The Relationship of Emotional Intelligence and Mental Disorders with Internet Addiction in Internet Users University Students

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Abstract

Background: This study aimed to evaluate the relationship of emotional intelligence and mental disorders, with internet addiction in university students.

Methods: The method of study was descriptive-pilot one and correlation. Two hundred internet users (male and female) from Isfahan University and Isfahan University of Technology were randomly selected. For data collection، Carson's emotional intelligence Questionnaire، SCL-90 scale and Internet Addiction Test were used. Data analysis was implemented using multivariate regression statistical method.

Findings: Anxiety, obsessive-compulsive, aggression, phobia, hypochondria disorders, and emotional intelligence were the most significant predictors of Internet addiction. Moreover, there were significant correlations between these variables and Internet addiction disorder ($P < 0.001$). Moreover، the findings showed that there were significant associations between depressive ($R = 0.33$), summarization ($R = 0.24$), and interpersonal sensitivity ($R = 0.20$) disorders. In this study no correlation was found between internet addiction disorder with psychosis and paranoid ideation. Moreover, among mental disorders, there was only a significant difference between the sexes in depression ($P < 0.001$); the men showed more depressive tendencies than women.

Conclusion: The results showed a correlation between emotional intelligence and mental disorders with internet addiction, but these results can help therapists, psychologists and counselors in providing services to help internet addicts.

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Introduction

We are witnessing a new kind of addiction in individuals with extensive access to the Internet that is a particular problem of the information age.

A growing volume of research done in this field suggests that Internet Addiction Disorder is a psycho-social disorder. The characteristics of this disorder include tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, emotional disorders, and fragmentation of social relations.[1]

Internet addiction is a real addiction like drug addiction and other forms of dependence. It is a chronic, pervasive and, recurrent phenomenon associated with serious physical, financial, family, social and psychological injuries. The addicted individual experiences a significant drop in personal and social functions.[2]

In this regard, Bullen and Harré have concluded that the more young people spend time on the internet, the less time they will spend on their real social environment. In addition, like other addicts young people addicted to the internet are specified with addictive symptoms and characteristics.[3]

In a related study Nie Erbring concluded that women were more exposed to severe addiction to internet, therefore they had more problems in using internet than men.[4]

Anderson found that one third of the students had academic problems as a result of excessive use of internet. University counselors had reported similar problems. For example, in a study on about 5310 students at the University of Texas it was found that 14% of the subjects were in concordance with the criteria of internet addiction.[5]

McIlwraith reported that labeling young people as internet addicts draws our attention to mental disorders (neuroticism), introversion, disappointment and feeling of frustration. These people probably spend more time using the internet in order to keep themselves away from unpleasant thoughts and mood swings.[6] Findings of the studies carried out by Petrie and Gunn, and Tsai and Lin suggest that internet addicts often possess introverted personalities and are more likely to suffer from high levels of depression.[7,8]

According to Pinnelli, Internet addicts not only show behaviors different from common patterns in their community, but their thinking traits are also distinct from those of the majority of people. These users have obsessive thoughts about the internet, and little control over their temptation and the desire to use the Internet. They even assume internet as their unique friend. Moreover, these people think that internet is the only place where they can feel good about themselves and their surroundings.[9]

In their study, Yen et al. demonstrated that adolescents with Internet addiction had higher attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) symptoms, depression, social phobia, and hostility. Higher ADHD symptoms, depression, and hostility are associated with Internet addiction in male adolescents, and only higher ADHD symptoms and depression are associated with Internet addiction in female students.[10]

In a study, Ko et al. found that aggression and attention deficit are the highest predictors of internet addiction in adolescent boys and girls.[11]

Furthermore, the studies by Morrison and Gore, and Christakis et al. showed that individuals with internet addiction are more depressed than normal people. There is a higher rate of addiction in men than women and a higher rate of addiction in young people than adults. There was a significant correlation between depression levels and internet addiction disorder.[12,13]

In another study on 59 students conducted by Dong et al., results showed that the scores of depression, anxiety, aggression, interpersonal sensitivity and psychosis increased after getting addicted to the Internet, but no changes were detected in the somatization, paranoia and anxiety phobia dimensions scores.[14]

