Internet Addiction and Loneliness Among Students of University of Shkodra

Elona Hasmujaj

Department of Psychology and Social Work, Faculty of Educational
Sciences, University of Shkodra, Albania

Abstract

Internet addiction is a kind of consumer behavior that has attracted the attention of many studies. Loneliness is a frequently reported mental illness addicted to the internet. Lonely individuals may be drawn online because of the increased potential for companionship, the changed social interaction patterns online, and as a way to modulate negative moods associated with loneliness.

This study examines the relationship between internet addiction and loneliness among albanian students of University of Shkodra and the gender differences to this aspect. The participants to the research were 151 students from 18-23 years old, who live in different places of North Albania. In order to trace the connection between loneliness and Internet addiction among students was used the self-administered questionnaires: Internet Addiction Test (IAT) and UCLA Loneliness Scale. The research has shown that there is a mild negative correlation between loneliness and Internet addiction, on the other hand no gender differences was found in terms of internet addiction and loneliness level. The results suggest that students addicted to the Internet have significantly lower rates of loneliness.

Keywords: Internet addiction, loneliness, students, quantitative research, University of Shkodra.

Introduction

Historically, the field of addictions is dedicated only to substances addiction (i.e., alcohol, cocaine or other drugs). Later, scientists and clinicians researchers, involved in this group the behavioral addictions, gambling and sex addiction.

As early as 1976, the American Psychological Association (APA) noted that excessive Internet use could lead to addiction (Chebbi, Koong,

Liu, & Rottman, 2007). Clinicians were asked to develop policies and protocols for dealing with this problem and in the mid 90 ' Kimberly Young (1996), conducted the first research on the phenomenon of Internet addiction. On the other hand Stanford University's School of Medicine had estimated that internet addiction should be considered a new form of psychopathology that could affect an increasing number of individuals (Aboujaoude, Koran, Gamel, Large & Serpe, 2006). Although Internet addiction has been studied to varying degrees, there is no well-defined standard for treatment. The debate about Internet Addiction varies from symptomatology to the definition of specific concepts: the amount of time using the Internet or the dilemmas if internet addiction should be considered or not a form of addiction (Byun et al., 2009) .

The studies in this field in our country are limited. This is because compared to developed Western countries, in Albania this phenomenon is spreading a little later.

The purpose of this study is to explore the phenomenon of internet addiction and its relationship with psychopathological symptoms such as loneliness. My interest for this study arose from my personal experience with university students. From my experience of several years as a lecturer, I found that every the incrasely use of the Internet in the classroom and university environments is becoming a problem that requires attention.

On the other hand compared to all demographic groups of Internet users, the population of university students is considered one of the most vulnerable groups in the development of problems related to excessive use of the Internet (Nalwa & Anand, 2003; Yang & Tung , 2007).

Most of these students, represent the first generation to grow up with this new technology, and they are characterized by their familiarity and confidence with ICT (Gallardo Echenique, 2014). They have grown up in an age when computers, mobile phones, and the Internet are part of mainstream culture and society. Also they are free from parental control, and most of them move away from family and located close to the respective universities.

Over the last decade, research on Internet addiction (IA) has increased. Most of them reported the connection between excessive internet use with some social and psychological variables such as social isolation, depression and loneliness (Kraut et al., 1998), low self-esteem and complacency. Also Ko et al (2007) reported that Internet addiction was linked to a variety of psychological variables such as shame, loneliness, anxiety, depression, and problems in interpersonal relationships.

In relation to loneliness more specifically, it is generally thought that this variable plays an important role in the development of IA, and thus warrants further need to study this phenomena. In a meta-synthesis of qualitative studies on IA from 1996 to 2006 (Douglas et al. 2008), it was

found that loneliness was one of the main antecedents of IA alongside feelings of isolation, low self-confidence, and low self-esteem. In fact, some authors found loneliness to be one of the best predictors of IA (Bozoglan, Demirer & Sahin, 2013; Caplan, 2002).

However it should be noted that empirical researches that study the relationship between loneliness and IA are not numerous. Despite this shortcoming, previous studies tend to portray loneliness as a possible consequence of IA (Cooper, 1998; Kandell, 1998; Suler, 1999; Young, 1998b)[21]. However, more recent empirical studies have shed light on the relationship between IA and loneliness (Esen, Aktas and Tuncer 2013; Odacı & Kalkan, 2010 ect.), where most of them suggest strong links between these two variables.

