

# Internet Addiction: A Snapshot

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## ABSTRACT

*The explosive use of internet in recent years has led to its pathological use. The aim of this paper is to give a brief overview of rapidly growing problematic social issue of internet addiction. This paper briefly explores definition, classification and consequences of internet addiction. The effect of internet addiction led to various nervous complications, psychological disorders and social problems. The knowledge of developmental stages of pathological use of internet, its early diagnosis and its treatment helps to get rid of problematic internet usage and using it in regulated and balanced manner.*

## Introduction

Fast technological improvements have expanded use of internet rapidly and it has become an indispensable part of daily life. Internet is the system of interconnected network of computers globally. Originally, the use of internet was to facilitate communication and research activities but the explosive increase in the use of internet results in internet addiction. This advancement and excessive use of internet technology not solely brings benefits, however, conjointly negative results also. Kim (2008) reported various labels have been used in literature for describing internet addiction. Other terms used as computer addiction, internet dependence, pathological internet use, problematic internet use, compulsive internet use. The risk factors of internet usage includes impairment of mental and physical health, weakens the bonding with family and friends, economic insecurity, provokes mood swings, having deep and seductive feelings. Various health practitioners and research scholars considered anxiety and depression as a consequence of growing and excessive use of internet usage among all age groups. Greenberg, Lewis and Dodd (1999) analyzed men indulged in greater level of addiction to alcohol, cigarettes, video games, gambling and internet use while women addicted more to chocolate and caffeine. Also, addicted behavior associated with low self esteem. Kim, Ryu and Chon (2006) related level of depression and suicidal tendencies more with internet addiction.

## Definition of Internet Addiction

Young (1996) defined "internet addiction as staying online for pleasure averaging 38 hours or more per week, largely in chat rooms, and concluded that internet addiction can shatter families, relationships, and careers".

Cao and Su (2006) reported internet usage permeates every sphere of our life. Sleep deprivation, skipping meals and limited physical activity not only disrupts the academic but also the other aspects of the individual's life.

In a layman's language, internet addiction defined as spending hours in browsing the net and getting lost totally, tilting towards the compulsive use of internet without any specific purpose in mind. Earlier researches explore internet

addiction as an impulse control disorder that doesn't entail an intoxicant.

Morahan-Martin and Schumacher (2000) defined "problematic internet use as intensive use of the internet, failure to control internet use, serious harm to the user's life resulting from this use". Some common characteristics of chemical and behavioral addiction are mood swings, tolerance and withdrawal, loss of control, continuation of behavior despite conflicts and alleviation of distress.

## Classification of Internet Addiction

Davis (2002) categorized internet usage into healthy internet use and problematic internet use. Healthy internet usage means actively using the net rationally for a limited time without resulting into any cognitive or psychological discomfort. Problematic internet use means a psychiatric state that cause negative effect on the overall personality of the user and all other related areas of life like profession, family, academics, marital relationships etc as a result of excessive and continuous use of net.

American Center for Online Addiction classified internet addiction and activities of the addicted individuals into following types:

Sr. No.	Types	Activities of Addicted person
a.	Cyber-sex addiction	Downloading, viewing and trading pornography, participate in adult chats rooms and obsessed by cyber sex
b.	Cyber- relational addiction	Obsessed with virtual relationships, cyber adultery, virtual social networking and chatting
c.	Net gaming addiction	Video games, virtual role playing, online gambling, e- trading, shopping
d.	Addiction of the web	Excessive net surfing for information, search for database
e.	Computer addiction	Overly engaged in pre programmed games like Solitaire in computers

**III effects of Internet Addiction**

1. *Physical effects:* Obesity, visual impairment, headache, lack of sleep, tired eyes, neck pain, poor personal hygiene, backache.
2. *Psychological effects:* Depression, anxiety, stress, lack of concentration, forgetting, distorted thoughts, low self confidence, mood disorders, insecurity.
3. *Social effects:* Introversion, loneliness, relationship problems with family and friends, demand for privacy, isolation.
4. *Other effects:* deterioration in academic activities, withdrawal from real life situations, lack of interest, occupational problems, economic problems.

*Other contributing psychiatric symptoms* includes obsessiveness, compulsive, phobic anxiety, paranoid ideation and psychoticism.

Various scholars and psychologists (Brenner, 1997; Griffith & Greenfield, 2000; Nie & Erbring, 2000) linked continuously spending time online for long hours enhances the risk of physical and psychological problems. Chou (2001) reported extreme use of internet leads to educational, economical, relationship, and job related difficulties and physical impairments.

**Diagnosis of Internet Addiction**

People have to understand and evaluate the impact and damage caused due to internet usage on their lives. It is necessary for adults / parents to assure that their wards have intelligent web surfing and net is used in a positive way and does not get tilted to compulsive behavior. It is necessary to diagnose healthy internet usage and problematic internet usage.

Young (1996) defined internet addiction as an impulse control disorder that doesn't involve the use of an intoxicating drug and is alike to pathological gambling. She developed questionnaire of eight items (based on criteria for pathological gambling) for differentiating dependent users from non dependent users of web by modifying the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM – IV) criteria. The criteria that helped in screening normal from pathological internet usage are as follows:

vii.	Have you lied to family members, therapist, or other to conceal the extent of your involvement with the internet?
viii.	Do you use the internet as a way of escaping from problems or of relieving a dysphoric mood (e.g. feelings of helplessness, guilt, anxiety, depression)?

