



## INTERNET INFLUENCING VARIOUS ASPECTS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS; A CRITICAL ISSUE TO THINK

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### Abstract

Rapid expansion and proliferation of the internet has provided better opportunities for communication, information and social interaction. The excessive undisciplined use by individuals has led to the emergence of the concept of internet addiction. Psychological and environmental factors in the lives of college students may leave them disproportionately vulnerable to Internet addiction. Internet addiction is growing problem among students of professional courses, which has psychological, physical, and social impact on student's life. So it is necessary to develop strategies for prevention of internet addiction as well as therapeutic interventions, which is vital for promoting healthy and safe use of the Internet. Awareness should be created among the students to improve ability to reduce the occurrence of internet addiction behaviour promoting their healthy growth.

**Keywords:** Internet Addiction, College students and Awareness.



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### Internet

The internet is a global system of interconnected computer networks that use the standard internet protocol suite (TCP/IP) to link several billion devices worldwide. It is an international network of networks that consists of millions of private, public, academic, business, and government packet switched networks, linked by a broad array of electronic, wireless, and optical networking technologies.

According to Oxford Dictionaries, “internet is a global computer network providing a variety of information and communication facilities, consisting of interconnected networks using standardized communication protocols.”

In today's world of rapid knowledge expansion and technological advancements, the internet has completely revolutionised the way information is accessed. It has become a potential tool for social transformation, be it the economy, culture and ethics or even education. It provides many services some of them are as follows:

Information is probably the biggest advantage internet is offering. The internet is a virtual treasure trove of information. Any kind of information on any topic is easily available on the internet. Many search engines like Google, Yahoo, and Wikipedia etc. helps to find out the information about all things as well as Communication the foremost target of internet has always been the communication and internet has excelled beyond the expectations. Still, innovations are going on to make it faster, more reliable. Now we can communicate in a fraction of second with a person who is sitting in the other part of the world as well as File transfer is a generic term for the act of transmitting files over a computer network or the internet. There are numerous ways and protocols to transfer files over a network. Computers which provide a file transfer service are often called file servers. Depending on the user's perspective the data transfer is called uploading or downloading. Vast numbers of articles, data-bases, and other information are available this way.

VSNL introduced internet in India in 1995. Since, then, internet usage in India continues to grow at a slow but steady pace, both in breadth and depth. Internet represents so much potential for India. With 1.4 million internet users (0.1 percent) in 1998, India is reached up to 81 million internet users (6.9 percent) of total population till 2010.

### **Internet Addiction**

The term "internet addiction" was proposed by Dr. Iven Goldberg. Internet addiction is described as an impulse control disorder, which does not involve use of an intoxicating drug and is very similar to pathological gambling.

Some internet users may develop an emotional attachment to on-line friends and activities they create on their computer screens. Internet users may enjoy aspects of the internet that allow them to meet, socialize, and exchange ideas through the use of chat rooms, social networking websites, or "virtual communities." Other internet users spend endless hours researching topics of interest online or "blogging". Blogging is a contraction of the term "web log", in which an individual will post commentaries and keep regular chronicle of events. It can be viewed as journaling and the entries are primarily textual.

Similar to other addictions, those suffering from internet addiction use the virtual fantasy world to connect with real people through the internet, as a substitution for real-life human connection, which they are unable to achieve normally.

### **Internet Addiction and College Students**

As the usage of the internet is growing rapidly each year, Internet addiction has become a problem among some users. There is an emerging public health concern over the increase in internet usage, particularly among college students.

College students use a variety of internet applications such as instant messaging, bulletin boards, chat rooms, and blogs to connect with their peers and to explore typical adolescent issues such as sexuality, identify, and partner selection (*Margalit, 2010*).

*Letting your kids use the web completely unsupervised is like opening your own door and saying 'They don't know how to cross the road but they'll work it out'.*

(Tanya Byron, 2010)

Internet access and use among adolescents and other age brackets have grown exponentially over the past decade. The 2002 Gallup survey reported that internet is preferred by many adolescents to the other media, including the telephone, TV and radio (*Whitlock, Powers, and Eckenrode, 2006*). It is also reported that the primary purpose why adolescents use the internet remains social reasons (*Gross, 2004*) despite various activities including doing school work, playing games, shopping and downloading music (*Shen and Shakir, 2009*). As a social context, the internet enables multiple communication functions, such as e-mail, Instant Messaging (IM), chat and blogs to allow adolescents to participate and construct their own environments (*Greenfield and Yan, 2006*).

However, the internet access and usage among Indian adolescents is little and sparse. According to a research presented in a special issue of American Psychological Association (APA), spending a lot of time on the web can have both negative and positive effects on young people in terms of their social life, emotional state of mind and health (*Willenz, 2006*).

### ***Social Influences of Internet among College Students***

Because adolescents use the internet at higher rates than any other age group (*Lenhart et al., 2001*), a better understanding of how internet use effects their social development is an important line of scientific inquiry (*Whitlock et al., 2006*). Indeed, a small but growing body of research is beginning to examine the implications of various electronic forums for social interaction (e.g., chat rooms, news groups, message boards) on adolescents behavior (*Gross, 2004; Subrahmanyam et al., 2004; Tynes et al., 2004 cited in Whitelock et al., 2006*).

Research on American youth shows that the internet serves as a powerful resource for information about socially sensitive topics such as sex and interpersonal relations (*Suzuki and Calzo, 2004*); it also serves as a community-building tool providing information on civic engagement and political participation (*Rainie and Horrigan, 2005*). Studies have shown that through internet communication, youth are given the opportunity to exercise leadership skills and become stakeholders in communities that they themselves have created. Despite fears of stalkers and inappropriate sites, parents are beginning to recognize the internet as a powerful tool for both networking and academic enhancement for their children. The Home Net Too

Project Research indicates that home internet use has no adverse effects on children's social or psychological outcomes and has positive effects on their academic outcomes.

