

The Impact of Internet Addiction on Self-Esteem and Loneliness Among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

This review paper aims to understand internet addiction and its potential impact on self-esteem and loneliness among young adults. It explores how the internet's excessive consumption harms our mental health. Among the contributory psychological factors of internet addiction is said to be impacting self-esteem and loneliness due to excessive usage of the internet, which leads to the development of psychological factors. It has been hypothesized that lower levels of self-esteem will be associated with higher levels of loneliness and higher levels of internet addiction among young adults.

Keywords: Internet Addiction, Self-Esteem, Loneliness, Young Adults

The Internet is a vast network that connects computers, servers, and mobile devices all over the world, which makes it easier for us to connect, learn, research, and explore. It helps young adults in their research and education, shopping, entertainment, and searching for online connections. However, excessive use of the internet has been linked to the development of addiction in adults. Internet addiction disorder refers to an impulse control issue characterized by excessive internet use. It develops the unhealthy behaviour of being dependent on gadgets to cope with stressful situations (Bahrainian et al. 2014). The behaviour continues despite the bad consequences and impairments. Internet addiction is also known as Problematic Internet Use (PIU), defined as difficulty controlling the excessive use of computers, smartphones, and the internet. It becomes difficult for them to resist the craving to scroll through social media sites. Though Internet addiction is not yet recognized as a mental condition, all types of Internet addiction contain withdrawal symptoms like anger, tension, impatience, boredom, anxiety, and moodiness.

They may want to spend increasing amounts of time on the computer, so it progressively takes over everything they do. The negative effect of this is that being on gadgets too much may harm the personal relationship (Fan et al. 2022). The prevalence of Internet addiction has been increasing since the 2020 pandemic of COVID-19 (Bottaro et al. 2024). Individuals with excessive usage of the internet and not being able to resist the craving may lack motivation to do their tasks, and low motivation reflects low self-esteem (Bahrainian et al.

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2014). The studies also show that there is a relationship between internet addiction and self-esteem. It also affects motivation because individuals who have a healthy, positive self-image are aware of their potential and may be motivated to take on new tasks. Individuals who have poor self-esteem may feel less confident in their skills and may question their ability to make decisions (Akbar et al. 2023). People who lack self-worth may find it difficult to communicate their needs and build connections. They could also feel unworthy and unlovable and have poor confidence. As internet addiction worsens, self-esteem typically declines as well, leading to a vicious cycle of low self-esteem and addiction. There are even connections between internet addiction and self-esteem, like escaping from pain and real-life situations with the internet as they have poor self-esteem; social comparison, comparing one's life with other accomplishments and appearances and feeling inferior; and justification seeking. People who struggle with their worth may seek validation from social media likes and comments (Gala et al. 2023).

Being consumed by these thoughts and gadgets makes them close to isolating themselves. And which can lead them to feel a void inside them and feel lonely. Loneliness is a state of mind that causes people to feel alone, empty, unwanted, and invisible. It is a common human feeling that is multilayered and personal to each person. There is no one common reason for this potentially harmful mental condition (Latief et al. 2018). Studies found that the adjusted prevalence of loneliness increased during the pandemic compared to pre-pandemic. Loneliness increased more for women, especially those in urban areas, and less for those 75 years of age and older. In the generation of social media, people always find their escape from the real world, isolate themselves, and limit their lives on a rectangular screen, which gives them comfort and pleasure for a small amount of time, but as the consumption goes beyond the necessity, it becomes a problem (Alqahtani et al. 2020). That is why most young adults indulge in excessive internet usage and look into social media, and dating sites, download or swap pornography, or engage in casual cybersex with other users

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Bahrainian et al. (2014) found that it is important to evaluate self-esteem and depression in university students with Internet addiction, and these variables should be targeted for effective cognitive behavioural therapy in people with Internet addiction. Saadati et al. (2021) showed that there is a positive association between loneliness and internet addiction, so policymakers and mental health educators should be aware of the harmful effects caused by internet addiction, as this is such a common phenomenon today. They should take different intervention measures, such as physical activities and psychological and pharmacological interventions, to prevent and treat internet addiction. Research shows that the reason why people who feel lonely desire excessive use of the internet may be that these people find a way to cope with loneliness by interacting with other people in these environments (Ryan & Xenos, 2011; Sheldon, 2008).

Gala et al. (2023) showed that to conquer the spiral of loneliness, an individual must take part in various community events and organizations and indulge in valuable activities and hobbies of their interest. An individual with low self-esteem should get out of their comfort zone to build confidence, be kind to themselves, and practice good practices like mindfulness and gratitude. If any of the mentioned conditions are severe, it is always appropriate to consult a medical practitioner and seek professional help. Mahapatra et al. (2019) examined that internet addiction and loneliness have a positive correlation and influence each other at the same time. When students feel lonely to link the gap between

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loneliness and happiness, they get into activities on the internet such as gaming, social networking, entertainment, online dating sites, etc. The Internet also has certain negative impacts, such as depression, social isolation, impulsivity, etc. Saeed (2020) examined whether the impact of loneliness on internet addiction can be explained by international students' self-esteem. Such loneliness negatively predicts self-esteem, and self-esteem also negatively estimates the internet addiction of international students. Akbar et al. (2023) focus on how internet addiction causes social exclusion in students and gets them involved in different unhealthy activities. It has been noted that there are a huge number of experiential research findings that show the conception these fundamental contributing variables play an unhealthy role in the development of mental health issues in university students. Hasmujaj (2016) Numerous research has focused on the type of consumer behaviour known as internet addiction. One common mental health condition associated with internet addiction is loneliness. Because of the greater opportunity for companionship, the altered social interaction patterns, and the ability to reduce the unpleasant emotions associated with loneliness, lonely people may find themselves lured to the internet.

Various perspectives exist in psychological theories and research that elucidate the loneliness idea. According to social psychology theory, emotional pain may arise when a person's demands for closeness are not satisfied. Moreover, the cognitive psychology hypothesis suggests that a person experiences distress when there is a discrepancy between their perception and the reality of their social interaction. Furthermore, the humanistic perspective proposed that loneliness is a distressing facet of an individual's condition that might potentially diminish their sense of self-awareness and self-worth (VandenBos, 2013). Furthermore, the study discovered that internet addiction significantly affects university students' emotions of loneliness (Zarbaksh, Bahri, Rashedi, &Khademi, 2013)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Based on the review of existing literature, it is evident that Internet addiction, low self-esteem, and loneliness play a significant role in the well-being of young adults. In this growing era of information and technology, the internet has become a very important avenue to gain information and share knowledge. To a great extent, the internet has arrested the minds of young adults, due to which taking part in outdoor games and activities has decreased. Therefore, research on internet addiction and related factors that may contribute to it is crucial. Hence, based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that excessive usage of the internet can negatively impact a person's life in terms of self-esteem, mental health, or feelings of loneliness.

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Conflict of Interest

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