

Internet Addiction and Automatic Thoughts among Young Adults

Amit^{1*}, Sanjay Kumar²

ABSTRACT

India is a country of Youth and the development of any nation depends upon the talent the youth population carries. The parents and all stakeholders must inculcate the values and manners to make them resilient and mindful. The present study examines the relationship between Internet Addiction and Automatic Thought Processes among Young Adults. A total sample of 200 young adults was recruited and further equally divided into two groups based on gender. The data was collected from undergraduate young adults studying in arts, commerce, and science stream in various colleges of Hisar, Haryana. The tools used for the study were Internet Addiction Test (IAT) and Automatic Thought Questionnaire (ATQ). The findings of the study reveal that there is a positive correlation between internet addiction and automatic thoughts (Negative). It is concluded that internet addiction leads to negative thoughts and negative thoughts also trigger internet addiction.

Keywords: *Internet Addiction; Automatic Thought Process; Young Adults.*

India is a country of youth and youth plays a very important role in the development of any country, so the development of India also depends upon youth. But the question is who influences youth? Students use the internet for their classes, assignment presentations, workshops, lectures, research projects, and entertainment. The use of the internet is now in every field whether it is education, health department, sports, finance, or something else. Initially, the invention of the internet was to communicate with long-distance relatives & friends and for some business purposes. It makes the conversation easier, and quicker and exchange information fast. It is proven as a blessing for the new era. But at present extreme use of the internet is become a major issue in many countries including India (Anand et al., 2018). "Internet addiction" term was given by Goldberg (1995) to denote pathological internet usage (Vyjayanthi et al., 2014). Internet addiction has become a major issue in the present scenario; all age groups are affected or addicted to the internet whether they are children or old age people, whether they are students, employed, or unemployed people. Internet addiction has its different types, for example - Cybersex Addiction, Net Compulsions, Cyber Relationships Addiction, Computer or Gaming Addiction, Social Media Addiction, etc. Research suggests that depression is associated with Internet Addiction (Buschmann et al., 2014).

¹Research Scholar, Department of Applied Psychology, Guru Jambheshwar University of Science & Technology, Hisar, Haryana, India.

²Assistant Professor, Department of Applied Psychology, Guru Jambheshwar University of Science & Technology, Hisar, Haryana, India.

*Corresponding Author

Received: February 06, 2023; March 27, 2023; Accepted: March 31, 2023

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In India, Internet Addiction appears to be an emerging mental health condition among university students (Anand et al., 2018). Psychological distress and Internet Addiction are positively correlated with Internet Addiction (Anand et al., 2018). Many irrational and negative thoughts come to mind when someone gets addicted to the internet but perceiving them negatively or positively depends on the situation one coming through. All people experience automatic thoughts but negative automatic thoughts start to contribute to distress and inhibit daily functioning. It was found in a study that there is a relationship between irrational beliefs and automatic thoughts (Szentagotai & Freeman, 2007).

Overthinking takes place when we worry about the past and future too much. Negative thoughts can occur when you are feeling low and bad. This could cause you to feel bad about yourself, blame yourself, and point out the negatives about others. In a study, it was found that people with more irrational beliefs experienced a high level of automatic negative thought (Buschmann et al., 2014). Negative thoughts of self-critical thinking style have depressive symptoms (Pedro et al., 2019). A study found that pathological internet use is highly positively correlated with media consumption. It also alleviates depression and low self-regulation (LaRose et al., 2003).

It was found that symptoms of hysterical disorders were positively related to negative automatic thoughts (Muris et al., 2009) and internet addiction is more common among men than women with different patterns of its use (Vyjayanthi et al., 2014). Another study found that young adults use more internet in comparison to other age groups (Valkenburg et al., 2011) and internet addiction affects students' educational atmosphere and performance adversely (Ghamari et al., 2011). A study demonstrates that gender plays a very important role as the risk of addiction to the internet is greater for Iranian males than females, and they are more prone to depression, stress, and anxiety (Ostovar et al., 2016).

It was found that rather than using positive coping styles like yoga and meditation; the internet is used as a strategy for reducing stress, supported by the fact that adolescents with a higher level of positive coping styles did not use the internet for reducing stress (Li et al., 2016). Adolescent Smartphone addiction is negatively correlated with better student-student relationships and had a significant positive correlation with the need to belong which is partially mediated by self-esteem (Wang et al., 2017). One more study suggests that automatic thoughts and depressive symptoms have direct relationships and also have a high predictive value (Fatih et al., 2020). Also, a dysfunctional attitude affects internet addiction and automatic thoughts positively (Yigman et al., 2021).

Objectives

To study the gender difference and relationship between internet addiction and automatic thought processes among young adults.

HYPOTHESIS

- H¹ There will be no correlation between internet addiction and automatic thought processes among young adults.
- H² There will be no effect of gender on the level of internet addiction and automatic thought processes among young adults.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

A total sample of 200 students was collected from the various areas of Hisar, Haryana. The sample was equally divided based on gender. The age range of the sample was from 20-25 years. The data was collected online and offline mode.

