Chapter 5

The Repercussion of the Internet on Psychological Wellbeing:
Discussion on Diverse Psychopathology and Treatment Approaches

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ABSTRACT

The internet is an essential and integral part of our lives, whether it’s about looking for a meaning of a word, searching for a journal, shopping, or connecting to others. Human beings cannot think of life without the internet. Although it’s having a positive impact, the negative side is there. Problematic internet use is defined as non-chemical or behavioral addictions, which involve human-machine interactions and can be harmful as it leads to numerous forms of psychological disorders. The chapter addresses various psychopathologies arising due to excessive internet use (e.g., problematic internet use, online gaming, online gambling, and compulsive cybersex). The chapter frames a strong theoretical background along with recent controversial issues related to the disorder. The chapter is delineated to acquaint readers with new concepts arising in clinical psychology that will help mental health professionals to be well equipped with skills required for the prevention and treatment of internet-related psychological disorders.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-8449-0.ch005
INTRODUCTION

When Licklider wrote his memos on the “galactic network” in 1960, he would have hardly thought of it evolving into a phenomenon of immense evolutionary significance. From the successful demonstration of the ARPANET in 1972 to the highly sophisticated world wide web, the internet has come a long way. The word internet originates from the words “Internet Connection Network” (Greenfield, 1999), which connects computers around the world with a standard protocol. The internet created a completely different and consumer-friendly way to communicate and gradually evolved into the most important prop to the personal, professional and social life of a significant proportion of the world population. Its use ranges from very basic search engines, socializing, shopping to sophisticated research aids, banking, business to name a few. At the same time, it has also come with its share of misuses like accessing inappropriate sites, hacking, stalking, spamming etc.

Problematic internet use (PIU), has been variously described in the literature as “internet addiction” and “pathological internet use” in which an individual’s inability to control his or her internet use causes marked distress and/or functional impairment. As we will be discussing in the following sections PIU has several potential dangers associated with it. In addition to it being a source of gratification for several psychiatric illnesses like pathological gambling and paraphilia, several studies have also suggested a high level of psychiatric co-morbidities like substance use, mood and anxiety disorders with PIU. Looking towards the positive side of the picture, internet has also contributed in the management of psychiatric illness by helping in increasing awareness, web-based interventions, web-based counseling etc. On the whole, the influence of the internet on the 21st century has been immense on all aspects of humanity and obviously mental health hasn’t remained untouched by it.

Of all the invention that have impacted humanity over the span of its development, Information technology has been the most striking one and internet has catalyzed the development to a degree that even Charles Darwin would have been left wonderstruck. The internet is a worldwide arrangement of interconnected computers organizes that utilize the standard internet protocol suite (TCP/IP) to serve billions of users around the world. It facilitates a huge reach of information resources and services, for example, the inter-linked hypertext records of the world wide web (WWW) and the supports electronic mail. The average penetration of the internet user in the world is 3.74 billion as of March 2017 compared to 3.26 billion internet users in 2016. Asia is the continent with the most internet users. In fact, interestingly, Asia now accounts for 50.1 per cent, or more than half, of all internet users in the world. In that China, as with most users 772 million in 2017 followed by India with 462 million in 2017. No sphere of life is unaffected as is psychological well-being, it would not be an overemphasis to state that the internet has been instrumental in the evolvement of new disorders and deviances in psychiatry.

INTERNET AND PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

Problematic Internet Use

Many terms have been used to describe problematic internet use, including “Internet addiction,” “Internet addiction disorder,” “Internet dependency,” “Pathological internet use,” and “Compulsive computer use” (Liu & Potenza, 2007). Regardless of the term used, these behaviours have been defined as non-chemical or behavioural addictions which involve human-machine interactions (Griffiths, 1995).
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