


Prevalence and Associated Factors of Internet Addiction Among Male Students of Jubail University College, Saudi Arabia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the associated factors and prevalence of Internet addiction among Jubail University College – Male Branch students. Descriptive cross-sectional method was applied. 171 students participated. Self-administered survey questionnaire was the data-gathering instrument. Young's Internet Addiction Test was used to determine the level of internet usage. Factors associated with high internet consumption are accessibility, boredom, isolation, and extreme weather condition. Covid-19 pandemic changed the way respondents consume internet. It also changed the respondents' sleeping pattern and increases the average internet usage per day. Though the internet played a vital role during Covid-19 pandemic, it also increases the dependency of students on it. Higher number of moderate level internet addiction has been found among respondents. Therefore, it is encouraged that JUC should design a program to address the current situation.

KEYWORDS

Internet Addiction, Internet Dependence, Excessive Internet Usage, Associated Factors for Internet Dependence, Screen Addiction, Screen Dependence, Technology Dependence

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The internet started in USA in the 1950s. Initially the purpose of internet is for military defense. Former US President Dwight D. Eisenhower formed the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) in 1958 and led to the formation of the ARPANET (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network). The aim of the ARPANET was to help American military technology stay ahead of its enemies (Science+Media Museum, 2020). Since then, internet quickly grew and become a global interconnected network of networks, or 'Internet'. Internet became a mechanism for information dissemination, and a medium for collaboration and interaction between individuals regardless of geographic location (Internet Society, 2017). As of January 2022, there were 4.95 billion internet users worldwide - 62.5 percent of the global population. Of this total, 4.62 billion were social media users (Johnson, 2022). On average, internet user spends 6 hours and 42 minutes online each day (Zuckerman, 2020).

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Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, internet activities and technologies are increasing rapidly. It has been our source of countless opportunities for personal fulfilment, professional development and value creation. It has become a vital necessity for working, learning, accessing basic services and keeping in touch. When Covid-19 hit the world, Internet has become more vital necessity for working, learning, accessing basic services and keeping in touch.

Internet use is near-ubiquitous among teens and young adults. In the last decade, the young adult internet population has remained the most likely to go online. According to Pew Research Center (2020), over the past ten years, teens and young adults have been consistently the two groups most likely to go online. In 2019, 4.1 billion people were using the Internet. Since then, the number of users has surged by 782 million to reach 4.9 billion people in 2021, or 63 per cent of the population.

On December 31, 2019, as a typical black swan event, Covid-19 took the world by complete surprise. This newly identified coronavirus was first seen in Wuhan, the capital of Central China's Hubei province (Kilpatrick & Barter, 2021). Due to the threat of the Covid-19, many educational institutions worldwide suspended their academic activities and classes. Saudi Arabia suspended the in-attendance education activities in all schools, universities and educational institutions since March 9, 2020 and directed all educational institutions to implement distance learning through online platforms (Khalid, 2020). During the Covid-19 lockdown, the risk of internet addiction increased due to the dependence on the internet to perform daily activities and as an outlet for mental pressures (Siste et al., 2020). Jubail University College, the setting of the study, complied with the directive to shift the face-to-face classes to online learning. In 2020, the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of Internet users grew by 10.2 per cent, the largest increase in a decade (ITU, 2021). According to several studies, there is a higher prevalence of Internet usage during Covid-19 pandemic (Li et. al, 2021; Besalti & Satici, 2022, Siste et. al. 2021). Excessive Internet usage could have several impacts on mental health, such as greater severity of depression (Seki, Hamazaki, Natori, & Inadera, 2019) and anxiety (Soulioti, Stavropoulos, Christidi, Papastefanou, & Roussos, 2018).

With the growing use of the Internet, excessive use of it could interfere daily activities that may become a big concern. The higher Internet penetration rate could possibly cause Internet addiction, especially among youngsters. In 2014, Cheng & Li found out that Internet addiction around the world is about 6%. In Saudi Arabia, an Islamic conservative country in Middle-East, there are already few studies conducted related to Internet Addiction. For the past few years, Saudi Arabia has also been ranking among the countries where people spend most hours online (Jaffery, 2018). With 32.3 million residents, 20.8 million of them are active internet users. Users are between the ages of 16-35. Like the rest of the world, the internet is being used for several different purposes in Saudi Arabia. The bulk of day-to-day searches include the latest football results, news stories, and viral videos. The most popular websites are used for social media, news, business, entertainment, shopping, and search inquiries (Boshers, 2016). Internet addiction is an increasing problem among universities worldwide. Several studies found out that males have higher prevalence estimates of Internet Addiction (Mei, Yau, Chai, Guo, & Potenza, 2016). Male gender has also been identified as a risk factor for Internet Addiction Disorder, as reported by several studies (Choi et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2014). In Saudi Arabia, college students are sex-segregated due to Islamic religion that prohibits social interaction between non-relative male and female. With the afore-mentioned situations, the researcher will endeavor to find out the prevalence of Internet addiction and its associated factors among the male university students. hus, necessary recommendation, such as program or campaign, can be done to address any significant finding.

1.1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the study is illustrated in Figure 1 utilizing the "Input-Process-Output" model. The sociodemographic profile, factors influencing internet consumption, and pattern of Internet consumption before and during Covid-19 pandemic are the inputs of the study. By utilizing the standard diagnostic tool, Internet Addiction Test (IAT), the prevalence Internet addiction can be identified. The IAT will determine the level of internet usage, such as normal, mild, moderate, and

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