INTERNET ADDICTION AND ITS PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING CORRELATE AMONG UNDERGRADUATES

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ABSTRACT: *The study examined internet addiction and its psychological wellbeing correlate among undergraduates. A total of two hundred and thirty-two (232) students were selected using convenient sampling techniques. They consist of eighty-five (85) males, and one hundred and forty-seven (147) females. Their age ranged from 17 to 30 years and their mean age was 22.67 with standard deviation of 4.04. Two instruments were used for the study and they were: Psychological Well-Being (RPWS) Scale developed by Ryff's (1989) and Short Version of Internet Addiction Test constructed by Young (1998). The study adopted a correlational design and Pearson Product Moment statistics was used to analyze the data. The result revealed that internet addiction had significant relationship with psychological wellbeing. The implications of the study were highlighted and recommendations made.*

KEYWORDS: Internet, Addiction, Psychological Wellbeing, Undergraduates

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of internet seems not to have positive influences alone on the users but is associated with negative effects as well. Despite the fact that it speeds up communication, makes banking services, business transactions even research easier and faster, it has been observed to have several negative effects on the users (Thomee, Harenstam & Hagberg, 2011). Also, Sato (2006) stated that internet addiction leads to poor academic performance, impaired psychological wellbeing and relationship with peers and family. Furthermore, internet addiction increases shyness, depression and low self-esteem (Aydin & Sari, 2011) which usually hampered psychological well-being (Yang & Tung, 2007). Hence, this study explored the relationship between internet addiction and psychological wellbeing among university undergraduates.

Psychological Well-Being

Psychological wellbeing is viewed as a state, characterized by acceptance, actualization, contribution, coherence, and integration with others (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). It is defined as an amalgamation of positive affect such as happiness and pleasure (the Hedonic perspective) and functioning with optimal effectiveness in personal and social life, as well as realizing one's potentials (the Eudomonic perspective) (Deci, 2008). It is a proactive and intentional aspect of one's life consisting of autonomy, self-acceptance and mastery, and personality characteristics such as curiosity, integrity, spirituality, and forgiveness (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Ryff (1989) categorized psychological wellbeing into six dimensions, namely, autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, life purpose, mastery, and positive relatedness.

Accordingly, self-acceptance means to have a realistic perception of oneself, comprising of both the positives and negative self, and still be able to accept oneself. Positive relations with others mean to be able to form sound, warm, caring relationships with others. It is the capability to develop intimacy and to show empathy towards others. Autonomy is the capability to make one's own decisions without relying on, or waiting for, the other's approval. It involves the ability to assess oneself according to one's own beliefs and not the other's beliefs. Environmental mastery is the capability to manage and mould the environment which aligns with one's needs and values. Purpose in life mean having goals in life and a sense that one's life has purpose and meaning. Personal growth means to

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continuously grow and develop as a person and maximize one's capabilities.

Factors Influencing Psychological Well-Being of University Student

There are a variety of factors which have a significant influence on mental health in young adults (Khaleque & Rohner, 2002; Rohner & Khaleque, 2013). These factors include parental style, father's warmth, self-esteem, socioeconomic status, personality traits, and peer support

Parental warmth: The parental warmth refers to the quality of the affectional bond between fathers and their young adults, and the verbal, physical, and symbolic behaviours fathers use to express these feelings. Parental warmth refers to the affection, nurturance, love, care, comfort, support, and other such behaviours that fathers shows toward their children. Parenting is universal, but parenting practices or parental styles vary among cultures. In Western culture, parental attempts to monitor a growing child may be considered as a breach of autonomy, while in Asian culture such monitoring is viewed as a sign of parental concern, care, and love (Nelson, Hart, Yang, Olsen, & Jin, 2006).

Self-esteem: Self-esteem plays a substantial role in the self-concept and psychological development of an individual. Self-esteem was a popular area of research in Western countries from the 1960s to the 1990s. Bandura (1977) states that every individual possesses a self-system, which enables them to exercise a measure of control over their thoughts, feelings, actions, and motivation, and enables them to estimate their ability to get things done.

