

## Sensation Seeking and Internet Addiction Among College Students- Users and Non-Users of Dating Applications/Sites

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### ABSTRACT

Internet facilitates mass and personal communication, and has enhanced global competitiveness, however its excessive, uncontrolled, and problematic use can result in a condition called Internet Addiction, one personality trait consistently found to determine internet addiction is sensation seeking which is also found to be associated with the practices of online dating. Not many researches in the Indian context have explored the relationship between these three variables. Within this backdrop, this study aims to examine the influence of levels of sensation seeking on internet addiction among college students-users and non-users of online dating apps. Sensation Seeking Scale (SSS-V) and Internet addiction test was administered on 400 (200 male and 200 female) college students. The results revealed that levels of sensation seeking has a significant influence on internet addiction and there is a significant interaction effect between levels of sensation seeking and online dating on internet addiction, however no significant influence of online dating was found on internet addiction among males and females.

**Keywords:** *Internet addiction, Sensation Seeking, Online dating, College students, users and non-users*

Internet is a dynamically pervasive tool permeating all sectors of the society, It influences each and every member, along with all other members its impact is highly felt on college students which is one of the most vulnerable group, as most university students move away from home for academic purposes due to which they have more freedom in exploring the internet (Kendall, 1998), the impact is such that an increase in usage of the internet can lead to changes in mood, an inability to control the amount of time spent on the Internet, withdrawal symptoms when not engaged, a diminishing social life, and adverse work and academic consequences. (Brenner, 1996; Lin and Tsai, 2002).

According to Kandell (1998) 58% of Internet dependents reported a decline in their academic work, they reported lowered levels of study, a decrease in their grades, and missed classes due to their use. The Internet and the practices associated with it are addictive in nature, many researchers have found the significance of personality traits in determining internet

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addiction, and one such trait is sensation seeking, the sensation seeking trait has been defined as "The need for varied, novel, and complex sensations and experiences and the willingness to take physical and social risks for the sake of such experience" (Zuckerman, 1979). The behavioral expressions of sensation seeking is involved in vocational preferences and choices, social premarital and marital relationships, eating habits and food preferences, creativity, humor, fantasy, media and art preferences, and social attitudes (Ruch, 2001). Surfing the Internet and many other online activities are considered equivalent to global high-tech adventure and therefore could be considered a form of sensation seeking. (Lin and Tsai, 2002) Sensation seeking traits have also been found to be involved in making dating choices. Sautter et al. (2010) defined online dating as "the use of websites that provide a database of potential partners typically in close geographical proximity that one can browse and contact". According to Young (1998) Individuals viewed online friends as exciting, and in many cases lead to romantic interactions and cybersex, which was perceived by dependents as harmless interactions as these sexual online affairs did not involve touching and the anonymity is also maintained of Internet-addicted individuals, this was seen as the manifestation of their sensation seeking personality trait i.e. seeking thrill and excitement through online relationships. Young (1998) suggested a component of internet addiction called cyber relational addiction, where Individuals engage in online friendships, they become overly invested and involved in virtual relationships or friendships that they may neglect real-life relationships.

High sensation seekers anticipate less risk in finding partners online as compared to low sensation seekers. (Henderson et al., 2005). High sensation-seekers as compared to low sensation seekers are likely to seek novel and sensational experiences, and sensation-seeking is predictive of young people's risk-taking behaviour, and online interaction provide emerging adults an opportunity to meet their novel, dramatic and unconventional needs due to which they end up spending more time online searching for potential partners and creating a dependency on the internet (Zimmerman et al, 2007). The Internet allows adult and teen men and women more freedom to deviate from typically constraining gender roles that are often automatically activated in face-to-face interactions (Cooper & Sportolari, 1997).

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

#### ***Objectives***

1. To study the influence of levels of sensation seeking on internet addiction among female college students.
2. To study the influence of online dating on internet addiction among female college students.
3. To study the interaction between level of sensation seeking and online dating on internet addiction among female college students.
4. To study the influence of levels of sensation seeking on internet addiction among male college students.
5. To study the influence of online dating on internet addiction among male college students.
6. To study the interaction between level of sensation seeking and online dating on internet addiction among male college students.