Separate studies carried out by, Salovey et al., and Parker et al. found that weakness in components of emotional intelligence is related to neurotic subscale. In other words, people with low emotional intelligence suffer from mental disorders, lack of empathy, anxiety, anger, weak defense mechanisms, and have problems in administration of their emotions more than others.[15,16]

Zamani et al. reported that there is a significant relationship of the personality trait of emotional stability and academic fields, i.e. students with higher emotional stability experience less negative emotions when confronted with problems. Therefore, it is less likely for them to alleviate negative emotions by the extreme and obsessed usage of the Internet. In addition, results showed that the students with high extroversion scores prefer face to face social interactions with other people

to social interaction in virtual environments. Conversely, most introvert students avoid interactions with other people due to their shyness. Thus, they communicate with other people in the virtual world. This study found that three personality traits of loyalty, emotional stability, and extroversion are the most significant predictors of Internet addiction in high school students.[17]

The study by Dong et al. showed that students with internet addiction performed a lower rate of complex exercises than the normal group. They also showed less ability in information processing and impulse control. [18]

As mentioned above, excessive use of these tools creates much psychological distress and social impact. The aim of this study is, therefore, to clarify the nature of the correlation among internet addiction disorder, emotional intelligence and mental disorders.

Methods

The present essay is a cross-sectional study of the correlation type. The study population consisted of all internet users in the universities of Isfahan and Isfahan Industrial University sites with no age or sex restriction.

The multi-stage sampling method was executed, thus the universities' 200 student users, boys and girls, were randomly selected. According to the findings 55.5% of participants were male and 44.5% were female. In this study three questionnaires were used, which include internet addiction questionnaire. This questionnaire consists of 20 items, and is scored based on the Likert method. In the study by Yang et al., internal validity of the questionnaire has been reported to be higher than 92% and it is reported as significant in test-retest method.[19]

The facial validity and internal consistency of the questionnaire were also reported to be 82% by Widyanto and McMurran.[20] In a study by Alavi et al.[21] Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the 5 factors were reported to be from 62% to 81%, which was consistent with Cronbach's alpha coefficients reported by Widyanto and McMurran (0.54–0.82). For the validation of content validity and convergent validity of this questionnaire, Alavi et al. reported open trial (r = 0.82), internal consistency (α = 088) and split-half (r = 0.72).[20,21]

SCL-90-R questionnaires

SCL-90-R questionnaire was one of the tools for the diagnosis of mental patients, whose provided responses to each of the questions will be determined on a scale of 5 scores.

Scoring and interpretation are obtained based on three indicators: the overall coefficient signs, coefficient criteria of discomfort and total morbid symptoms. The reliability of this test at all scales is reported to be more than 80%, except for hostility, phobia and paranoid thinking. Moreover, its construct and diagnostic validity indicate that it can be used as a useful tool for diagnosing mental patients. [22]

In a study by Modabernia et al, the most reliability was found for depression with test retest, (r = 0.93) splitting (r = 0.85) and Cronbach's alpha, (r = 0.85). There was a correlation between all 9 factors and three global indices (r > 0.50), and between the 9 dimensions of SCL-90-R and MMPI scales. Most correlations were between depression and anxiety (SCL-90-R) with neurasthenia in MMPI (r = 0.59), and compulsive-obsessive psychosis with schizophrenia (r = 0.58). They found a statistically significant correlation between two tests (α = 0.05).[23]

Emotional intelligence questionnaires

Carson et al. invented the emotional intelligence questionnaire which includes 30 three-choice questions with a reliability coefficient of higher than 72%.[24] Tabesh reported the calculated reliability coefficient for the components of emotional intelligence, empathic response, mood regulation, interpersonal skills, internal motivation, and self-awareness, which were 0.728, 0.53, 0.597, 0.682, and 0.491, respectively. Moreover, the reliability coefficient of emotional intelligence (EI) in total was 0.78. [25]

First, demographic and internet addiction questionnaires were distributed individually and in groups, and then subjects were given SCL-90 and Carson emotional intelligence questionnaires. After the investigation, two of the subjects who had partially completed their questionnaires were excluded from the study and replaced by the reserved subjects. Eventually, the resulted data were statistically analyzed using the multiple regression analysis method.