Socioeconomic status: Socioeconomic status is a collective sociological and economic measure of an individual's or family's economic and social position relative to others, based on earnings, education, and occupation. Lareau and Annette (2003) observed socioeconomic status is usually classified into three categories: High, middle, and low to describe the three areas an individual or a family may fall into. When placing an individual or a family into one of these categories any or all of three variables of education, occupation, and income can be assessed. No education, low education, and low income have been shown to be strong predictors of a range of physical and mental health problems. This is due to social and environmental conditions that may be the primary cause of an individual's social predicament. There are bidirectional casual links among socioeconomic status, physical health and mental health.

Personality trait: Different personality traits are associated with different psychological wellbeing outcomes (Goodwin & Gotlib 2004). Certain personality traits, in particular, extraversion and introversion, have been shown to be related to psychological wellbeing. Research has also suggested that individuals who are high in introversion may exhibit greater levels of emotional behaviour and anxiety when confronted with stressful situations. In addition, the interaction between levels of certain personality traits and family conflict also help explain differences in mental health outcomes (Hampson, 2012).

Peer support: Experiences with peers create an important developmental perspective for young adults, especially for university students (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006). Throughout childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood, peer relationships are of central importance to an individual. Individuals who enjoy positive relationships with peers experience higher levels of social and psychological well-being and positive beliefs about the self. They also have values for prosocial behaviour and social interaction that are stronger and more adaptive than those of young adults without positive peer relationships (Wentzel, 2005).

Internet Addiction

Internet addiction is excessive uncontrolled internet use, in which a person spends a great deal of time online, in spite of negative outcomes in their lives. Also, internet addiction negatively affects psychological well-being (Winther, 2014). Internet addiction is also called online addiction, cyberspace addiction, internet addiction disorder, net addiction, pathological internet use, and high internet dependency (Davis, Flett, & Besser, 2002; Hur, 2006). Broadly, addiction is defined as a compulsive, uncontrollable dependence on a

chemical substance, habit or practice to such a degree that either the means of obtaining or ceasing use may cause severe emotional, mental or physiological reactions (Mosby's Medical Dictionary, 2009). Internet addiction is an explanation for uncontrollable, and damaging use of this technology. It is a warning sign that a person is having difficulty controlling his or her internet use (Beard, 2002).

Component of Internet Addiction

Griffiths (2000) found that internet addiction has six core components in common. They include salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict and relapse. They are as follows:

a. **Salience**: This occurs when the particular activity becomes the most important activity in a person's life and dominates his or her thinking, feelings and behaviour.

b. **Mood modification:** This refers to the subjective experiences that people report as a consequence of engaging in the particular activity and can be seen as a coping strategy.

c. **Tolerance**: This is the process whereby the increasing amount of the particular activity is required to attain the former effects.

d. **Withdrawal symptoms**: These are the unpleasant feeling states and physical effects that occur when the particular activity is discontinued or suddenly reduced.

e. **Conflict**: This refers to the conflicts between the addict and those around them or from within the individuals themselves that are concerned with the particular activity.

f. **Relapse**: This is the tendency of going back to a previous undesired pattern of particular activity. The undesired behaviour reappears or restored after many years of abstinence/control and may even be worse.

Internet Addiction and Psychological Wellbeing

Researcher argued that internet was believed to provide an atmosphere where individuals with perceived interpersonal difficulties (such as, shyness, depression and loneliness) could form momentous relationships (Huang, Ang, Chong & Chye, 2014) because of greater anonymity (Bargh, McKenna & Fitzsimmons, 2002; McKenna, Green & Gleason, 2002;), and better control over their online appearance (Noonan, 1998; Walther, 1996). During recent years, social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, etc. have provided a platform for young people to develop and maintain social relationships and networks online. Furthermore, the increased popularity of social media has made the lives of young users easier to stay in touch almost every day (Allen, Ryan, Gray, McInerney & Waters, 2014). Moreover, these benefits made such individuals more confident in disclosing their selves and share more intimacy (Forest & Wood, 2012; Morahan- Martin & Schumacher, 2003). On the other hand, this had the potential of making an individual depend on the internet and aggravate existing problems (Caplan, 2003; Morahan-Martin, 1999).

