

## **INTERNET ADDICTION AND LONELINESS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

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### **Abstract**

The internet has had provided us a comfortable life by making information more available to all and creating links with different people around the world. Internet addiction can lead to dysfunction in individual's public, academic, and occupation domains. Therefore the major aim of the study was to explore the correlation between loneliness and Internet Addiction of the university students. 50 university students (25 undergraduates & 25 postgraduates) ages between 17-22 years of were selected through simple random sampling. Questionnaire method was used for gathering data with two standardized tools: Internet Addiction Test (IAT) developed by Dr. Kimberly Young and UCLA Loneliness Scale developed by Russell, (1996). Results indicated that there were positive correlation between internet addiction and loneliness. Further the effect of qualification on internet addiction was also found to be significant.

*Keywords:* internet addiction, loneliness, adolescence.

### **Introduction**

Internet addiction is an emerging phenomenon which is very common among young adults those who are our emerging future pillars. The number of internet users has been found to be increasing in numbers due to the growing technology. Internet nowadays has become much important in our daily life and provides us with various benefits. In this global world of information technology it looks as if internet has become the most significant tool for human being (Shahnaz & Karim, 2014).

Internet addiction is a broad concept. Young (1996) defined that similar to other pathological disorders that does not involve an intoxicant, internet addiction is also an impulse-control disorder. Shapira (as cited in Bastani, 2008) stated that this may be another form of obsessive-compulsive disorder. Dr. Ivan Goldberg in 1995 propounded the term 'internet addiction' for pathological compulsive internet uses. As proposed by Griffith it a subset of addicted behaviour and any behaviour that meets the six "core components" of addiction, i.e., salience, conflict, mood modification, withdrawal, tolerance and relapse. Davis preferred the term 'pathological internet use' (PIU) and avoided the term internet addiction, referring it as a dependency on psychoactive substances. Young developed Internet Addiction Test and linked excessive internet use most closely to pathological gambling. According to her, different types of internet addiction are cyber-relationship addiction, cyber-sexual addiction, net compulsions, information overload, and computer addiction. According to the data reported in India Internet users (2016), internet users were 18% which suddenly rose up to 34.8%. Now this is something of major concern as because if the

use of internet is not channelized in the right direction it would lead to internet addiction. Internet addiction refers to problematic usage of internet and compulsive behaviour which affects the way of life of a person (Shahnaz & Karim, 2014). It also contributes to behavioural, interpersonal, psychical, psychological problem (Alam et al., 2014). Depression and loneliness may be found in internet addicted persons (Karapetsas, Karapetsas, Zygouris & Fotis, 2015).

Internet is a world of virtuality where an individual loses one's real self and is more attracted towards the ideal self that he possesses on the social networking sites and after a certain point of time this ideal self dominates the real self of the individual and could lead to identity crisis where adolescent begins to experiment with different lifestyles (Erickson, 1959). As the individual adopts the virtual world this leads to various problems like they become the victim of cyber crime. Loneliness is a major variable which contributes to internet addiction. People with loneliness are the ones who live alone or without social interactions (Karapetsas, 2015).

These people are not lonely just because they are physically alone but this loneliness emerges when the social awards decrease. The people with loneliness fail to satisfy personal and social needs when the number of social awards decrease (Oguz & Cakir, 2014). In fact loneliness can be further categorized into emotional loneliness; person who doesn't love an important figure and social loneliness; absence of social friend (Bernard, 2013). As a study was conducted in a residential setting consisting of students from different states, backgrounds, races which forms an ethnic population. Students have left their comfort zone i.e. home to get knowledge and education and somewhere in between home sickness and adjustment issues which creates a void just to run away from this real life situation. Study reported that they get involved into internet as there is no one to restrict their access and internet is something which makes it alluring and attracting for these young adults. The access to internet use was high in undergraduates those who had taken new admission and were not aware of the consequences of excessive internet use whereas the postgraduates were experienced and familiar with the environment and were aware of the ill effects caused by excessive use of internet.

Hence, it can be concluded that internet addiction and loneliness have a positive correlation and they influence each other simultaneously as when students feel lonely to bridge the gap between loneliness and happiness they get into internet such as gaming, social networking, entertainment, online dating sites etc. Internet also has certain negative impact such as it leads to depression, social isolation, impulsivity etc.

### **Research objectives**

- To explore the relationship between loneliness and internet addiction among students.
- To investigate the effect of qualification on loneliness and internet addiction.

## Hypothesis

- There will be positive correlation between loneliness and internet addiction.
- There will be significant effect of qualification on loneliness and internet addiction.

## METHOD

Correlational research method was used to solve the research problem.

**Research Design:** one way between group research design was used to investigate the effect of independent variable (education) on dependent variables (loneliness & internet addiction) among students.

## Participants

Participants were 50 university students enrolled in various undergraduate and postgraduate programs at Banasthali Vidyapith, Rajasthan. There were 25 undergraduate students of first semester and 25 postgraduate students of third semester with the age group of 17-22 years. All the participants were females. Purposive sampling technique was employed to collect the data.

