

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### INTERNET ADDICTION AS A PREDICTOR OF LONELINESS

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#### ABSTRACT

This research aimed to investigate internet addiction as a predictor of loneliness. It was hypothesized that: "Internet addiction would predict high loneliness". There have been many researches conducted about the impact of internet addiction internationally, however in Pakistan there is dearth of researches related to specific area of relationship of internet addiction with loneliness. In order to test the hypothesis, sample of 300 university students (150 males and 150 females) were selected through purposive sampling from the different universities of Karachi, Pakistan. Their mean age was 21.03, and SD was 2.07. After taking verbal and written consent from the heads of faculties, participants were approached. With their consent also, they were requested to fill respondent's profile form. To assess the dependence of oneself on internet, the Compulsive Internet Use Scale (CIUS) was used. Differential Loneliness Scale – short student version (DLS) was used to assess one's social segregation. The results indicated that internet addiction is a significant predictor of high loneliness.

**Key words:** Internet Addiction, loneliness, university students.

#### INTRODUCTION

Addiction to communication technology has increasing day by day. Apart from its positive implication it also has some negative impact. It has been found that anxiety; depression and other psychological problems are also caused by the excessive use of internet. Feelings of being lonely decrease in emotional support in the family and accountability towards family members are being avoided by these people. Talking about youngsters and adults studying in colleges and universities has worsened their grades, remained mostly absent in class, and spent most of the time chatting on internet. The changes in their emotions have also found to be short tempered, offensive and aggressive (Shaffer, 2004). There have been many researches conducted about the impact of internet addiction internationally, however in Pakistan there is dearth of researches related to specific area of relationship of internet addiction with loneliness. On the other hand, Walther (2001) accounted that there have been many reasons and roots about why people become addicted to internet, such as staying alone at home, not meeting people, not having friends, surfing the web for projects, or for job. Moreover, Facebook, Twitter, and MSN are the commonly used websites. Many people also use social networks to acquire the online relations. Furthermore, loneliness could also be linked to the social networking. It has been clear that internet has changed the lives widely by its ease of access and expediency; however its potential exploitation and negative effects of the internet cannot be ignored. Holden (2001) determined that concerns of public awareness about the

possible troubles of unmanageable internet use, with the estimation of addiction experts and computer industry professionals, there has always been a strong link between the extreme usage of internet and other behavioral addiction such as gambling, and shopping. Murray (1996) found that college undergraduates who faced failures in their studies and had no friends because of internet mistreatment. He also explored that internet might possibly direct the individual to addictive behaviors among users. Correspondingly, Kimberly Young has offered the initial key study about the internet addiction in 1998. He customized the norms for pathological gambling explained by the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) to detect the internet addiction as an uncontrollable turmoil. In one study, Young found that 66% of the participants were categorized as internet dependents (Young, 1998).

***Internet addiction is considered as, the state of a dependence on the internet and compulsive behavior of a person***

Today web surfing has come into daily life of people and many has become its compulsive user. This addiction increasingly has been made the individuals to neglect their responsibilities, relationships and health to remain stimulated for example a study was carried out on undergraduates to evaluate the correlation between the use of internet and negligence in relations, the results suggested that there was a positive correlation between them (Adams, 1998). Young (1998) has specified four types of incentives of extreme internet use:

- **Applications:** A definite task of internet that becomes mainly tricky for the users.

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- **Emotions:** Becoming online is pleasing, and encouraging in order to blocking pain, ambiguity, or uneasiness.
- **Cognition:** To be online is a release from disturbing thinking and terrible feeling.
- **Life events:** Unhappiness in the different areas of life chiefly in grouping, such situations might guide an individual to be more prone to internet addiction.

Some excessive internet users use internet for the reason of their social relations they have created online. Many people use forums or chats for entertainment, but when a person has more close online friends and no one in the real life, difficulties could appear. Online friends have permitted the people to ignore their responsibilities of their real lives. Creating imagined personalities has been an unsafe practice because people generating these false personas are those who have low self esteem. These individuals just restore themselves online, while varying nothing about their real lives. This could lead to increase in depression and feelings of insufficiency in them (Solano and Koester, 2000).

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Sample**

The sample of this research consisted of 300 participants (150 males and 150 females). 150 Students were from public sector universities, comprising of 75 male and 75 female university students. Similarly the remaining 150 students were from private sector universities, comprising of 75 male and 75 female university students.