#### ***Hypothesis***

H1: There is a significant influence of levels of sensation seeking on internet addiction among male college students

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H2: There is a significant influence of online dating on internet addiction among male college students.

H3: There is a significant interaction effect between level of sensation seeking and online dating on internet addiction among male college students.

H4: There is a significant influence of levels of sensation seeking on internet addiction among female college students

H5: There is a significant influence of online dating on internet addiction among female college students.

H6: There is a significant interaction effect between level of sensation seeking and online dating on internet addiction among female college students.

### ***Participants***

The Sample constituted of 400 college students aged between 18-25 years residing in different parts of India pursuing either graduate or post-graduate studies, 200 females (100 users of dating apps, 100 non users) and 200 males (100 users of online dating apps and 100 non-user). The sample was recruited using convenience and snowball sampling.

### ***Materials***

The variables of the present study were investigated using 3 different tools Socio demographic sheet, to collect information regarding participant's age, gender, educational level, and details of their dating apps usage. Sensation seeking scale form V, 40-item forced choice scale, it can be scored as a general measure of sensation-seeking by summing all items, It has good psychometric properties, the test retest reliability of form V for the total scores is .94 internal reliability of the total score on form V .83 to .86. Internet addiction test, it is composed of 20 elements, total score ranges with the higher the score representing the higher level of severity of Internet addiction. The IAT showed a very good internal consistency in a study conducted in India with Cronbach's alpha = 0.93

### ***Procedure***

The participants were briefed about the study, consent was taken before administering the standardized scales, data about the participant's demographics and online dating status was collected through a socio-demographic sheet after that SSS form V and IAT questionnaire were administered on the participants to measure their level of sensation seeking and internet addiction. The data was analysed using Descriptive statistics and Two-way analysis of variance between groups measure with the help of SPSS.

### **Variables of the study**

#### ***Independent variables***

1. Sensation seeking – high, medium and low
2. Online dating- users and non-users

#### ***Dependent variable***

Internet addiction

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Table 1: Mean, SD, Skewness and Kurtosis of the female participants on Sensation seeking and Internet addiction**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Std. Error	Kurtosis	Std. Error
Total_score_sensation seeking	200	21.12	5.687	-.047	.172	-.240	.342
Internet_addiction_score	200	35.23	12.770	.477	.172	.154	.342
Valid N (listwise)	200						

**Table 2: Mean, SD, Skewness and Kurtosis of the male participants on Sensation seeking and Internet addiction**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Std. Error	Kurtosis	Std. Error
Total_score_sensation seeking	200	23.49	5.661	-.135	.220	.210	.437
Internet_addiction_score	200	45.13	20.523	.163	.220	-.900	.437
Valid N (listwise)	200						

Descriptive data for males and females represented in table 1 and 2 shows that male participants scored higher on sensation seeking, as well as on internet addiction in comparison to female participants, and a similar results were revealed by a study conducted by Martin and Schumacher (2000) According to their study, Internet users are more likely to be males who are technologically sophisticated, who use real time interactive activities, such as online games and chat lines, and they feel comfortable and competent online.

**Table 3: Two way ANOVA tests of between subject effects for females**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Sensation seeking	1912.407	2	956.203	9.009	.001
online_dating_status	276.005	1	276.005	2.600	.108
online_dating_status * sensation_seeking	417.490	1	417.490	3.933	.049
Error	20697.259	195	106.140		
Total	253173.000	200			
Corrected Total	25697.875	199			

