


Chapter 16

Digital Addiction and Its Reflections on the Individual and Society

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ABSTRACT

Digital technologies greatly affect many aspects of our lives and make life easier in every way. Nowadays, more than half of the world's population uses digital technology. Continuous and excessive use of digital technological tools or applications can lead to digital addiction. Presently, digital addiction is considered as a behavioral addiction, although there seems to be a lack of consensus on its definition. Effects of digital addiction on individuals are physical, mental, cognitive, behavioral, etc. Also, digital addiction, characterized by excessive and compulsive use of digital technologies, can have significant effects on society. Those are social, economic, legal and ethical, educational, cultural and societal norms, healthcare, environmental, privacy, security, and mental health, impacts. From a public health perspective, the priority is to prevent the prevalence of digital addiction. Effective programs in prevention and treatment should include a multi-sectoral and interdisciplinary approach and be methodologically strong, evidence-based programs.

INTRODUCTION

Post-industrial societies have emerged with the realization of production by digital technologies. For this reason, the current era is also called the digital age (Yengin, 2019). The digital technologies used in this era were introduced into individuals' lives with the development of the computer in the 1940s and the discovery of the internet in the 1970s. (Çakır, 2005). The spread of digital devices like computers,

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internet, smartphones and tablets in areas such as access to information, communication, education, health, socialization and entertainment has created digital culture (Biricik, 2022). Digital technologies greatly affect many aspects of our lives and make life easier in every way (Joseph & Joy-Telu Hamilton-Ekeke, 2016). As digital technologies facilitate life more and more, are easy to access and are present in almost every field (such as education, health, communication, socialization, entertainment), their use is constantly increasing. According to the Digital 2022 Global Overview Report published in partnership with We Are Social and Hootsuite, more than half of the world's population is a digital technology user. Of the approximately 7.9 billion people worldwide, 67.1% use mobile phones, 62.5% use the internet and 58.4% use social media. The number of internet users has more than doubled in the last 10 years. It is also estimated that the number of internet users will continue to grow at an average rate of 4.8% per year until 2030 (We Are Social and Hootsuite, 2022).

As of January 2023, there are 5.16 billion internet users worldwide, equivalent to 64.4% of the world population. Among the regions of the world that use the internet the most, Northern Europe ranks first in terms of population in 2023. In Ireland, Norway, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, 99% of the population used the internet as of January. North Korea ranks last worldwide (Statista, 2023b).

Digital technologies occupy a large share of time for people all over the world. The Digital 2022 Global Overview Report states that the daily internet usage time in the world is about 7 hours. So, if a person sleeps on average 7 to 8 hours a day, they spend more than 40% of their waking time online. The report also states that a person with internet access spends an average of 2.5 hours on social media every day (We Are Social and Hootsuite, 2022). According to Statista 2023 data, the average daily social media usage of internet users worldwide increased from 90 minutes in 2012 to 147 minutes in 2022 (Statista, 2023a). In a study conducted in the US, it was reported that participants looked at their phones 80 times a day (Deloitte, 2018).

The use of digital technologies has increased today compared to the period before the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, more people have spent more time using the internet, social media and mobile than ever before. The fact that the number of people using the internet worldwide increased from 4.3 billion in 2020 to 4.9 billion in 2022 with an increase of 12% during the pandemic period is an indicator of this (We Are Social and Hootsuite, 2022). The prevalence of internet use among women worldwide is 63% and 69% among men by 2022 (Statista, 2023b).

Young people appear to be the group that uses digital technology the most. Global internet use is higher among individuals aged 15 to 24 in all regions by 2022. Young people in Europe represent the most significant frequency of use at 98%. The world average of this prevalence among young people is 75% (Statista, 2023b).

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) report on the use of digital technologies by children states that children under the age of 18 constitute approximately 30% of all internet users worldwide. It is also stated that internet use is shifting towards early childhood (UNICEF, 2017).

While the frequency of internet use in low-income countries is 26%, it is reported that 92% of the population in high-income countries use the internet (Statista, 2023b).

Increasing access to the internet leads to an increase in the use of digital devices. It is stated that the use of digital devices may have harms as well as benefits (Joseph & Joy-Telu Hamilton-Ekeke, 2016). In this context, there is a possibility that increased frequency of use may lead to addiction (Christakis, 2019).

Digital addiction (DA) has emerged as an important area of research in recent years due to its increasing prevalence (Cemiloglu et al., 2022). Addiction is defined as an individual's excessive use of a substance despite being harmed, or the inability to continue, give up or control a behavior. Although substance

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