Instruments

- **Self-Structured Profile:** An inventory was also developed for collecting socio-demographic data of the participants which include Age, Background, Qualification, Gender, etc.
- **Internet Addiction Test** (Kimberly Young., 1998): The IAT has 20 statements which are based on 5 points Likert scale starting from 1 to 5. The test classifies the three groups of internet mild, moderate, and severe categories. 20 to 49 scores indicate average internet user, 50 to 79 scores indicate some frequent problems with internet use, and 80 to 100 scores indicate pathological internet use. The internet addiction test has a reliability of 0.85 and validity is 0.90.
- **Automatic Negative Thoughts Questionnaire** (Hollon & Kendall., 1980): It is a questionnaire of 30 negative statements which assesses the level of depression. The test is based on 5-point scale (from 1 to 5) that indicates how frequently an individual has these negative thoughts.

Procedure

The subjects were informed about the purpose of the study and consent was obtained from the respondents. The socio-demographic data sheet along with the study questionnaire was made to fill out both online as well as offline mode. The difference was due to the breakout of the covid-19 pandemic. Pearson r and T-test were applied to the data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 Mean and standard deviation of the sample (N=200).

Variable	Mean	SD
Age	22.67	1.658
Gender	1.57	.496
Qualification	1.33	.472
Area	1.34	.475
Automatic thought	58.41	19.755
Internet Addiction	36.77	13.690

Table 2 Sample Characteristics (N= 200)

Variable		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age (years)	20-22	78	39.2
	23-25	121	60.8
Gender	Male	85	42.7
	Female	114	57.3
Qualification	Graduation	133	66.8
	Post-graduation	66	33.2
Area	Urban	131	65.8
	Rural	68	34.2

Internet Addiction and Automatic Thoughts among Young Adults

Table 3 Pearson Correlation among study variables (N=200).

Variable	Age	Gender	Qualification	Area	ATQ	IAT
Age	1					
Gender	-0.179*	1				
Qualification	0.277**	0.069	1			
Area	0.138	0.001	0.033	1		
ATQ	-0.158*	0.037	-0.052	-0.135	1	
IAT	0.032	-0.136	-0.040	-0.083	0.485**	1

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The result shows that there is a negative correlation between age and automatic negative thoughts which indicates that as age increases, automatic negative thoughts decrease. Additionally, there is a positive correlation between internet addiction and automatic negative thoughts.

Table 4 shows the differences between groups on Automatic Thoughts and Internet Addiction

Variable	Male M±SD (N=100)	Female M±SD (N=100)	t	Df	P
ATQ	57.58±21.42	58.96±18.42	-.488	198	.626
IAT	38.92±13.28	35.16±13.763	1.939	198	.054

Table 4- shows gender differences in the level of internet addiction and automatic thoughts among young adults. The t value is -.488 of ATQ whereas the t value of IAT is 1.939 obtained by the groups.

The result of the study shows that there is no gender difference in the usage internet and the process of automatic negative thoughts.

The present study was carried out to examine the relationship between internet addiction and automatic negative thoughts. It was found that there is a negative correlation between Age and Automatic thoughts indicating that as age progresses, the automatic (negative) thoughts decrease. The reason behind it may be that when people get older they became more spiritual, and they develop strong religious beliefs (Bengtson et al., 2015), and thus the process of negative thoughts automatically decreases. Another cause of the negative correlation between age and automatic negative thoughts can be biological. When people get older they become more mature and more experienced, which enables them to make judgments logically without the involvement of emotion. This logic and better understanding help them not to think negatively.

It was also found that there is a positive correlation between internet addiction and automatic negative thoughts. It means when a person gets addicted to the internet the person becomes more prone to negative thoughts and negative thoughts also trigger internet addiction; hence the proposed hypothesis has been rejected. The finding of this study is in line with Yigman et al. (2021) stating that a dysfunctional attitude affects internet addiction and automatic thoughts positively. As people surf the internet, they compare them-self with

Internet Addiction and Automatic Thoughts among Young Adults

others, and when they assume that they don't have as many resources as other people, more negative thoughts start emerging.

No gender effect was found on the level of internet addiction and automatic thoughts showing that males and females may have a relatively equal level of possible negative thoughts so far as internet addiction is concerned; hence the proposed hypothesis has been accepted. This study contradicts the findings of Vjayanthi et al. (2014) stating that internet addiction is more common in men than women.

A negative thought is a cognitive aspect and it encourages internet use. This works according to the A-B-C model by Albert Ellis stating that antecedent gives way to behavior and behavior gives way to consequence (Corey, 2017). Here, negative thoughts give way to increased internet usage while increased internet usage gives way to more automatic negative thoughts. Internet is also used as one of the coping styles against automatic negative thoughts which do not yield positive results like other adaptive & holistic approaches (Nyklíček & Kuijpers, 2008).

Hence, a better and healthy approach must be opted to deal with automatic negative thoughts rather than opting for stress-increasing activities like floating in the pool of the internet. Be the master of your thoughts and control the undesired behavior which makes you a slave to do something socially unacceptable.