The possibilities provided by the internet such as anonymity, absence of physical contact and identity alteration allowed individuals to communicate and compose messages at their own pace (Huan *et al.*, 2014; Morahan- Martin *et al.*, 2003;). Owing to greater control over presentation while online (Huan *et al.*, 2014), individuals were able to forge or alter any information, concerning their identification, which could be unsafe to disclose openly (Caplan, 2003). Consequently, the preferences for online communication than face-to-face interaction were strong among lonely and depressed individuals, as internet allowed them to make friends with minimal disclosure of identity and personal information. Furthermore, lonely people were more likely to use the internet to regulate their moods, report difficulties in everyday functioning and relieve feelings related to loneliness compared to non-lonely individuals (Booth, 2000; Morahan- Martin *et al.*, 2003).

Studies demonstrated that loneliness, depression, and computer self-efficacy were strongly associated with internet addiction (Ceyhan & Ceyhan 2008; Leung 2002). In addition to its harmful effects on interpersonal

relationships, academic performance and work, researchers have demonstrated the potential ill effect of internet addiction in relation to adolescents' perception and cognitive processes, such as being preoccupied with thoughts (Caplan, 2010; Roberts & Good, 2010; Tiggemann, 2006). Those who are addicted to internet displayed greater chances of developing loneliness and depression in contrast to the non-addicts because individuals who suffered from frequent psychological problems such as loneliness and depression possessed a tendency to underestimate as well as negatively perceive themselves in contrast to others who were psychologically healthy (Korkeila, Jaaskelainen, Vahlberg, & Taiminen, 2010).

Moreover, these categories of people were more likely to be susceptible to rejection (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980), having a smaller social circle and poor social skills (Ashe & McCutcheon, 2001). Those who were shy were more likely to feel the same as lonely people. In context for the above statement, researchers argued that lonely, shy or depressed people displayed greater tendencies of being drawn towards internet, in comparison to the non-lonely people (Amichai-Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2003) because they felt that they were able to be their "true selves" online (McKenna, Green & Gleason, 2002), and further perceived internet platforms to be less threatening (Caplan, 2003; Caplan, 2005; Morahan-Martin, 1999).

Such people felt secure and confident when they were online, and uncomfortable, when offline. These advantages, thus, displayed greater risks for people to become addicted to the net. Furthermore, the desire for constantly being in touch and expanding friend networks online, resulted in making the person become habitual by making him/her hooked to the screen, which further lead to aggravating existing problems (Caplan, 2003). Such degeneration hampered other facets such as school, job and home (Kim, LaRose & Peng, 2009).

Preferences for online communication were viewed as popular coping strategies particularly amongst the psychologically distressed individuals as they viewed internet as a medium of alleviating feelings of loneliness and low moods (Liang, Zhou, Yuan, Shao & Bian, 2016). Online entertainment helped in decreasing high levels of stress and depression (Bessiere, Kiesler, Kraut, & Boneva, 2004). Liang *et al.,* (2016) argued that individuals with extreme low mood were more likely to indulge in online entertainment such as music and games to uplift their spirits. Internet is often used as a coping mechanism among individuals to avoid real life problems (Young, 1999). Adolescence more often used internet to escape issues rather than finding suitable ways of resolving issues (Aydm & San, 2011; Griffiths, 2000). Failure to monitor one's own control on the internet, along with feelings of remorse greatly exhibit excessive use of internet (Caplan, 2003). Excessive use of internet leads to decline in wellbeing in glocalized society (Mei, Yau, Chai, Guo & Potenza, 2016; Zhang, 2015), and an increase in feelings of loneliness and depression (Kraut *et.al.*, 1998).