Results

This study has examined the relationship of

emotional intelligence and mental disorders, with internet addiction disorder in internet users. The findings of the current study show that of the variables studied in the anxiety regression, obsessive compulsive behaviors, aggression, phobia, hypochondria and emotional intelligence are the best predictors of Internet addiction (Table 1).

The findings of table 1 show that among the variables regression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive, aggressive, phobia, hypochondria and emotional intelligence have been the best predictors of Internet addiction.

According to the obtained data, the predictive variables in the study have determined the variance of internet addiction users to be 28.4% in the first step, 38.9% in the second step, 43.3% in the third step, 46% in the fourth step, 48.4% in the fifth step, and 49.4% in the final step, respectively. The F ratio is significant when $P < 0.001$, therefore, the regression can be extended to the statistical community.

Table 1. The multiple correlation coefficients with mental disorders and emotional intelligence with internet addiction disorder

Criterion variable		Predictive variables	Multiple R**	Adjusted R-squared	F*	Significant
Internet addiction	Step 1	Anxiety	0.536	0.284	79.817	0.001
	Step 2	Anxiety, obsessive compulsive	0.629	0.389	64.387	0.001
	Step 3	Anxiety, obsessive compulsive, aggressive	0.664	0.433	51.604	0.001
	Step 4	Anxiety, obsessive compulsive, aggressive, phobia	0.686	0.46	43.314	0.001
	Step 5	Anxiety, obsessive compulsive, aggressive, phobia, hypochondria	0.705	0.484	38.275	0.001
	Step 6	Anxiety, obsessive compulsive, aggressive, phobia, hypochondria, and emotional intelligence	0.714	0.494	33.433	0.001

$P < 0.001$; *F ratio in f-test; **Multiple correlation coefficients

Table 2. Beta Coefficient table in predicting internet addiction in internet users

Criterion variable		Predictive variables	Beta	T*	Significant
Internet addiction	Step 1	Anxiety	0.536	8.934	0.001
	Step 2	Anxiety	0.412	6.964	0.001
		Obsessive compulsive	0.351	5.931	0.001
	Step 3	Anxiety	0.330	5.443	0.001
		Obsessive compulsive	0.340	5.946	0.001
		Aggressive	0.231	4.018	0.001
	Step 4	Anxiety	0.322	4.435	0.001
		Obsessive compulsive	0.346	6.204	0.001
		Aggressive	0.211	3.735	0.001
		Phobia	0.172	3.278	0.001
	Step 5	Anxiety	0.318	5.496	0.001
		Obsessive compulsive	0.328	5.978	0.001
		Aggressive	0.212	3.840	0.001
		Phobia	0.190	3.672	0.001
		Hypochondria	0.164	3.173	0.002
	Step6	Anxiety	0.310	5.393	0.001
		Obsessive compulsive	0.319	5.870	0.001
		Aggressive	0.204	3.714	0.001
		Phobia	0.191	3.727	0.001
		Hypochondria	0.150	2.924	0.004
		Emotional intelligence	-0.117	-2.267	0.024

$P < 0.05$; *T ratio in t-test

The findings in table 2 suggest that for every one unit of increase in anxiety, obsessive compulsive-aggressive, phobia and hypochondria, beta coefficient increases internet addiction 0.310, 0.319, 0.204, 0.191, and 0.150 unites respectively. However, one unit increase in emotional intelligence results in 0.117 unit decrease in internet addiction.

The equation of prediction can be presented in the following way:

Internet users' addiction = Constant factor (2.867) + Anxiety (0.517) + Obsessive-compulsive (0.373) + Aggression (0.466) + Phobia (0.298) + Hypochondria (0.258) + Emotional Intelligence (–0.097).

The findings in table 3 show that the correlation coefficient among internet addiction and emotional disorders, phobia, aggression, anxiety disorders, depression disorders, interpersonal sensitivity, obsessive-compulsive disorder and somatization disorder is significant. In terms of determining the r^2 coefficient, the common variances between internet addiction disorder and emotional intelligence have been 5.7% phobia 5.0%, aggression 17.1%, anxiety disorders 28.7%, depression 9.9%, interpersonal sensitivity 5.7%, obsessive-compulsive disorder 24.6%, and somatization 4.0%.

