Addiction of Selfies and Social Networking Sites: An Epidemic plaguing the Human Race across the Globe

Internet Addiction Disorder refers to the problematic use of internet and though it has not made its place in DSMV, but it is formally recognized by the American Psychological Association as a disorder. While time spent on the internet can be hugely productive, compulsive Internet use can interfere with daily life, work, relationships and productivity. Though internet surfing can provide a vast amount of information at a click but the compulsive overuse is often in pursuit of pleasure rather than knowledge. The authenticity of the information offered is also not questioned by the naïve users. Internet Addiction, otherwise known as computer addiction, online addiction, or Internet addiction disorder (IAD), covers a variety of impulse-control problems, including Cybersex Addiction, Net Compulsions, Information Overload, Cyber-Relationship Addiction etc. Cybercrimes are increasing day by day and many innocent youngsters become a prey to cyber scavengers. Another major concern for researchers is the mobile mania especially in youth. A number of researches suggest that most of the mobile users are turning slaves to the gadget which appears so harmless. It absorbs too much of a person’s time causing them to neglect their relationships, work, college, sleep and other important tasks. A gadget which has made life so convenient represents a real problem for 4 out of 10 adults in Spain for whom cell phones has turned into addiction that can lead them into consequences as dangerous as those caused by alcohol and drugs (Torrecilas, F.L. 2007) Experiments have shown that resisting internet and mobiles is resulting in withdrawal symptoms like irritation, headache, stress and even palpitations in more severe cases. These symptoms were somewhat similar to withdrawal symptoms of certain drugs. The youngsters using mobiles for many hours a day may develop psychological disorders (Francisca, 2007) Most young adults in U.K said that they would give up alcohol, chocolate, sex, tea or coffee than live without their mobiles (Williams, 2007) If internet use and mobile mania is becoming a compulsive urge despite the negative consequences, then it’s high time to become cautious and strike a new balance. This paper suggests the preliminary measures which can be taken at individual level to protect oneself against the addiction before it becomes pathological and compulsive and also throws light upon the symptoms of technology addiction.

**Keywords:** Technology, Internet addiction, cybercrime, youngsters

**Introduction**

Globalization is an ongoing process which has connected people, neighborhoods, cities, regions and countries much more closely than they had been earlier. This has resulted in our lives being influenced and linked with people in all parts of the world. Our cuisine, our dresses, the music we listen to, the information we get and the ideas we hold has gone global. The process is driven economically by international financial flows and trade, technologically by information technology and mass media entertainment, and very significantly, also by very human means such as cultural exchanges, migration and international tourism. We now live in a global village which is totally interconnected by various networks. While globalization has accelerated very rapidly since World War II, and has affected the environment, cultures, national governments, economic development and human beings around the globe. Internet and mobiles have played a very crucial role in going global as they improve the connectivity between people living in different parts of the world. Internet stands for „Interconnected networks“ which is a worldwide computer network providing a variety of information and communication facilities using standard protocols. The internet has
become a necessity rather than a privilege in the present times. People all over the globe stay connected round the clock by conveniently using Internet through their laptops, smart phones, tablets and other gadgets. Internet is surfed for information search and exchange, networking with people using audio visual mode and in pursuit of pleasure. The world is accessible just by moving our finger tips. The world has become a much smaller place than it used to be in the past due to technological advancement and the birth of internet brought a revolution. There have always been two sides of every coin. Any boon in excess can become a bane if not handled with care. Young (1998) was among the first researchers to describe the phenomenon of Internet as an addiction similar to that of drugs or alcohol which resulted in academic, social and occupational impairment. Most recently, the Task Force on Substance Use Disorders recommended inclusion of a section on Internet Addiction in DSM- V, that has been included as an „Appendix“ in order to provide impetus to further research in the area. Internet overuse has been associated with physiological problems like back pain and carpal tunnel syndrome, unhealthy eating habits, lack of exercise, vision and sleep disorders. It has also led to psychological and emotional problems as the youngsters are becoming attracted towards „virtual friends“ and these relationships are often emotionally disastrous. There has been an increase in „virtual affairs“ as people get attracted towards likeminded people of the opposite sex without knowing their actual backgrounds, age and looks. This often results in dejection and depression once they actually meet the person. Low self-esteem and cyber bullying go hand in hand as youngsters are becoming too preoccupied with the reactions of others on the social networking sites. Numerous studies and researches show that just like television and computers people are becoming addicted to mobile phones. Initially, the mobile phone was an essential instrument which was available to very few people who could afford luxury of having a number which was accessible at all times. With the increase of technical functions, the mobile phones are fulfilling different social and psychological functions. People have their mobile phones with them continuously and use them to organize and manage every moment of their lives. It is being used as a clock, calendar, organizer, radio and means of communication. Mobile phones have reduced the distance in communication and relationships. The mobile phone allows even the most introverted person to communicate as they protect the person from the risks of direct emotional impact, insecurities and the fear of being rejected. Adolescents often use mobile phones as an instrument to protect themselves when facing their communication insecurities. The problem with this type of communication often becomes a substitute for face to face communication. Mobile phone addicts are unable draw the line between normal and abnormal behavior. The addiction to the mobile is not just related to long conversations with few people or frequent calls but could be related to the abuse of other functions in a mobile phone.