Some evidence suggests that internet communication may be especially advantageous for shy, socially anxious or marginalized youth, enabling them to practice social skills without the risks associated with face-to-face interactions (*Heitner, 2002; Mckenna et al., 2002; Subrahmanyam et al., 2004*). This freedom from social pressure may help adolescents build more confidence in real social situations and can elicit a sense of connection to others an important aspect in adolescent social development (*Louge, 2006*).

Although the internet has consistent positive impacts on modern society, it has also caused various societal concerns about privacy, security, pornography, internet crime and virtual community (*Greenfield and Yan, 2006*). Its easy accessibility poses greater risks and dangers for youth as compared to other forms of media. 85 percent of parents reported that among all forms of media, the internet posed the greatest risk to their children (*Common Sense Media, 2006*). Parental concerns are valid, especially considering that teens are essentially free to view and post whatever they choose and communicate with whomever they want (*Louge, 2006*).

Although the internet may serve as a catalyst for communication and may increase social competence of socially anxious teens, it may also encourage fake identities and a false image of real life situations. Fake identities are easy to produce and to sell on the internet. These socially anxious teens may have a tendency to resort to computer communication as a substitute for real life interactions (*Subrahmanyam et al., 2006*).

Research from Cornell University explored that online interactions provide essential social support for otherwise isolated adolescents, but these online message boards may also normalize and encourage self-injurious behaviour and add potentially lethal behaviours to the repertoire of established adolescent self-injurers and those exploring identity options (*as cited in Willenz, 2006*).

### ***Emotional Influence of Internet among College Students***

Internet has become a highly effective and profitable means of distributing sexually explicit material as well as a sophisticated channel for compulsive sexual behaviour, sex trafficking and sex crimes (*Galbreath and Berlin, 2002*). According to a survey performed by the London School of Economics (2002), 90 percent of children between ages 8 and 16 have viewed pornography on the internet. In most cases, the sex sites were accessed unintentionally when a child, often in the progress of doing homework, used an innocuous word to search for information or pictures. Such free access and exposure to this information

by adolescents who have not yet developed a full maturity could pose negative impacts on adolescent development and could potentially manifest in their social interactions with peers, their sexual activity and their emotional developments (*Subrahmanyam et al., 2006*).

Free and sometimes anonymous communication through chat rooms, blogs and instant messages pose risks to teens. Recent studies have shown that adolescent from virtual communities to support unhealthy behaviour including self-injury and eating disorders (*Whitlock et al., 2006*). Half of teens ages 13-18 often communicate through the internet with someone they have not met in person, one-third have talked about potentially meeting someone face-to-face whom they have only met through the internet (*Polly Klaas Foundation, 2006*). Further, almost 12.5 percent discovered that someone they were communicating with online was an adult pretending to be much younger. A national poll revealed that 54 percent of girls reported they could be online without their parents' knowledge and have been involved in some sort of cyber relationship (*Girl Scout Research Institute, 2002*).

Tyler (2002) addressed that the psychological quality of internet societal interaction is lower than the psychological quality of traditional face-to-face interaction. Excessive use of online activities, internet addiction and internet pornography makes adolescents emotionally and mentally disturb. So, there is a strong need to control the adolescents' pattern of internet usage.

### ***Influence of Internet on Health of College Students***

Internet is invaluable for adolescents who want to find out more about personal, sensitive and embarrassing issues related to their bodies, relationships and health (*Willenz, 2006*). Researchers from Johns Hopkins University and the University of Ghana looked at the benefits of teens using the internet for health information in the developing world, where access to health information is scarce (*Willenz, 2006*). Teens use the internet as a source of health information in order to gain the necessary information on both sexual and general health issues that they would probably not have access to in their own local environment (*Cassell et al., 2006*). Two thirds (66 percent) of the youth who were in school and ground half (54 percent) of the youth who were of school had gone online previously. Internet provided interesting material that helped youth to solve a problem or answer a question. The most common topics searched on the internet for in school youth were sexually transmitted diseases, diet/nutrition and fitness and exercise. For the out-of-school youth, sexually transmitted diseases, sexual activities and sexual abuse were the topics of choice (*Willenz, 2006*).

Thus the internet has implications for the physical, cognitive, social and behavioural development of children and adolescents (Finkelhor et al., 2000; Finkelhor et al. 2003; Greenfield, 2004; Huston and Wright, 1998; Katz and Rice, 2002; Kraut et al., 1998; Subrahmanyam et al., 2001; Thornburgh and Lin, 2002). Greater use of the internet is associated with small, but statistically significant declines in social involvement as measured by communication within the family and the size of social people's network and significant increases in loneliness and depression. Other effects are increase in the size of the distant social circle, social support and stress, academic efficacy, emotional maturity, social competence are not significant but consistently negative (Kraut et al., 1998).

Easy and continuous access to the internet provides tremendous opportunities for adolescent socialization, allowing them to connect with their peers as well as with complete strangers from across the world. Clearly, the internet is transforming the social world of adolescents by influencing how they communicate, establish and maintain relationships and find social support. Therefore, it is essential to gain awareness of both the potential benefits and risks of teen internet use and provide strategies to guide safe and positive practice. So, the children's internet Protection Act was signed into law in 2000, requiring schools and libraries receiving federal e-rate funds to filter online visual depictions that are harmful to children under the age of 17 and representing widely implemented federal policy decisions to protect children from damaging impacts of the internet (Parsad and Jones, 2005).

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