\* $p < .05$ ,  $p > .05$ ,  $p < .05$

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Two-way ANOVA results for female participants in table 3 revealed that levels of sensation seeking has a significant influence on internet addiction among female college students supporting the 1<sup>st</sup> hypothesis, this finding can be explained in the light of a study conducted by Rahmani and Lavasani (2011) which showed a positive significant relationship between internet dependency with overall sensation seeking and subscales of disinhibition and boredom susceptibility. However, the results do not support the 2<sup>nd</sup> hypothesis which suggests that online dating has a significant influence on internet addiction, therefore no significant influence was found of online dating on internet addiction among female college students, few studies have highlighted some mediating factors between online dating and internet addiction. A research study conducted by Kim, Kwon, and Lee. (2009) reveals that there is an impact of Self-Esteem, Involvement, and Sociability on the Use of Internet Dating Services. Kang & Hoffman (2011) found that trust and the total number of tasks that a person performs on the Internet were significant predictors of the likelihood of online dating usage. Fishbein (2009) suggests that when an individual has positive ideas and opinions about using dating applications, when the societal and cultural norms are in favor of online dating, and when they know they have adequate resources like time, money and technology to execute their plan they are more likely to indulge in online dating behavior. Young (1998) also suggests that factors like online gaming and net compulsion are the factors responsible for Internet addiction and not just online dating alone. The 3<sup>rd</sup> hypotheses were supported as there is a significant interaction effect between levels of sensation seeking and online dating on internet addiction among female college students. The results could be explained under the light of the study conducted by Lin and Tsai, (2002) their study revealed online friendships have become a popular activity among people, potentially leading to its excessive internet use and internet dependents scored significantly higher on overall sensation seeking than internet non-dependents. Use and gratification theory by Blumler and Katz (1974) explains the internet has something suitable for everyone, be it information-seeking, inter-personal communication, entertainment, or escapism.

**Table 4 : Two way ANOVA tests of between subject effects for males**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Sensation Seeking	1685.311	2	842.655	3.545	.031
online_dating_status	510.547	1	510.547	2.148	.144
online_dating_status* sensation_seeking	5869.363	1	5869.363	24.689	.000
Error	46357.611	195	237.731		
Total	322940.000	200			
Corrected Total	64171.820	199			

\* $p < .05$ ,  $p > .05$ ,  $p < .05$

**Post Hoc Analysis.** In relation to table 3 and 4, In the interest of exploring the interaction effect, for both males and females, it was found that there is a significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between medium and low sensation seekers and, there is also a significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between high and low sensation seekers with respect to internet addiction.

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Table 4 presents Two way ANOVA results for male college students, it was found that there is a significant influence of levels of sensation seeking on internet addiction among male college students supporting the 4<sup>th</sup> hypotheses, This finding is supported by Lavin and colleagues (2000) in their study, It was found that Internet addiction is positively correlated with sensation seeking. Internet dependents scored significantly higher than non-dependents in terms of overall sensation seeking, thrill, and adventure-seeking, as well as experience seeking. Lavin and colleagues (2000) then further explained their finding by suggesting that sensation seeking of Internet dependents might not be physical, as measured by the Zuckerman scale, but rather mental or virtual. The 5<sup>th</sup> hypotheses suggesting that there is a significant influence of online dating on internet addiction is not supported as no significant influence of online dating was found on internet addiction of male college students. In the Indian culture, the act of online dating varies a bit from other countries, It has also been observed that the online dating app users are mostly male in India 76 percent (Singh, 2018). The 6<sup>th</sup> hypotheses was supported as there is a significant interaction effect between levels of sensation seeking and online dating on internet addiction among males. Brym and colleagues (2001) found out online dating has many advantages as it gives its user's control over many activities like self-presentation, self-disclosure, anonymity, these kinds of pleasures arise from sensation seeking components like seeking novel and varied experiences which have addictive properties that lead users to spend more time on the Internet (Brym & Lenton, 2001; Fiore & Donath, 2004).

Despite the challenges and unsafe nature of some dating sites or applications, some individual still takes part in the online dating activity, such individuals are seen to have higher sensation seeking tendencies. High sensation seekers tend to gauge risk as lower than do low sensation seekers, even for activities that they have never tried moreover, high sensation seekers anticipate feeling less anxiety in risky situations than do low sensation seekers (Hovarth & Zuckerman, 1993)

### CONCLUSION

The study revealed a significant influence of levels of sensation seeking on internet addiction and a significant interaction effect between levels of sensation seeking and online dating on internet addiction among male and female college students, however no significant influence of online dating on internet addiction was seen among males and females. With changing times, the methods to find potential romantic partners has also changed, through education and awareness Internet use can be made a safer practice, the understanding of the relationship between these three variables will help in building strategies and models for cyber education and Internet hygiene for emerging adults.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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