CONCLUSION

This study suggests that there is a positive correlation between Internet Addiction and Automatic Negative Thoughts. It means Internet Addiction leads to Automatic Negative Thoughts and Negative thoughts also trigger Internet Addiction. This study also observed that there is no gender difference in using the internet and the process of automatic negative thoughts. It means there is no difference between males and females regarding the use of the internet and the process of automatic negative thoughts. Gender roles should be investigated deeply to establish the link between gender and addiction.

REFERENCES

- Anand, N., Jain, P. A., Prabhu, S., Thomas, C., Bhat, A., Prathyusha, P. V., & Cherian, A. V. (2018). Internet use patterns, internet addiction, and psychological distress among engineering university students: A study from India. *Indian journal of psychological medicine*, 40(5), 458-467.
- Bengtson, V. L., Silverstein, M., Putney, N. M., & Harris, S. C. (2015). Does religiousness increase with age? Age changes and generational differences over 35 years. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 54(2), 363-379.
- Buschmann, T., Horn, R. A., Blankenship, V. R., Garcia, Y. E., & Bohan, K. B. (2018). The relationship between automatic thoughts and irrational beliefs predicting anxiety and depression. *Journal of Rational-Emotive & Cognitive-Behavior Therapy*, 36(2), 137-162.
- Corey, G. (2017). *Theory and practice of counseling and psychotherapy*. Nelson Education.
- Fatih, Y., Kadir, Ö., & Canan, E. (2020). Investigation of the relationship between disease severity and automatic thought and dysfunctional schemes in patients with depression and non-clinical group: a structural equation modeling study. *Current Psychology*, 1-9.
- Ghamari, F., Mohammadbeigi, A., Mohammadsalehi, N., & Hashiani, A. A. (2011). Internet addiction and modeling its risk factors in medical students, Iran. *Indian journal of psychological medicine*, 33(2), 158-162.

Internet Addiction and Automatic Thoughts among Young Adults

- Hollon, S. D., & Kendall, P. C. (1980). Cognitive self-statements in depression: Development of an automatic thoughts questionnaire. *Cognitive therapy and research*, 4(4), 383-395.
- LaRose, R., Lin, C. A., & Eastin, M. S. (2003). Unregulated Internet usage: Addiction, habit, or deficient self-regulation? *Media Psychology*, 5(3), 225-253.
- Li, D., Zhang, W., Li, X., Zhou, Y., Zhao, L., & Wang, Y. (2016). Stressful life events and adolescent Internet addiction: The mediating role of psychological needs satisfaction and the moderating role of coping style. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 63, 408-415.
- Muris, P., Mayer, B., Den Adel, M., Roos, T., & van Wamelen, J. (2009). Predictors of change following cognitive-behavioral treatment of children with anxiety problems: A preliminary investigation on negative automatic thoughts and anxiety control. *Child psychiatry and human development*, 40 (1), 139-151.
- Nyklíček, I., & Kuijpers, K. F. (2008). Effects of a mindfulness-based stress reduction intervention on psychological well-being and quality of life: are increased mindfulness indeed the mechanism? *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 35(3), 331-340.
- Ostovar, S., Allahyar, N., Aminpoor, H., Moafian, F., Nor, M. B. M., & Griffiths, M. D. (2016). Internet addiction and its psychosocial risks (depression, anxiety, stress, and loneliness) among Iranian adolescents and young adults: A structural equation model in a cross-sectional study. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 14(3), 257-267.
- Pedro, L., Branquinho, M., Canavarro, M. C., & Fonseca, A. (2019). Self-criticism, negative automatic thoughts, and postpartum depressive symptoms: the buffering effect of self-compassion. *Journal of reproductive and infant psychology*, 37(5), 539-553.
- Szentagotai, A., & Freeman, A. (2007). An analysis of the relationship between irrational beliefs and automatic thoughts in predicting distress. *Journal of Evidence-Based Psychotherapies*, 7(1), 1.
- Vyjayanthi, S., Makharam, S., Afraz, M., & Gajrekar, S. (2014). Gender differences in the prevalence and features of internet addiction among Indian college students. *Media Innovatica*, 3(2), 47-51
- Wang, P., Zhao, M., Wang, X., Xie, X., Wang, Y., & Lei, L. (2017). Peer relationship and adolescent smartphone addiction: The mediating role of self-esteem and the moderating role of the need to belong. *Journal of behavioral addictions*, 6(4), 708-717.
- YIĞMAN, F., Muhammed Hakan, A. K. S. U., Özdel, K., & Ünver, H. (2021). Social media addiction among Turkish young adults is partially mediated by automatic thoughts and social problem-solving skills: a single-center, clinic-based study. *Anatolian Journal of Psychiatry*, 22, 0-0.
- Young, K. S. (1998). Internet addiction: The emergence of a new clinical disorder. *Cyberpsychology & behavior*, 1(3), 237-244.
- Young, K. S. (1998). Internet addiction Test (IAT) Manual.

Acknowledgement

The author appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Amit & Kumar, S. (2023). Internet Addiction and Automatic Thoughts among Young Adults. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 11(1), 2107-2112. DIP:18.01.210.20231101, DOI:10.25215/1101.210