kiesler, Mukopadhyay, & Scherlis (1997) found a correlation between social isolation and depression with internet usage. Carnegie Mellon University researchers did a longitudinal study to study the psychological effect of internet use (Young & Abreu, 2011). Researchers followed the selected families for one to two years and found that increase in use of internet was related with decrease in family communication and decrease in size of social circle. The researchers also noticed that internet use lead to increased feelings of loneliness and depression. More addicted the person is, more the internet is used as an escape (Young & Rogers, 1997). Internet users reported increased feelings of loneliness, depression and compulsivity with increase in internet use. Many studies have found a link between internet use and depression though it is not clear whether internet usage causes depression or depression causes internet usage.

In the light of statistical results and the different researches conducted at different places at varying times, it can be concluded that loneliness and internet addiction are positively related. If the individual does not feel lonely and has social support, then there are less chances of his/her getting internet addicted. Contrarily, if the adolescent has feelings of loneliness and lacks social support, then the chances of reverting to internet to escape such feelings, are more. Even if the adolescent lacks social support then he/she may revert to internet for the sake of company, then also internet addiction can be the outcome. In other words, it can be concluded that the adolescents revert to internet in order to avoid the feeling of loneliness.

The above conclusions can be of great utility in helping the future of the World i.e. adolescents. The parents, teachers and other institutes working for directing and giving shape to the adolescents should pay an extra attention to provide a healthy environment in which the feelings of loneliness are taken care of so that the internet is used for recreation or for a purpose rather than as an escape from negative thoughts or feelings.

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