One of the main reasons of Internet use is to reduce psychological symptoms such as loneliness and depression. Loneliness is linked directly with deficits in social skills, preference for network interaction and compulsive internet use (Kim, LaRose, Peng, 2009).

Objectives

To find out the relationship between internet addiction and loneliness level, among university students.
To see if there are gender differences in the rate of internet addiction and it's relation with loneliness.

Research questions

How far students are addicted to internet?
What is the relationship between internet addiction and loneliness level among students?
Is the rate of internet addiction and its relation with loneliness different for male and female students?

2. Methodology

2.1 Design

This study used a cross-sectional design, as the main tool of quantitative methodology, where data are collected on the whole study population at a single point in time. That relies heavily on statistical techniques and mathematical numerical data, in order to answer the questions about various social problems.

---

[21] Revista de Psicologia, Ciències de l'Educació i de l'Esport ISSN: 1138-3194 Copyright © 2014.

2.2 The sample

The population of this study includes students from University of Shkodra, Albania. It was created a probabilistic sample of 151 subjects (where 78 are male and 73 female), and in the age group from 18-23 years old. The representation of the population object of the study was conducted through random selection.

2.3 Assessment tools
Internet Addiction Test (IAT)

IAT is created by Dr. Kimberly Young. This questionnaire consists of 20 questions, which measure the low, moderate or higher level of dependence on the Internet. This questionnaire is scored on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 to 5. The marking for this questionnaire ranges from 20-100, the Higher the marks are the greater dependence on the Internet is. In this study Cronbach's alpha score for this test was estimated 0.913.

UCLA Loneliness Scale

Is the most known scale which has been somewhat adopted as a standard measure in the field of scientific researches due to its higher reliability in psychoanalysis compared to other scales. This test includes 20 questions which should be answered by respondent according to Likert's scale divided into 4 measures. In this study Cronbach's alpha score for this test was estimated 0.839.

2.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 14.0 software (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL). Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated between internet addiction and loneliness level. Data were then analyzed using linear regression, descriptive statistics, independent sample T-test, which will be discussed in detail in the results section.

3. Results
Table 1. Frequency and percentage of students in terms of gender (n=151)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	male	78	51,7	51,7	51,7
	female	73	48,3	48,3	100,0
	Total	151	100,0	100,0	

Table 1 shows frequency and percentage of students with respect to gender. Female students (f=73, 48.3%) are not equal in number as compare to male students (f=78, 51.7%)

Table 2. Frequency of normal users, abusers and addicted to internet (n=151)

Users	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Abusers	25	16,6	16,6	16,6
Addicted	3	2,0	2,0	18,5
Users	123	81,5	81,5	100,0
Total	151	100,0	100,0	

The results show that 16.6 % (25) of student are problematic internet abusers, and they are at risk to become addicted. In the present sample 2% (3) are indicted to be having addiction to internet.

Table 3. Mean, Standard Deviation for Male and Female Students on internet addiction and loneliness (n=151).

	Gender_variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Internet Addiction	male	78	36,2564	14,42620	1,63345
	female	73	34,4932	16,72998	1,95810
Loneliness	male	78	22,9744	10,28550	1,16460
	female	73	22,6027	8,22891	,96312

The mean value of internet addiction in the male students (M=36.26, p.05) is greater than female students (M=34.49, p>.05), but the results are not significant, because the difference is so small. It also indicates that mean value of loneliness in male students (M=22.97, p>.05) is greater than female students (M=22.60, p>.05). Non significant result of loneliness shows that gender differences of being lonely are not too much and so non significant.

Table 4. t values for Male and Female Students on internet addiction and loneliness (n=151).

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	**Sig.**	**t**	**df**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**	**Mean Differenc e**	**Std. Error Differenc e**	**Lower**	**Upper**
Internet Addiction	Equal variances assumed	,146	,703	,695	149	,488	1,76326	2,53749	-3,25085	6,77736
	Equal variances not assumed			,691	142,534	,490	1,76326	2,54996	-3,27736	6,80388
Loneliness	Equal variances assumed	2,250	,136	,244	149	,807	,37162	1,52235	-2,63657	3,37981
	Equal variances not assumed			,246	145,538	,806	,37162	1,51126	-2,61523	3,35847

Table 4 shows t-values for male and female students on internet addiction and loneliness. Results indicate non-significant mean on internet addiction [t (149) =0.6, p=0.5 p>a]. Finding also indicates that students loneliness has non-significant mean value [t (149) =0.2, p=0.8, p>a]. On average man did not have a different level of internet addiction and loneliness, comparing to women.