**Measures**

**Compulsive Internet Use Scale (CIUS, Meerkerk, Van Den, Vermulst and Garretsen, 2009)**

Compulsive Internet Use Scale is designed to tap the dependence on the internet and behavioral addiction of oneself. It is a uni-dimensional, 14 items self reported measure. It is based on five point Likert scale format. It targets adults and adolescents. It requires about ten minutes or less of a respondent’s time. Meerkerk, Van Den, Vermulst and Garretsen (2009) used 447 heavy internet users in a study and found: Reliability: Cronbach’s alpha = .89. Validity: Construct - correlation with the Online Cognition Scale (OCS) r = .70, and with consumption of time on internet r = .33.

**Differential Loneliness Scale-short student version (DLS, Schmidt and Scrmat, 1983)**

Different Loneliness Scale–short student version designed to find one’s personal approach to loneliness as well as approach of social segregation. The scale evaluates loneliness in four forms of affairs, namely (1) romantic-sexual relationships (R/S), (2) friendships (Fr), (3) family relationships (Fam), (4) relationships with larger groups (Gr). In particular, the scale also measures the disparity between the type of relationship one wishes to have and the type of relationship one has currently. It is a four-dimensional 20 items scale especially designed for students (young adults).

**Schmidt and Scrmat (1983) accounted: Reliability:** The reliability of the scale is high, with Kuder-Richardson-20 coefficients varying from .90 to .92, and test–retest coefficients

of .85 and .97. Validity: The scale has concurrent validity adjacent to several criteria. Further analyses indicate that scale has substantive and structural validity.

**Procedure**

After taking their verbal and written consent participants were required to respond firstly on respondents profile form, which gathered personal demographic information about the participants. Secondly the Compulsive Internet Use Scale was administered, to tap the dependence on the internet and behavioural addiction, and then Differential Loneliness Scale-short student version was used to find one’s subjective feelings of loneliness as well as feelings of social isolation. Scoring of all two measures was done in accordance to the scoring procedures as explained in the questionnaires.

**Operational Definition**

**Internet Addiction**

“The dependence on the internet and behavioral addiction of oneself on it” (Meerkerk, Van Den, Vermulst and Garretsen, 2009).

**Loneliness**

“One’s personal approach of loneliness as well as approach of social segregation” (Schmidt and Scrmat, 1983).

**RESULTS**

Table shows the mean and standard deviation of the variables under study. It is also obvious from the table that mean scores of internet addiction falls within moderate range, whereas loneliness is of low –range.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Main Variables under Study**

Study variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Internet addiction	300	23.17	9.177
Loneliness	300	7.76	2.971

**Table 2. Bivariate Correlations among Internet Addiction, Loneliness, Self Esteem and Satisfaction with Life of Uuniversity Students**

	Internet addiction	Loneliness	Self esteem	Satisfaction with life
Internet addiction				
Loneliness	.127*			

\* Correlation is significant at the .05 level.

As shown in table II, Loneliness significantly correlates with the internet addiction at the .05 level. While the scores of internet addiction are significantly and negatively related with self esteem at .01 level. This finding reveals that the university students who are high user of internet, they are also high on feelings of loneliness.

**DISCUSSION**

The present study aimed to investigate prediction of internet addiction with reference to loneliness. Hypothesis states that “Internet addiction would predict high loneliness among university students”. Results in table I and II shows that the findings of the hypothesis are statistically significant which

indicates that internet addiction is a predictor of high loneliness. Stepanikova, Norman and Xiaobin (2010) work also revealed that spending time on internet predicts high loneliness and low life satisfaction. Internet has been used by lots of people commonly for their career or education. It is very important to understand the difference between the intense use of internet, and normal use of internet for which simple measures have been used such as quantity of time utilized on internet in a given period (Joinson, 1998). Most of the essentials have distinguished the general from problematic internet use is the practice of compulsions to use the net. When a family member become internet addict and begins to spend much time on internet than with family then it is considered that internet has taken control of their closed ones from them for example a research conduct on couples and showed a strong association between depression and excessive internet use (Dems, 1994). Results of Odaci and Kalkan (2010) revealed a positive association between internet use and loneliness whereas negative relation was found between internet use, self esteem and satisfaction with life. In addition to this, high problematic internet use appeared to be present among individuals who use too much internet than those who do not. Another study conducted by Erdogan (2008) indicated that adolescents who use the internet excessively for various purposes such as browsing, instant messaging, emailing and online games scored significantly higher in loneliness compared to their counterparts. Alavi, Maracy, Jannatifard and Eslami (2011) determined a positive relation between loneliness and diagnosis of internet addiction, and negative association between self esteem and satisfaction with life.

### Conclusion

It is clear from the results and discussion that a significantly positive relationship is found between internet addiction and loneliness. Therefore, in order to prevent student's total involvement in internet and negative impacts on the other areas of life, there is a need to have a proper check on the level of behavioral dependency of students on the internet.

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