

Influence of Internet in Shaping the Emotional Maturity of Adolescents: A Review Study

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Abstract

Background: Excessive Internet usage has become a global issue. Adolescents and young adults use the Internet in an excessive way which significantly affects their physical, mental, social, and emotional health. Emotional maturity in adolescents declines significantly due to exposure to limitless Internet access.

Aim: The primary aim of this study is to review the influence of the Internet and its physical and mental effects on the emotional maturity of adolescents in the context of Pakistan.

Methodology: The study comprises a qualitative research design for analyzing and reviewing the existing literature on the influence of the Internet and its physical and mental effects on the emotional maturity of adolescents in Pakistan's context.

Results: The outcomes of this study revealed that emotional maturity and the factors contributing to it are significantly affected by excessive Internet usage resulting in adolescents facing numerous mental, physical, and social challenges.

Conclusion: The study concluded that excessive internet usage negatively influences the

mental, physical, and social health of adolescents and also has a significantly negative impact on their emotional development and maturity.

Keywords: *Internet abuse, Adolescents, Emotional Maturity, Pakistani Youth.*

Introduction

The use of the Internet is rapidly growing globally making it one of the most important modes of communication, and social connection (Can & Alatas, 2019; Haythornthwaite, 2005), and an important source of entertainment (McCloud et al., 2016). The technological advancement fused with advanced networking, communication technologies, digital learning services, easy internet accessibility (Can & Alatas, 2019; Haseeb et al., 2019), and digital gadgets including social computers, smartphones, and social media facilitate communication systems (Ghafoor & Raja, 2022; Matthew et al., 2021; Meena et al., 2022). According to an epidemiological study conducted on 5366 adolescents from six Asian countries, smartphone ownership stands at a staggering 62%, while internet addiction rates vary between 6.2% and 21% across these countries (Trang & Thuy, 2023).

Internet and different digital gadgets are most commonly used by young adults and adolescents for communication and entertainment purposes (Sharov et al., 2021). However, excessive Internet usage has become a global issue, predominantly the use of the Internet and digital gadgets is most common in Asian countries (Hussain, et al., 2023; Duarte, 2023). Excessive Internet usage is common in adults (Ahmad, Ali, & Sewani, 2021; Boursier et al., 2020), however, young adults and adolescents tend to use the Internet in a malignant way, particularly to cope with their psychological and negative emotions allied to their difficult relationships with peers and parents (F. Akhtar et al., 2023; Khalid, 2023).

Pakistan in the early 1990s started using the Internet as a method of communication (Safdar et al., 2020). The Internet and communication technology industry has become one of the fastest-growing industries in Pakistan (Hafeez, Iqbal, & Imran, 2021; Javed, 2020). The Internet and communication industry of Pakistan has been progressing rapidly throughout the years. The Internet and communication industry has a fundamental share in the growth of organizations in Pakistan (N. Akhtar et al., 2021). Extreme Internet usage by adolescents and young adults has become the most challenging issue in Pakistan and is considered a behavioral addiction (Siddiqui et al., 2021) resulting in severe mental and physical health problems (Lehtimaki et al., 2021;

Shaikh et al., 2021). During puberty, teenagers may experience emotional and social instability (Fairchild et al., 2019), and excessive internet use can lead to serious health issues as well as the development of antisocial and aggressive behavior (Ahmad, Sewani, & Ali, 2021; Fontana et al., 2022) which has a significant effect on their emotional maturity. Thus, the study primarily aims to review the effects of excessive Internet usage and its physical and mental effects on the emotional maturity of adolescents and how the Internet affects the emotional maturity of adolescents in the context of Pakistan (Ahmad, Thomas, & Hamid, 2020).

Methodology

Research Design and Approach

The study encompasses a qualitative research design employing a comprehensive review of existing literature for analyzing the influence of the internet and its mental and physical effects on the emotional maturity of adolescents. The data was collected from online databases primarily Google Scholar, PubMed, Science Direct, ProQuest, and some other Web pages by using appropriate keywords such as, “Internet abuse”, “Excessive internet usage”, “Influence of the Internet”, “Highschool students”, “Emotional Maturity:” and “Pakistani youth” from recent studies in Pakistan’s context. Some articles from relevant journals were also extracted for this study. This study primarily aims to explore the influence of the internet on the emotional maturity of adolescents.