The present study uses case lets from all over the world to throw light on the grimness of the situation which is still being handled casually and poses a serious threat to one and all using and abusing this technology.

Case 1: The medical practitioner who was hospitalized after excessive WhatsApp typing.

A woman used the WhatsApp messaging service so much over the last Christmas holiday that she ended up in hospital. A report in the medical journal, The Lancet noted a report by medical staff who treated a 34-year-old emergency medicine physician, 27 weeks pregnant who sought treatment for severe pain in her wrists. She had no history of trauma and had not engaged in any excessive physical activity in the previous days. However, on Christmas Day, she spent an estimated six hours holding a modestly weighty mobile phone while sending vast quantities of messages. The diagnosis was bilateral extensor pollicis longus tendinitis of the thumb or what they have nicknamed "WhatsAppitis".The treatment consisted of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and complete abstinence from using the phone to send messages -- although she ignored that rule on New Year’s Eve. Even medical workers ignore medical advice it seems. A so-called Nintendinitis was first described in 1990, and since then several injuries associated with video
games and new technologies have been reported. Initially reported in children, such cases are now seen in adults. Tenosynovitis caused by texting with mobile phones could well be an emerging disease. The Lancet warned that physicians need to be mindful of these new disorders.

Case 2: The teenager who tried to kill himself because he wasn't satisfied with the quality of his selfies.

The British teen spent up to 10 hours each day taking photos of himself on his iPhone, the Daily Mirror reports. The addiction became so debilitating that he dropped out of school and retreated into his home for six months. "I was constantly in search of taking the perfect selfie and when I realized I couldn’t I want to die," Bowman told the Daily Mirror. “I lost my friends, my education, my health and almost my life.” He nearly overdosed on pills, but his mother intervened and helped keep him alive. Bowman’s case is extreme, yes, but psychiatrists are beginning to consider selfie addiction as a serious mental health issue. Maybe we should all just stop taking selfies and solely use our Smartphone’s for the truly important things, like pretending we’re texting to avoid saying hello to people.

Case 3 British teenager commits suicide when banned from owning a mobile phone.

A troubled teenage ballerina, addicted to the internet, shared photos of her own bleeding arms on self-harm websites before killing herself. Tallulah Wilson, 15, created an online alter ego – a fantasy cocaine-taking character – in her desperation to be loved as someone else. The teenager also regularly visited pages accused of promoting suicide before throwing herself in front of a train. Her mother, Sarah, told an inquest: I saw pictures she had posted of her cutting herself – I recognized her bedsheets. I realized there were young girls on their cutting themselves to see who is worse. It’s like the worst horror movie you have ever seen sitting in your house. Tallulah retreated into an online world as she struggled to cope with alleged bullying, her grandmother’s death and her parents divorce. She was banned from owning a mobile phone or laptop but used her mother’s computer to go online. Mrs. Wilson said she scanned the sites her daughter had visited and found another girl had posted a photo of a noose with the caption: Here’s your new necklace, try it on.” She confronted her daughter about her online fantasies. „She said she had 18,000 people who loved her for who she was online,” Mrs. Wilson told St Pancras coroners court. The following day Tallulah left home in West Hampstead, north-west London, without her dance gear, telling her mother: I don’t need my things today.” She died later that day – October 12, 2012 – when she was hit by a train at St Pancras station. The inquest continues.