LITERATURE REVIEW
Theoretical Framework
Behavioural theory by Young (1999) will serve as theoretical framework for the stud. It states that behaviour is related to historical antecedents. The individual's response to the immediate environment depends on the effects of previous experiences as well as current environmental conditions. The 'cue' has been an important influence in the development and maintenance of addiction behaviour and psychological wellbeing.

Young (1999) emphasises the similarity between Internet addiction and psychological wellbeing. For example, when people feel depressed, hopeless and pessimistic about the future, they may be addicted frequently to escape these feelings. Depression or low self-esteem may lead people to binge in other behavioural ways to escape or avoid these negative situations. In this context, Young explains that Internet addiction may start from binge behaviour intended to escape negative factors. For example, the Internet may supply people having problems in their real lives with emotional relief, mental escape and a way to avoid some of these problems.

Some internet users with problems may forget their problems while using the internet for

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things such as news groups, interactive games, chat rooms and surfing data. 'Cue' may supply internet users with some forms of positive social interaction through the experience of participating in common topics or helping others and improve their wellbeing (Modayil, 2003).

Empirical Review

Pal (2017) examined the relationship between problematic internet use and psychological wellbeing among upper high school students in Sweden. In addition, potential gender differences with regard to problematic internet use was described. Finally, the study explored potential differences between students categorized as "Average internet users" 127 (65%), "Risk internet users" 67 (34%), and "Addictive internet users" 1 (0.5%) in relation to wellbeing. The questionnaires were distributed to 140 female students and 96 male students. The participants attended either of the two high schools in the south of Sweden. Results revealed small positive correlations in personal growth $(r=.25)$ and purpose in life $(r=.15)$ in relation to problematic internet use.

The results showed no difference in males and females in relation to problematic internet use (total). Also, the results showed no differences in psychological wellbeing in relation to "Average internet users" and "Risk internet users." Further, on assessing differences between the six subscales of wellbeing in relation to "Average internet users" and "Risk internet users", no significant difference was found. However, there was seen a tendency for personal growth in relation to "Average internet users" and "Risk internet users."

ÇARDAK (2013) examined the relationship between internet addiction and psychological wellbeing. Participants were 479 university students who completed a questionnaire package that included the Online Cognition Scale and the Scales of Psychological Well-Being. The relationships between internet addiction and psychological well-being were examined using correlation and multiple regression analysis. According to results, psychological well-being was predicted negatively by diminished impulse control, loneliness/depression, social comfort, and distraction. Students with higher levels of internet addiction are more likely to be low in psychological well-being. The results indicated that psychological well-being was affected by internet addiction negatively. This provided a better understanding on the relationship between psychological well-being and Internet addiction.

While Xu, Zhang, Liu, Wan and Sun (2011) explored the evolution of the relationship between internet use on psychological wellbeing from elementary school, middle school, to high schools. Randomized stratified sampling was used. Participants were 3,185 teens in Kunming, a city located in southwest China. They were asked to complete a questionnaire on Internet Use and Well-Being Scale. The result indicated a relationship existed between internet use and psychological well-being. Higher grade students used internet earlier, spent more total time online per week, and scored lower psychological well-being. Students of middle and high school shared more similarity on internet usage behaviour and content preference of social and study services. Significant difference existed on loneliness and anxiety among elementary, middle, and high schools. Compared with females, males significantly used the internet earlier, more frequently, more for all internet services, and scored higher psychological well-being.

Hypothesis

1. Internet addiction will have significant correlation with students' psychological wellbeing.

METHOD

Participants: A total of two hundred and thirty-two (232) undergraduate students served as participants for the study. They were selected using convenient sampling techniques to ensure equal participation of the various students in the university faculties. They consist of one hundred and forty-seven (63.4%) females, and eighty-five (36.6%) males. Their age ranged from 17-30 years and their mean age was 22.67 with standard deviation of 4.04: Their facultys' data shows that ninety-two (39.7%) were drawn from social sciences, fifty-five (23.7%) from management sciences, thirty-one (13.4%) were of law, twenty-five (10.8%) were from art faculty, twenty-nine (12.5%) were from natural sciences.