Data Extraction

Qualitative research was conducted to analyze and extract data from the included studies. The data includes characteristics [author(s) names, publication year, study design], and recent studies on the impact of the Internet on adolescents in Pakistan.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

- Studies on the influence of the Internet on adolescents were included
- Studies discussing the impact of the Internet in Pakistan’s context were included
- Studies in English were included
- Studies discussing the influence of the Internet on adults were not included

- Studies discussing the impact of the Internet in countries other than Pakistan were not included

Study Selection

The data was selected on the basis of the title and abstract of the studies. Two reviewers reviewed the data, reviewer 1 and reviewer 2 [real identities are not included due to privacy concerns]. As per the inclusion and exclusion criteria, maximum studies were extracted for eligibility. Inconsistencies were resolved by consulting with a reviewer.

Results and Discussion

Emotional Maturity

Emotional maturity reflects the concept of the emotional development of a person. An emotionally immature person is incapable of handling their emotions healthily (Gottman, 2011). Such a person usually has trouble making healthy and secure relationships with family or other people (Raza & Ahmed, 2017; Winnicott, 2013). They find it difficult to handle conflicts and adverse life challenges and are also hesitant to share their thoughts and feelings with others (Rickwood et al., 2007). An emotionally immature individual is unable to restrain their selves from lashing out and harming other people or behaving in inappropriate ways (Bushman & Huesmann, 2010). People with emotional immaturity may appear to have exaggerated reactions to normal stressors and may be perceived as maladjusted (Brown & Beail, 2009). Maturity is a consistent process that occurs in several areas throughout your life (Skidmore & Chapel, 2023):

- **Physical Maturity:** Physical maturity is termed as the development of a person's physical body. In physical maturity, the body of an individual passes four stages of growth namely being an infant, a child, a teenage/adolescent, and finally an adult.
- **Mental Maturity:** The growth of an individual's cognitive skills occurs in mental maturity. A person develops the skills of how to process information and reasoning through problems.
- **Emotional Maturity:** With growth and age, a person gains more control over their emotions and is likely to control their emotions better. As a person grows, they learn to replace emotional reactions with self-expression and introspection.

Young adults or adolescents are more likely to be emotionally immature due to excessive internet usage (Guan & Subrahmanyam, 2009). Internet-addicted adolescents comprise a greater degree of emotional regression, lack of independence, personality disintegration, emotional instability, and social maladjustments (Jamdar & Kakulte, 2023). The following are the determinants of emotional maturity and how excessive internet usage affects the emotional maturity of adolescents.

Determinants of emotional maturity

Emotional States

Young adults and adolescents spend the majority of their time using the Internet, particularly for entertainment and academic purposes (Aslanidou & Menexes, 2008). While the Internet can be beneficial by increasing social interactions, using the Internet excessively is associated with numerous psychological and emotional problems (Weinstein & Lejoyeux, 2010). Various studies have been conducted which demonstrate that excessive Internet usage among adolescents and young adults is linked with life-long adverse effects such as anxiety, and sleep deprivation which can disturb neurological development resulting in suicidal behaviors and depression (Jamieson et al., 2020). Furthermore, eating disorders, low self-esteem, and issues with having a healthy relationship with family are also some of the potential impacts of excessive Internet usage because of the constant exposure to adverse online experiences, disturbed sleep schedules, and social isolation (Sohn et al., 2019), dopamine deprivation contributes in the aggravation and development of such mental and emotional conditions (Cyr et al., 2015). There are growing concerns about the harmful effects of the Internet on children. These effects include exposure to violent and sexual content, as well as a displacement of important aspects of their lives, such as social relationships, physical activity, and leisure-time activities like reading and playing (Lee & Kuo, 2002). Furthermore, there is evidence that the Internet may have a negative impact on children's psychological well-being, leading to feelings of loneliness and isolation (Huang, 2010).