Table 5. Pearson correlation among internet addiction and loneliness (n=151).

		UCLA_SCALE	Internet_Addiction
Loneliness	Pearson Correlation	1	-,200(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,014
	N	151	151
Internet Addiction	Pearson Correlation	-,200(*)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,014	
	N	151	151

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Result indicates internet addiction has a mild negative correlation with loneliness, r(151) = -0.2, p < 0.025. So increased Internet usage was associated with decreased levels of loneliness.

Table 6. Linear Regression analysis showing the effect of internet addiction on loneliness (n=151)

Variables	*B*	*SEB*	*B*
Internet addiction	-.120	.048	-.200
R^2	.040		
F	6.231		

Linear Regression analysis is computed with internet addiction as predictor variable and loneliness as outcome variable. The R^2 value is moderate, about .040 and indicates that 0.4% variance in the dependent variable can be accounted for, by the predictors {F (1, 149) = 6.231p <.005 }. The findings are significant.

3. Discussion and Conclusions

The results of this study showed there is no difference in mean value of internet addiction [t (149) =0.6, p=0.5 p>a] in male and female students of University of Shkodra. It shows that a only small percentage (2%) of university students results internet addicted. Findings also showed that about 16.6% are problematic internet users. This rate is comparable with those reported by Lićwinko, Krajewska-Kułak & Łukaszuk (2011), but a study

conducted among university level students showed 30% of students are internet addicts (Bhatti, Usman, Farhan, Satti & Bakhtawar, 2015) which is considerably higher result then what I got in this study averaging of only about 2%.

Results of the present study also indicate that there is no a significant mean value of loneliness [t (149) =0.2, p=0.8, p>a].
Findings shows that student of University of Shkodra are having not a significant level of internet addiction as well as loneliness. It may be due to higher of students who study social sciences, where their educational programs emphasizing precisely how to help themselves and how to become social.
The second aim of this research was to investigate the relationship between internet addiction and loneliness in university students. The results shows that there is a negative mild, correlation between the two variables r (151) = -0.2, p < 0.025. This results show that excessive use of internet is associated with low level of loneliness in university students and it may be because the people who spend more time on the Internet, have the opportunity to create personal relationships with other internet users, although these relationships are unstable and so to reduce the social loneliness level. In an online sample of 96 adults was found that Internet addicts as measured by the IAT, appeared to be more emotionally lonely but not socially lonely (Hardie & Ming, 2007). In relation to the association between IA and loneliness, studies have consistently reported links between high levels of Internet use, IA, and loneliness (Kandell, 1998).

Another important question of this study was gender differences regarding internet addiction and loneliness level. The prevalence of internet addiction in male students (M=36.26, p>0.05), is greater than in female students (M=34.49, p>0.05). It indicated that male students are more addicted to internet than female students. But the results are not significant, showing a small difference of internet addiction regarding gender. There are studies that support this conclusion. It was found out that problematic internet use do not show difference according to gender (Ceyhan, 2010). But there are also studies that shows others results. In a study, conducted on university students; it was found that problematic internet use is higher in females compared to males (Odacı, 2011). There are studies that support the conclusion that man have higher levels of addiction (Odacı and Kalkan, 2010). In the same way the loneliness level in male students (M=22.97, p>0.05) are greater than in female students (M=22.60, p>0.05). It means that male students are suffering from higher loneliness level and higher internet addiction level as compare to female students, but the difference is so small and the results are not significant.

Limitations of the study

However, several limitations of the study should be noted, to provide direction for future research. First, the sample of the study consisted of university students and may not be representative of the general adult population in terms of the frequency of internet addiction or the prevalence of loneliness, because generalization of the results is somewhat limited. Second, no definitive statements can be made about causality. Third, although there is growing recognition of internet addiction among clinicians, it is still unrecognized as a psychiatric disorder and there are controversial issues concerning assessment and diagnosis.

In conclusion:
- There is a negative mild relationship between the level of internet addiction and the level of loneliness.
- There is no gender difference found in terms of internet addiction and loneliness level.
- In the whole sample most of the subjects appear to be normal Internet users. Only a small percentage of the sample display symptoms of Internet addiction.

4. Recommendations

Based on the study findings, I suggest the following recommendations:

a. Provide information on the level of internet addiction to the "student guidebook" to the University of Shkodra, instead of just placing ethical issues and regulations.

b. Students who use internet during class will pay just a little attention to what the lectures are saying. The university should really consider blocking the usage of social network sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter ect.

c. University counsellors can provide small group or individual counselling for students who are Internet addicted.

d. More studies are needed to explore the prevalence of Internet addiction and its psychological morbidity in different occupations and social groups.