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Instruments: The first instrument adopted for the study was Ryff's Psychological Well-Being (RPWS) Scales scale, a 42 items scale, which was developed by Ryff's (1989). It is designed to measure autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life and self-acceptance. It consists six items subscale, and has 6-point response format: Strongly disagree=1, Slightly disagree=2, Disagree=3, Agree=4, Slightly agree=5 to Strongly disagree=6. The instrument generally is highly reliable, with Cronbach alpha internal consistency value of .55-.79=autonomy, .74=environmental mastery, .62-78=personal growth, .55=positive relations, .42-84=purpose in life and .66-87=self-acceptance as was determined by Ryff (1989). And Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient analysis of .74 was confirmed.

The second instrument adopted was Short Version of Young's Internet Addiction Test: A 12 items scale. Constructed by Young (1998) and designed to assess excessive or pathological internet use. It has 5-Point response format "never"=1, "rarely"=2, "sometimes"=3, "often"=4 and "very often"=5. It has two subscales: "Loss of control/time management" and "craving/social problems. The subscales has six item each, both subscale have good reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = .876 and .836). The reliability for the overall score is also good (Cronbach's Alpha = .897). The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient analysis of -.15 and .73 were confirmed.

Procedure: The researcher through the aid of Heads of Department obtained permission from the Dean of Faculties. The following faculties social sciences, management sciences, natural sciences, law and art faculty which were part of the faculties within the university were used. Copies of the questionnaire were administered to the participants. The researcher in process directed the respondents on how to attend to the questions properly and encouraged them to answer all, doing that with honesty, emphasizing that no answer is either right or wrong.

Design and Statistics: The study is a survey research, with correlational design. Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics was used to analyze the data. This is because it geared towards ascertaining the relationships between or among variables of interest.

RESULTS

The result of the statistical analysis of the data obtained in this study indicated that internet addiction had a significant relationship n=232, r=.18**, P<.01) with psychological wellbeing. Thus, the hypothesis is accepted. This implies that increase in internet addiction leads to increase in psychological well-being.

DISCUSSION

The study examined the correlate between internet addiction and students' psychological wellbeing. The hypothesis which stated that internet addiction will have significant correlation with psychological wellbeing was confirmed. The study is in line with the findings of (Pal, 2017; Younes et.al, 2016 & ÇARDAK, 2013). Internet addiction from this study affects the psychological wellbeing of undergraduates in different forms and can likely lead to anxiety and depression if not properly handled. Certain factors like peer pressure and self-esteem may as well have a role to play in internet addiction and psychological wellbeing.

Implications of the Study

The outcome of this research makes a number of noteworthy implications.

1. This finding provides valuable insight into why students are likely to suffer from poor psychological wellbeing. This represents a step in raising awareness and understanding on the issue of students' internet addiction. The knowledge could therefore help educationists, counsellors, psychologists and university authorities to understand the complexity of the psychological issues students face.

2. Authorities of learning institutions can use the knowledge of this research to develop effective programmes that will meet students, emotional and psychosocial needs.

3. Parents can use the knowledge of the study in parenting the internet engagement of their children.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that psychotherapy sessions should be conducted to examine students psychological wellbeing.
2. Psychological evaluation of students' personality is paramount in the University setting. Experts like psychologists should organised seminar for students' addictive and teach them on how to respond to live stressors.
3. It is essential for students to be confronted with the dangers of poor psychological wellbeing.

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Conclusion

The study examined correlation between internet addiction and students' psychological wellbeing. A hypothesis was postulated, data were generated, analyzed, result carefully interpreted, and discussed by the researchers. Implications and recommendations were also established. Thus, the researchers conclude that there is a significant correlation between internet addiction and psychological wellbeing.

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