Emotional Instability

Excessive use of the internet can cause emotional instability and a lack of emotional intelligence among students, particularly those in college or university (Beranuy et al., 2009). This is often associated with poor academic performance (Kolachi & Memon, 2022). Students who

experience emotional instability are unable to manage or control their stress levels well, making it difficult for them to perform well in exams (Yasmin et al., 2020). Additionally, students face challenges in balancing their classes, tests, exams, assignments, curricular and extracurricular activities, and social life (Wilson, 2009). Numerous studies have shown that internet use has an effect on the emotional instability of university students. Students who use the internet excessively show extreme tension and anxiety while performing any kind of task (Lepp et al., 2014). This can lead to poor time management for academic, social, or recreational activities. Individuals who spend most of their time on the Internet are prone to emotional disturbances. When feeling anxious and agitated, their emotions can negatively influence their behavior and relationships with others (Dangwal & Srivastava, 2016). Emotional instability, also known as neuroticism in the Big Five Personality trait, refers to negative emotions such as anxiety, insecurity, moodiness, nervousness, and depression (Sherry et al., 2014). Numerous studies show that internet addiction causes not only physical and social problems but also creates a psychological disturbance that affects emotional instability and the Big Five Personality trait (Cerniglia et al., 2017).

Social Maladjustment

A study by Novaković et al. (2023), determined that there is a positive interlinkage between daily Internet usage of adolescents and emotional, hyperactivity-inattention symptoms. Such problems are responsible for social maladjustment including social isolation and loneliness (Reißmann, 2017). Excessive internet usage significantly affects and reduces the academic and social functioning of an individual (Suhail & Bargees, 2006). It is an undeniable fact that children from broken homes often struggle to adjust socially. Excessive use of the internet inevitably reduces face-to-face interactions with parents and peers (Gökçearsan et al., 2016). This can impair relationships with family members leading to a reduction in social support (Agbo, 2023). As a result, adolescent healthy development may be hindered, ultimately leading to maladjustment in multiple aspects (Agbo, 2023; Gökçearsan et al., 2016). Due to excessive internet usage, adolescents and young adults have a maladjusted social life. They suffer from poor academic performance, isolation, poor relationships with parents, and impaired parent-child relationships (Gao et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021).

Self-regulation

In recent years, numerous studies have investigated the link between individual differences in self-regulation and the development of excessive internet usage (Gökçeşlan et al., 2016). This is because excessive internet usage has been classified as an addictive behavior and self-regulation has been shown to be a crucial factor in such disorders (Billieux & Van der Linden, 2012). Several studies have explored the relationship between excessive internet usage and self-reported impulsivity, which is linked to a range of behaviors that are often poorly thought out, expressed too soon, too risky, inappropriate to the situation, and which can have negative consequences (Bachoo et al., 2013; Martín-Perpiñá et al., 2019; Meda et al., 2009; Paaver et al., 2006). Individuals who are considered internet addicts have higher levels of self-reported impulsivity compared to control participants (Reed et al., 2015). Moreover, impulsivity is positively associated with excessive internet usage in online gamers and undergraduate students (Li et al., 2021). Recently, some studies have focused on the association between excessive internet usage and the ability to inhibit a prepotent response, which refers to the ability to deliberately control or suppress an automatic response (Argyriou et al., 2017; Bari & Robbins, 2013; Billieux & Van der Linden, 2012). Using the internet excessively declines the self-efficiency and self-regulation of adolescents having a significantly negative effect on their academic regulation and learning skills (Gökçeşlan et al., 2016).

In conclusion, the studies collectively demonstrate that the emotional development and maturity of adolescents are significantly affected by excessive internet usage. The factors contributing to the emotional development are negatively influenced by extreme Internet usage which consequently affects the mental, physical, and emotional health of adolescents (Ali, et al., 2020).

Conclusion

The outcomes of this study revealed that excessive usage of the Internet negatively affects the emotional development and maturity of adolescents. The factors contributing to emotional maturity are also significantly influenced by the excessive use of the Internet. The Internet affects the emotional state of adolescents which results in numerous psychological and emotional problems including, depression, anxiety, and sleep deprivation. Emotional instability is also associated with excessive Internet usage. High screen time results in various emotional issues such as individuals with high screen time are prone to having poor time management for social,

academic, and recreational purposes. The excessive use of the Internet negatively influences social maladjustment due to the face-to-face interaction with family, parents, and peers which results in impaired relationships with parents, families, and peers lastly, using the Internet excessively affects self-regression resulting in impulsiveness and aggressive behaviors primarily among Internet addict adolescents which indulge in online gaming. To sum up, the study concluded the negative influence of excessive Internet usage on the emotional development of adolescents along with their physical, social, and mental health.

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