Table 3. The mean standard deviation and coefficient of correlation between internet addiction disorder, emotional intelligence, and subscales of mental disorders

Riterion variable C	Internet addiction disorder				
Predictive Variables	**Mean**	**Standard deviation**	**Coefficient of correlation**	**Squared correlation coefficient**	**Significant**
Emotional intelligence	3.72	2.31	0.240	0.057	0.001
Psychosis	11.52	3.09	-0.037	0.001	0.603
Phobia	5.98	2.11	0.244	0.050	0.001
Aggression	8.67	2.90	0.414	0.171	0.001
Anxiety	15.27	4.69	0.536	0.287	0.001
Depression	15.01	3.61	0.315	0.099	0.001
Interpersonal sensitivity	13.52	4.14	0.240	0.057	0.001
Obsessive compulsive	9.79	2.82	0.496	0.246	0.001
Somatization	4.22	1.82	0.200	0.040	0.004
Paranoid thoughts	41.47	5.85	0.111	0.123	0.118

Table 4. Comparison of the mean and standard deviation in mental disorder scores according to gender

Statistical variables	Sex	Mean	Standard deviation	T	P
Psychosis	F	3.80	2.17	0.458	0.647
	M	3.65	2.42		
Phobia	F	11.33	3.04	-0.767	0.444
	M	11.67	3.14		
Aggressive	F	5.76	1.93	-1.295	0.197
	M	6.15	2.24		
Anxiety	F	8.79	2.98	0.556	0.579
	M	8.56	2.84		
Depression	F	13.39	3.61	-5.610	0.001
	M	78.16	4.92		
Interpersonal sensitivity	F	14.95	3.78	-0.209	0.834
	M	15.06	3.49		
Obsessive compulsive	F	94.13	4.09	1.281	0.202
	M	13.18	4.17		
Hypochondria	F	9.77	2.82	-0.660	0.948
	M	9.80	2.83		
Paranoid thoughts	F	4.24	1.74	0.188	0.851
	M	4.19	1.89		
Emotional intelligence	F	41.68	5.92	0.465	0.643
	M	41.29	5.81		

$P < 0.005$

Table 4 findings show that the observed T in P < 0.005 level is not significant for any of the mental disorders except for depression. In other words, there is a significant difference between girls and boys in depressive disorder; the depressive disorder in males is significantly higher than females.

Discussion

One of the objectives of this study has been to investigate the multiple relationships of mental disorders and emotional intelligence, with Internet addiction users. Results showed that anxiety, obsessive-compulsive, aggression, phobia, hypochondria and emotional intelligence have been the best predictors of Internet addiction and there is a significant relationship of these variables and internet addiction.

The findings are consistent with results obtained by Calvert and Tan, and Shapira et al. They showed that computer and internet games increase physiologic arousal symptoms such as aggressive behavior, increased cardiovascular pressure, heart rate and feelings of hostility in users.[26,27] These finding are also consistent with those of Pinnelli,[9] Yen et al.,[10] Ko et al.,[11] Dong et al.,[18] and Weinstein.[28]

Excessive use of Internet may lead to problems in time management, various physical and psychological disorders, and conflicts in daily activities or in relationships with friends and family members. It also creates problems in spending time on studying and sleeping, moreover, it can result in mood change in users, so that they are likely to experience various mental disorders. The mass of information in the World Wide Web creates a kind of obsessive behavior regarding excessive searches within the networks in databases. Obsessive desire toward a particular kind of information in the fields of interest, and decrease in the importance of work tasks are usually associated with this behavior. While these people know their work is socially desirable, they cannot stop because it will lead to less self-esteem, and more symptoms.

The excessive use of the Internet can cause many problems, including marital, professional, family and also social communication problems. These issues can create a great deal of stress, anxiety and feelings of hostility in people.

Studies have shown that people who spend long hours on the internet will experience failure in their academic, career, and family performance, and will be socially isolated. They also incur a lot of financial pressures, and the pressures that have an important role in accelerating their anxiety, aggression, and mental and emotional fatigue. Therefore, it is normal that, with regard to these mental states, a person suffers from mental and physical issues and, as research has shown, gets a high score in hypochondria scale.