References:
1. Aboujaoude, E., Koran, L. M., Gamel, N., Large, M. D., & R. T. Serpe. (2006). Potential Markers for Problematic Internet Use: A Telephone Survey of 2,513 Adults *CNS Spectrum, The Journal of Neuropsychiatric Medicine, 11*(10), 750-755.
2. Bozoglan, B., Demirer, V., & Sahin, I. (2013). Loneliness, self-esteem, and life satisfaction as predictors of Internet addiction: A

cross-sectional study among Turkish university students. Scandinavian Journal of Psychology, 54(4), 313-319.

3. Byun, S., Ruffini, C., Mills, J. E., Douglas, A. C., Niang, M., Stepchenkova, S., & Blanton, M. (2009). Internet addiction: Metasynthesis of 1996-2006 quantitative research. *CyberPsychology & Behavior, f* 203-207.

4. Ceyhan. E, (2010). Predictiveness of identity status, main internet use purposes and gender on university students' the problematic internet use. Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice, 10(3): 1323-1355

5. Chebbi, P., Koong, K., Liu, L., & Rottman, R. (2007). Some observations on Internet addiction disorder research. Journal of Information Systems Education, 11(3), 97-107.

6. Chen, S.-K. (2012). Internet use and psychological well-being among college students: A latent profile approach. Computers in Human Behavior, 28(6), 2219- 2226.

7. Douglas et al., (2008) A.C. Douglas, J.E. Mills, M. Niang, S. Stepchenkova, S. Byun, C. Ruffini, M. Blanton Internet addiction: Meta-synthesis of qualitative research for the decade 1996-2006 Computers in Human Behavior, 24 (2008), pp. 3027–3044.

8. Esen, B. K., Aktas, E., & Tuncer, I. (2013). An Analysis of University Students' Internet Use in Relation to Loneliness and Social Self-efficacy. Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 84, 1504-1508.

9. Gallardo Echenique, E. (2014) An integrative review of literature on learners in the digital era, Studia paedagogica vol. 19, n. 4, 2014 www.studiapaedagogica.cz DOI: 10.5817/SP2014-4-8.

10. Halley M. Pontes, Mark D. Griffiths, & Ivone M. Patrão (2014) Internet Addiction and Loneliness Among Children and Adolescents in the Education Setting: An Empirical Pilot Study, Revista de Psicologia, Ciències de l'Educació i de l'Esport ISSN: 1138-3194 www.revistaaloma.net.

11. Kandell, J. J. (1998). Internet addiction on campus: The vulnerability of college students. CyberPsychology & Behavior, 1(1), 11-17.

12. Kim, J., LaRose, R., & Peng, W. (2009). Loneliness as the cause and the effect of problematic Internet use: The relationship between Internet use and psychological well-being. CyberPsychology & Behavior, 12(4), 451-455.

13. Kraut, R., Kiesler, S., Boneva, B., Cummings, J., Helgeson, V., & Crawford, A., (2002). Internet paradox revisited. *Journal of Social Issues*, *58,* 49-74.

14. Lićwinko, J., Krajewska-Kułak, E., & Łukaszuk, C. (2011). Internet addiction among academic youth in Białystok. Progress in Health Sciences, 1(1), 124-130.
15. Martin. J, Schumacher.P (2003) *Loneliness and social uses of the Internet*, Computers in Human Behavior 19 (2003) 659–671, Pergamon.
16. Nalwa, K., & Anand, A. P. (2003). Internet Addiction in Students: A Cause of Concern. Cyberpsychology and Behavior, 6(6), 653-656.
17. Niemz, K., Griffiths, M. D., & Banyard, P. (2005). Prevalence of pathological Internet use among university students and correlations with self-esteem, the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ), and disinhibition. CyberPsychology & Behavior, 8(6), 562-570.
18. Odacı, H. (2011). Academic self-efficacy and academic procrastination as predictors of problematic internet use in university students. Comput Educ 57:1109-1113. Doi:10.1016/j.compedu.2011.01.005.
19. Odacı, H., & Kalkan, M. (2010). Problematic Internet use, loneliness and dating anxiety among young adult university students. Computers & Education, 55(3), 1091-1097.
20. Yang, S., & Tung, C. (2007). Comparison of Internet addicts and non-addicts in Taiwanese high school. Computers in Human Behavior, 23(1), 79-96.