## Tools

### 1. Internet Addiction Test (IAT)

Internet addiction test, developed by Dr. Kimberly Young, is a standardised, 5-point Likert scale of 20 items. Aim of the test is to test the level of addictive internet use. Range of the score on this test is 20 to 100. Higher score represents higher level of internet addiction. The scoring comprised of three categories 20-39 demonstrating an average score, 40-69 implying frequent problem and the high rate of score 70-100 representing the subject were highly addicted to the internet (Widyanto & Mcmurran, 2004). The construct validity of the IAT was 0.90 and reliability was 0.86 ((Keser, Esgi, Kocadag & Bulu, 2013).

### 2. UCLA Loneliness Scale Version 3 Developed by Daniel Russell (1996)

It is a revised version of the original UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, 1996). It is a 20-item scale which measures feelings of social isolation and subjective feelings of loneliness. There are 9 reverse-scored items they are items 1, 5, 6, 9, 10, 15, 16, 19 and 20. Respondents rated each item on a scale from 1 that is “never” to 4 as “always”. A higher score indicated a greater level of loneliness. The scale has 0.73 test retest reliability.

**Procedure:** Data was collected by using two questionnaires along with demographic information. In the first stage of the study to check the suitability and appropriateness of the tools, a pilot study was conducted on 10 participants. After the pilot study, main study was conducted on 50U.G. and P.G. female students.

### Results

To check the hypothesis researcher used both descriptive and inferential statistics. In descriptive statistics mean, SD and in inferential statistics ANOVA and correlation were calculated by using SPSS version 23.

**Table no.1:** Mean, SD and F scores of the participants (N=50) on internet addiction and loneliness by qualification.

Measures	Qualification		F	Sig.
	UG	PG		
Internet Addiction	36.60 (15.92)	28.08 (14.99)	3.79	.05*
Loneliness	19.64 (8.05)	19.40 (13.29)	.006	.93

\*p < .05

**Table 1** shows that internet addiction was higher in UG students (M=36.6) in comparison to PG students (M=28). These differences was statistically significant,  $\chi^2 = 3.79$ ,  $p < .05$ . In context to loneliness the educational level did not play significant role as there was almost no difference between the mean values of two groups.

**Table no.2** Shows the correlation among internet addiction and loneliness (N=50).

Measures	Internet Addiction	Loneliness
Internet Addiction	1	.323*

\*p<.05

Table 2 - Result showed that the internet addiction score of the participants was statistically significant positive correlation with loneliness ( $r = .323$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between loneliness and internet addiction in adolescents and whether educational qualification has any impact on internet addiction and loneliness. The results revealed a positively significant correlation between internet addiction and loneliness of the university students, i.e., higher the internet addiction, higher the loneliness and vice versa. So, the hypothesis that there will be positive correlation between loneliness and internet addiction was accepted. Several studies have revealed same findings (Young, 1997, Qasem Zadeh et al. 2007, Bozoglan et al. (2013), Rafat et al. 2013; Zarbakhah Bahri et al. 2012; & Sadeqian ,2005). Similar finding reported by Yang et al. (2007) that the individuals who are addicted to the internet are exhausted, bored, and lonely, depressed, suffer from social anxiety and have more social deprivation and seclusion. Ceyhan and Ceyhan, (2008) also found a causal relationship between internet addiction and loneliness by isolating individuals from the real world and deprive them of a sense of

a connection with real-world contacts. Loneliness happens when a gap occurs between the favourable relationship expected and the current relationships.

Those who feel an excessive amount of loneliness, have a low self esteem caused by the lack of effective and favourable relationships. They doubt about their abilities. They are sensitive to affective and emotional conditions. And they behave with shame, embarrassment, anxiety and low assertiveness and risk taking (Perlman, 2004). They avoid social and interpersonal relationships and so they use internet and cyberspace as an alternative and defence mechanism to fill up the loneliness. They feel better in the world of web and so get additionally drawn to it and step by step get hooked and become addicted.

Result is found to be statistically significant at 0.05 levels in relation to internet addiction whereas in relation to loneliness results showed there was no significant difference by qualification. So the second hypothesis that there will be significant effect of qualification on loneliness and internet addiction was partially accepted. These findings highlight that qualification does not create any differences in loneliness. This may be because of their personality traits, life style, preferences, time spend on ICT rather than outdoor games, competitive environment and so on. In the present study, we found that the undergraduates were more addicted to internet in comparison to postgraduates this may be because they are less matured and experienced than postgraduates.

### Conclusion

In this growing era of information and technology, internet has become a very important medium to acquire information and also to share knowledge. As to a great extent internet has captured the minds of young adults due to which taking part in outdoor games and activities has decreased, thus study on internet addiction and related variables that can be responsible for the same is of immense importance. Hence, on the basis of above discussion it can be concluded that excess usage of internet can play negatively an important role in person's life in terms of mental health or feeling of loneliness. So it is high time to take some serious steps to minimize the adverse effects of internet dependency so that a person could use ICT effectively and rationally.

### Limitations

This study on internet addiction and loneliness has made valuable contribution in the field of research. However, this study had certain limitations. First of all, as the sample size was small, good generalization was not possible. Secondly, we could not study gender effect, as the sample consisted of only female participants. Thirdly, qualitative method of analysis was excluded and only quantitative based data were taken into account. So in future, researchers could minimize above limitations and could plan a comprehensive study so that a strong generalization can be made.

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