

Internet addiction: ushering in a generation of the socially inept

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How long does a year take when it's going away? This was a question asked by Dunbar to a very highly disciplined soldier right before explaining, rising in almost furious passion, how fast life goes and that the only way that can slow it down is the slow, tedious, and overall unpleasant aspects of life. Granted this conversation took place in a work of fiction; however, how Dunbar insisted that he spend most of his time on base shooting skeet simply because it made his life seem to pass slower does draw parallels to how we distract ourselves today.

Unlike in the 50's when Mr. Heller first introduced us to his pleasantly insane world that was *Catch-22*, today we have the amazing expanse of information and entertainment known as the Internet as well as the multitude of mediums for accessing it: computers, tablets, cellphones, televisions, even the very confines of our car can read Facebook updates.

But with this quickly growing rise in demand for technology, status updates, and quick amusement, there is also a growth in research on a literal addiction to the Internet and technology. Many in the social sciences worry that we may be looking at a dependence on the superficial global connection, one that I fear may leave us with an incapable generation of social media dependents.

Internet addiction is seen as an impulse-control disorder, much like other addictions such as to gambling or sexual activity, where users are unable to resist urges or impulses to access the Internet. In a recent study done by Dr. Kimberly Young of the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford, it was found that out of the nearly four hundred surveyed that were categorized as Internet

dependent a resounding number had experienced academic, relationship, financial, or occupational problems that could be directly linked to excessive Internet use (Table 1).

One of the most alarming of these were those whose real relationships were affected with plenty sad and at times disturbing anecdotes of people becoming too absorbed in the lures of the online community; for example, one mother had forgot about some of the more basic needs of her own children such as picking them up from school or making them dinner (Young 1-5).

The academic arena is one that has been most recently seen affected. When surveyed at the Cranfield School of Management in the United Kingdom, about 39% of students 11 to 18 years old said that texting had taken its toll on their ability to proper write English. Probably more concerning was the 59.2% that openly admitted to plagiarism, " inserting information straight from the Internet into schoolwork, without actually reading or changing it, and then, shockingly, a third of those said that they considered that acceptable schoolwork (Goodwin).

Then you have Californian psychologist Larry D. Rosen who referred to the " Googleeffect," what he described as " an inability to remember facts brought on by the realization [sic] they are all available via Google (" Rise " 8). What we see here can be construed as just laziness on part of this generation, a stereotype that I would agree with if not for the overwhelming evidence that suggests that this issue runs so much deeper, namely how we interact with each other when we are offline.

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The detrimental effects that dependence on the Internet has on people is further outlined in the report " Technology Overload: Explaining, Diagnosing, And Dealing With Techno-Addiction" by Nada Kakabadse, a professor of management and business research at University of Northampton in the United Kingdom. His commentary was hardly optimistic:

" Being hooked into ICT [information and communication technology] devices and ignoring 'offline' social interaction can lead to chronic insomnia, relationship break-up, job-loss, premature burn-out and accidents as a result of inattentiveness to daily detail. The harm to both the individual and society is immense. Idolatry of ICT gadgets such as the PDA, BlackBerry, mobile phone, has serious consequences, especially when 'online' behavior begins to interfere with an 'offline' life. " (Claburn)

Vesile Oktan revealed in another report on the effects that Internet dependence had on students at the Karadeniz Technical University in Turkey on their ability to cope and control emotions. While his findings did indicate that Internet addiction was a reliable predictor in poor emotions management, he also point out previous studies that supported this such as young people with virtual gaming addictions had low self-control and discipline. He went on to discuss how this addiction could be a behavioral pattern that compensated, however inadequately, for failures in life (Oktan 3-5).

A very similar examination from Greece only showed consistency; when comparing a younger demographic (ages 12-18) to their respective parents over the course of two years, it was found that without preventative initiative

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Internet addiction grew in the children. The biggest predictor variable for this addiction was parental bonding rather than actual security as many parents underestimated their children's involvement (Siomos). These two reports show a consistent connection between how people interact outside the digital world and how they both are affected and effect how one develops uncontrollable cravings.

What the spectacular resources the Internet has to offer surely can't be refuted as invaluable. The ability to quickly and effectively communicate with each other over vast distances and almost instantaneously is a recent luxury that we at times take for granted. The use of the Internet and its many outlets does make for a good distraction in much of the same way Dunbar made use of the shooting range in *Catch-22* even though he detested actually doing target practice. Unfortunately, in this situation, what we can take for granted also has its capacity to consume and entrap us with its ease of access and being easily relatable unlike standard social situations when offline where one has to make compromises (Young 5).

Many experts would rather not classify this issue as an actual addiction, citing that it is more of a means to an end such as how gambling addicts will switch to the Internet poker rooms when they can no longer get their fix from actual casinos or vice versa (Ritchie). I firmly believe that this is a real problem in society that will eventually prevent many people from achieving success as this continues to monopolize their time, effort, and mental processes. I would almost go as far to say that I have my own difficulties with this; case and point: I would readily say that this essay would have been

completed in a timely manner if it had not been of the constant distraction from reality that the Internet provides.

I will conclude with an anecdote that very clearly displays where many undiagnosed individuals are going if this issue is not given proper attention. I challenge you to read this and reflect on other well researched and described addictions such as with alcohol, gambling, and sexual activity. Then I pose to you a question: if we are dealing with a very similar problem with a medium that is as vast as it is accessible, long could a life take when it's going away?

" When Johnny's grandmother died unexpectedly, the family was devastated. Fifteen-year-old Johnny seemed to be coping well, but would continue to spend at least six hours a day playing online role-play game [sic] World of Warcraft; sometimes up to 10 hours at the weekend.

It was not until months later, after he had cut down on his gaming, that the impact of the death really hit home. Johnny went to visit his grandfather and was horrified to relearn that his grandmother had gone and would not be coming back. " He did acknowledge it, but was so immersed in World of Warcraft at the time that when he got off the game, he was shocked and very upset that she wasn't there, says Dr. Richard Graham, a consultant child and adolescent psychiatrist who subsequently treated Johnny for his gaming addiction.

" The time Johnny spent gaming had steadily increased over the years until he was spending every available hour on his Xbox. He completely lost all

interest in school and his grades inevitably suffered. It was only after a couple of months of treatment that Johnny started to re-engage with the people around him. 'That emotional impact had been frozen in time,' says Dr Graham. 'Even when there was a death in the family, something as crucial as mourning didn't take place.'" (Ritchie)