The results have shown that there is a significant relationship of internet addiction and depression. These findings are in coordination with research results obtained by McIlwraith,[6] Petrie and Gunn,[7] Tsai and Lin,[8] Yen et al.,[10] Ko et al.,[11] Christakis et al.,[13] Shapira et al.,[27] Weinstein,[28] Young and Rodgers,[29] and Kraut et al.[30] concerning the higher prevalence of mood disorders particularly major depression and bipolar mood disorders in addicted users.

A possible reason for these results is that since people spend a lot of time surfing the internet, they are inevitably deprived of social interaction, which is an important source of reinforcement for individuals. As a result of this reduction in resources of social reinforcement, such individuals are prone to depression.

Cognitive dysfunction is also another problem, because non-adaptive recognition of self and the world is an early indicator of the disorder. Beliefs such as the "individual only has control power on the internet, and is only respected in such an environment", "nobody likes me outside the internet", and "Internet is really the only place where one can know other people" are some problematic cognitive thoughts in this regard. These beliefs, in turn, produce more depression, anger and feelings of hostility towards the outside world. Therefore, the user takes refuge in the internet cyberspace and this will affect his relationship with others.

As research has shown, internet addicts have more interpersonal sensitivity. Interpersonal sensitivity causes problems in relationships with other people in the home, education and work environments.

According to the results of the current study, there is a significant relationship among emotional intelligence, mental disorders, and internet addiction. These results are in coordination with the research of Salovey et al., and Parker.[15,16] Since physiologic and emotional arousal symptoms, feelings of hostility and

aggressive thoughts are the adverse effects of addiction to and uncontrolled use of the internet, it is natural that the concerned individuals have difficulties in expressing their emotions in different situations, including social and family interactions, correct understanding of thoughts and feelings of others (lower emotional intelligence).

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بررسی رابطه بین هوش هیجانی و اختلالات روانی با اعتیاد به اینترنت در کاربران دانشجوی دانشگاه

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چکیده

مقدمه: پژوهش حاضر با هدف، بررسی رابطه بین هوش هیجانی و اختلالات روانی با اعتیاد به اینترنت در کاربران دانشگاه انجام گرفت.

روش‌ها: مطالعه توصیفی- مقطعی حاضر از نوع همبستگی بود و به این منظور تعداد ۲۰۰ کاربر دانشجوی دختر و پسر از بین دانشجویان دانشگاه‌های اصفهان و صنعتی به صورت تصادفی انتخاب شدند. برای جمع‌آوری اطلاعات، از پرسش‌نامه‌های هوش هیجانی Carson، مقیاس SCL-۹۰ و پرسش‌نامه اعتیاد به اینترنت یانگ استفاده گردید. تجزیه و تحلیل داده‌های به دست آمده با کمک روش آماری MANOVA صورت گرفت.

یافته‌ها: بهترین پیش‌بینی کننده اعتیاد به اینترنت، اضطراب، وسواس جبری، پرخاشگری، ترس مرضی، خود بیمار انگاری و هوش هیجانی بود (۵۱ درصد) و واریانس اعتیاد به اینترنت را تبیین نمود، بنابراین بین این متغیرها و اعتیاد به اینترنت رابطه معنی‌داری وجود داشت ($P < ۰/۰۰۱$). همچنین نتایج تحقیق نشان داد که بین اعتیاد به اینترنت و افسردگی ($R = ۰/۳۳$)، حساسیت بین فردی ($R = ۰/۲۴$) و اختلالات شبه جسمی ($R = ۰/۲۰$) رابطه معنی‌داری وجود دارد. نتایج تحقیق رابطه معنی‌داری را بین اعتیاد به اینترنت و افکار پارانویید و روان‌پریشی نشان نداد. همچنین در بین اختلالات روانی تنها در اختلال افسردگی بین دختران و پسران تفاوت معنی‌داری وجود داشت ($P < ۰/۰۰۱$)؛ بدین ترتیب که پسران افسردگی بیشتری را گزارش کردند.

نتیجه‌گیری: بنابراین می‌توان نتیجه گرفت که بین هوش هیجانی و اختلالات روانی با اعتیاد به اینترنت رابطه وجود دارد و این نتایج می‌تواند به درمانگران، روان‌شناسان و مشاوران در ارایه خدمات به این افراد کمک نماید.

واژگان کلیدی: اختلالات روانی، اعتیاد به اینترنت، هوش هیجانی، افسردگی، اضطراب

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