Case 4: The woman who committed suicide after being accused of Facebook addiction.

In February 2014, a 24-year-old Indian woman who was confronted by her parents over her obsession with Facebook responded by hanging herself from a ceiling fan. Sushma Goswami 24 had discovered Facebook only a few months earlier and the site quickly turned into an addiction as she started spending hours in front of her computer. Her younger brother followed suit and both raised the ire of their parents for neglecting their daily chores while doing little else beyond spending time online. The siblings each had more than a thousand friends on Facebook, despite spending their lives as social recluses focused almost entirely on their studies. Following the confrontation with her parents, Goswami locked herself in her room and was found hanging from a ceiling fan the next morning. Sadly, this isn't the first time a young Indian woman took her own life over Facebook. In October 2013, a 17-year-old girl in Parbhani district of Maharashtra committed suicide after an argument with her parents over her obsession with Facebook. "Is Facebook so bad? I cannot stay in a home with such restrictions as I can't live without Facebook," she wrote in her suicide note.
Case 5: Make-up artist killed hit by a train while answering his mobile in Kolkata during Photo shoot (Reader's Digest, December 2007)

Prabir Kumar De, a make-up artist was at a morning photo shoot near railway tracks when he answered a cell phone call. As he spoke, he kept moving closer and closer to the tracks. He couldn’t have heard the sound of the approaching train as he kept on talking and walking till he was hit by the running train and was killed on the spot.

Case 6: Three Army Men Fall For Online Sex chat, Leak Military Secrets (The Times of India, August 30, 2015)

Three Indian Army officers are under the scanner for leaking the location of battalions while indulging in salacious chats on Facebook. A colonel, reemployed at the Army War College in Mhow after retirement, a Major from the Rajput regiment and a Lieutenant attached to the Ordnance Corps have been found Prima Facie guilty of giving out parts of the ORBAT( order of battle)in clear violation of laid down security protocols. “It looks like a honey trap as they were lured into chats by a person posing as an attractive woman, who had posted suggestive FB pictures, The officers had sexually explicit chats with „her‟ who asked them about the location of units” a source said. Incidentally, several army officers have been punished through court martial for posting location of a battalion or a warship, or their patrolling patterns on social networking websites. Faced with ever increasing attacks by Pakistani and Chinese online espionage agents, the Indian Armed Forces have taken serious note of frequent “leaking” of confidential data and information through the Internet. This has also led to further tightening of cyber security and computer usage norms, ranging from strict access control and proper fire walls to “air gap” between secure and insecure networks and curbs on use of digital storage devices.

Major Findings

- Internet Addiction Disorder and Mobile Mania are posing a serious threat to the present generation all across the globe. Though it is affecting all age groups, it has the maximum impact on the young children and adolescents.
- Different age groups are becoming addicted to the different features of the smart phones and different on line attractions. Various on-line games are attracting young children in such a way that they are unable to resist the passion of scoring more and more.
- This affects the academic pursuits, creativity and physical activity most negatively. Most Internet games emphasize speed and action in violent plots.
- The children greatly enjoy simulation games that involve entering virtual realities and role playing characters. An increasing number of studies show that playing violent games like watching violent T.V increases hostility and aggression (Anderson et al 2001).Furthermore these games are full of racial, ethnic and gender stereotypes.
- Mobile phone is being a means to deal with solitude and isolation as it takes on the role of a companion and youngsters lacking social skills often get addicted to it.

Case 1: suggests that even the doctors who are highly aware of all the physiological consequences can fall prey to these temptations. Social Networking Sites are becoming the latest compulsive disorder.