Out of the above said eight items, respondents who responded five or more than five questions as "yes" answer labeled as pathological internet users or addicted individuals and others who answered less than five questions as "yes" considered as normal users of internet.

**Developmental Stages of Pathological Internet Users**

The learning process of internet usage is risky process. The general pattern how the development of pathology, common for all web (internet) users is described as follows:

- i. *Exploring stage:* In this phase, the new users explore different web activities like online magazines, e- news, online gambling, various social networking websites, trading, pornography etc. by observation and research activities and these become habitual activities for them. development
- ii. *Growth stage:* At this stage, the user becomes familiar with the various internet resources. Here, the user becomes a part of chat rooms, involved in virtual role games, indulge in blind dates, cyber sex obsession, and social isolation, and start finding pleasure and happiness in the virtual world. People having social and communicative problems becomes hooked to the internet easily at this stage and become problematic internet users.

**Treatment of Internet Addiction**

Treatment of internet addiction disorder does not mean complete abstinence from the use of internet instead it's an approach from getting rid of problematic internet usage and using it in regulated and balanced manner. Young (1999) suggested some interventions involving cognitive behavioral approach like disrupt the regular pattern of web usage of patients, set achievable aims and objectives within time frame, create situations which lead the patient to get distracted from virtual reality and become a participant of real activities, make the patient to realize his hobbies and activities in which he find pleasure earlier, complete withdrawal from particular application, use of reminder cards to keep himself aligning with strong determination, engage in a support group and use of family therapy.

Two types of approaches are used in treatment of internet addiction:

- (i) Non- psychological Approach (ii) Psychological Approach

**(i) Non- psychological Approach**

Different pharmacological treatments for internet addiction disorder used effectively in different studies and their results showed significant improvements in reducing the use of internet. Anti- depressants, mood stabilizers, anti- psychotic drugs like escitalopram (Dell'Osso, Hadley, Allen, Baker, Chaplin & Hollander, 2008), bupropion (Han, Hwang & Renshaw, 2010), methylphenidate (Han, Lee, Na, Ahn, Chung

Sr. No.	Items
i.	Do you feel pre – occupied with the internet (think about previous online activity or anticipate next online session)?
ii.	Do you feel the need to use the internet with increasing amounts of time in order to achieve satisfaction?
iii.	Have you repeatedly made unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop intent use?
iv.	Do you feel restless, moody, depressed, or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop internet use?
v.	Do you stay on-line longer than originally intended?
vi.	Have you jeopardized or risked the loss of a significant relationship, job, educational or career opportunity because of the internet?

& Daniels, 2009) along with physical exercises used as an intervention resulted in decrease in craving for internet usage and improving its symptoms.

## (ii) Psychological Treatments

**Motivational Interviewing:** Motivational interviewing is a counseling technique for increasing intrinsic motivation, to explore and resolve client's ambivalence required in the process of behavior change. It is an empathetic, supportive, practical, directive counseling process developed to help addictive individuals to learn novice behavioral proficiencies and give up addiction. In this process, the goal is to draw out self motivational statements by open ended questions, reflective listening, and affirmation for bringing a positive behavioral change.

**Community reinforcement and family training:** This technique involves treatment of an addicted person in presence of family members or relatives for improving motivation and helping him to cut down internet use.

**Reality therapy:** This recovery tool involves counseling sessions used to reduce the addiction levels and to improve the self esteem of addicted individuals. This is a cognitive behavioral approach in which addicted gets training of time management, using alternative activities to problematic behavior, effective use of cue cards and become committed to transform their behavior and improve their lives. Wubbodling (2000) reported reality therapy applies the core instructions of choice theory by exploring to recognize the reality of choices and choose as well as plan for more effective behaviors. Basically, it is a type of counseling that observes behavior and choices and helps the addicted individuals to accept responsibility and choose desirable actions.

**Acceptance and Commitment Therapy:** This is an action oriented approach in which individuals understand the ways in which their attempts to avoid, suppress, deny, struggle and

control inner emotions hinder their pathway from moving forward in their lives. Addicted individuals start recognizing and accepting their issues and challenges and commit to make necessary changes in their behavior. Twohig and Crosby (2010) reported 85% reduction in watching pornography, when used this therapy on six adult males with internet addiction of viewing pornography.

**Multimodal therapy:** Multimodal therapy is combining two or more interventions of different disciplines simultaneously or sequentially. Different studies reported multimodal treatments effective. Orzack and Orzack (1999) found readiness to change, cognitive behavioral therapy and motivational interviewing for problematic internet addicted sexual behavior; Orzack, Voluse, Hennen (2006) found combination of solution focused brief therapy, family therapy and commitment therapy useful. The restart program involves a mixture of various treatments focused on no use of technology for about three months reported change in behavior.

## Conclusion

Individuals suffer from ill effects of internet when excessive use of internet turns it from informative, convenient and effective resource to a damaging entity as the individual's inability to control the urge of use of internet leads to distress and much functional impairment as occupational, psychological, physical, marital, academic etc. The chances of becoming addicted to the irresponsible internet use and its negative consequences should be stressed through awareness campaigns so that suitable interventions and restrictions can be implemented.

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