Case 2: indicates that something as harmless as a selfie can claim lives. Psychiatrists are beginning to consider selfie addiction as a serious mental health issue. Selfie craze can also be indicative of increasing self-obsession and narcissism in the present generation.
Case 3: Internet addiction led the British ballerina to commit suicide after visiting self-harm websites. The teenagers are visiting websites without any censorship. This leads to experimentation amongst the teens who visit the websites that can positively reinforce their negative instincts.

Case 4: Social networking sites are becoming such an obsession for the present generation that they have the potential to claim lives of psychologically and emotionally vulnerable people. People are losing interest in their immediate environment, face to face interactions and living in a desirable but not so real virtual world”.

Case 5: Never use a mobile when mobile. Studies have pointed out that while talking on the mobile phone all our cognitions are focused on the conversations leaving us blind towards the other cues from the environment. A large number of people have lost their lives in freak accidents while they were using their mobiles.

Case 6: The teens cannot be blamed when even the senior personnel’s from the army can fall prey to cyber criminals. They fell into the honey trap laid down for them on a social networking site and revealed very confidential information to a cyber-scavenger who posed as an “attractive female”.

Symptoms of Mobile and Internet Addiction

- Addicts dedicate large amounts of time to activities related to using their mobiles. Phone calls, text messages, games, use of the camera for photos and selfies, etc. They remain preoccupied with the instrument even when not actually using.
- Extreme usage may lead to a sense of dizziness, headache, vertigo, eye or ear ache.
- Other physical symptoms that can be related to abusing the mobile phone or Internet are Spondylitis causing stiffness in the neck and shoulders and dizziness, Pollicis Longus Tendinitis of the thumb which causes extreme pain in the thumb and also affects the grip, Tenosynovitis which causes the inflammation of the sheath that surrounds a tendon. Mobile overuse causes the finger to “stick” in the flexed position.
- The victims develop extreme affection towards the mobile phone and are unable to part with them even while sleeping or using washrooms.
- The addicts find Face to Face communication difficult while they have numerous on line friends.
- It has been found that the victims tend to experience unpleasant emotions, anxiety and even get panic attacks when the phone does not work or when they have to part with it.
- The victim loses interest in physical and outdoor activities which often affects their physical and mental health.
- The victim is in the habit of keeping the phone on at night and they wake up to check for messages or calls which lead to fatigue and inactivity during daytime.
- The addiction can affect a person’s social, personal and professional life immensely as they are unable to maintain their interpersonal relationships.
- The phenomenon of “ringxiety” is becoming very common as people can hear their phone ringing or feel phantom vibrations even when it is actually not ringing or vibrating. (Sinha K, 2007)

Conclusion

In the present age of globalization the technological gadgets have made the whole world available at a click of the finger. They have improved the quality of life tremendously and have made the tasks very easier. The intellectual usage of technology and Internet can help people achieve great heights. The distances between
people have greatly reduced and the pain of being separated from loved ones has lessened as communication is possible round the clock all over the world. The other side of the picture is very grim as people are turning slaves to these technological gadgets. Cell phones are adding to the stress levels of people. Psychiatrists and Researchers have stated that mobile addiction is similar to narcotic addiction. Frequent mobile users have been found to be anxious, moody and often irritable. Addictive use of Internet is similar to other “Process Addictions” like gambling or shopping. It becomes a compulsive urge and people are unable to control it and gradually it turns into an obsession and affects every aspect of a person’s life. The social and interpersonal skills are greatly influenced. The person clings to these gadgets and stays away from family and friends ruining his immediate relationships. The person has problems with self-esteem, the mobile phone tends to be used an instrument to deal with this problem. In this age of technology, the youngsters are looking for immediate gratification which becomes easier in the „Virtual World“. This leads to a craving for an „unreal world“ which satisfies the person even if for a short period. Those people who feel isolated and lonely in real life use mobile as a substitute for other people and soon the mobile phone turns into a fetish object As the physical symptoms appear much later, the concerned adults should look for warning signals and take charge before it turns into an addiction. Accusing and blaming can claim lives and the situation has to be tackled very tactfully. Providing opportunities and keeping the youngsters engaged in sports and other creative pursuits can help. Being available is the best option. Moderation is the Key word.

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