Research Article

CYBERSPACE ADDICTION: STATUS OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Studies have identified high rates and severe consequences of internet addiction among high school students. Most of them are pathologically preoccupied with their activities in cyberspace. This has resulted in yet another type of addiction that has invaded the human psyche. Psychological dependence on the Internet is characterized by (a) an increasing investment of resources on Internet-related activities, (b) unpleasant feelings (e.g., anxiety, depression, emptiness) when offline, (c) an increasing tolerance to the effects of being online, and (d) denial of the problematic behaviors. Individuals exhibiting such symptoms often are dealing with underlying psychological issues. They are highly involved in a variety of comprehensive online activities, some of which are hour's long texting, watching online videos, shopping, gaming, video chatting etc. Some fulfill more social needs, while some may be an extinction of work/course compulsion. This addiction has permeated their lives at home, college and elsewhere.
This study is conducted to identify the factors that cause students to cling towards the cyber world. Findings of the study will be discussed in the light of the implication on the society.

INTRODUCTION

The internet has emerged as an essential media channel for personal communication, academic research, information exchange, and entertainment. While the positive aspects are renowned, concerns continue to mount regarding problematic internet usage behaviors. Some psychologists do not believe in addiction to the Internet itself, but rather in addiction to stimulation that the Internet provides. They suggests that new Internet users often show an initial infatuation with the novelty of the Web, but eventually lose interest and decrease their time spent online back to a normal, healthy amount. Those users who do go on to show compulsive Internet utilization, for the most part become compulsive only with regard to particular types of information to be had online, most often gambling, pornography, chat room or shopping sites. This is not an addiction to the Internet itself, but rather to risk-taking, sex, socializing or shopping. In essence then, the chief addictive characteristic of the Internet is its ability to enable instant and relatively anonymous social stimulation. "Addicted" Internet users are addicted to a favored kind of social stimulation and not to the Internet itself, although it is also true that the Internet has made it vastly easier and more convenient for someone to develop such a compulsion.

Because the Internet is used by many people as a normal part of their career or education, knowing how to separate excessive from normal use becomes difficult and cannot be accomplished using simple measures such as amount of time spent online in a given period. Most fundamental in differentiating normal from problem Internet use is the experience of compulsion to use the net. Normal users, no matter how heavy their usage, do not *need* to get online and do not neglect their occupational duties or their relationships with family and friends to get online.

Help for Internet related addiction is available from multiple sources. Anyone concerned about serious problem Internet usage should consider consulting with a local licensed psychologist, social worker or counselor, specifically one with experience treating addictions. Cognitive therapy based approaches are recommendable due to their systematic and direct focus on reducing problem use and preventing relapse, and the strong scientific support for the approach. Marital and or family therapy approaches may be useful as well when an individual's Internet Addiction is affecting their larger family system (such as might be the case when a husband uses Internet-based pornography as his sole sexual outlet, leaving his wife frozen out). More than a few books and self-help resources (such as audio tape sets) are also available for those

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who want to educate themselves on the problem. Our Internet Addiction Treatment article provides further detail. All cyberspace "addictions" can be separated into two very general categories: social and non-social types. Some people may be very preoccupied with their computers but have little interest in using it. These people may use their computers, as well as the internet, to play solitary games, work, collect information, or explore. In other words, they may be game, information, or adventure junkies - or simply workaholics - but they aren't not necessarily using cyberspace to make interpersonal connections. Yet most internet addictions are the social type.

MEANING AND TERMINOLOGY

Although some argue that the term 'addiction' should be applied only for the cases involving chemical substances (e.g., Bratter and Forrest, 1985), similar diagnostic criteria have been applied to a number of problematic behaviors such as pathological gambling (Young,1996). Popular use of the term may associate 'addiction' with almost any substance or activity (Hatterer, 1994). People are said to be 'addicted' to food, smoking, gambling, shopping, work, play, and sex (Truan, 1993). With its convenient communication options and the World Wide Web, the internet provides remote access to other people and abundant information in all areas of interest. It is an environment which could be abused by virtually anyone, regardless of their interest in the technology and science (Griffiths, 1998). Although there is no standardized definition of internet addiction, there is a acknowledgement among researchers that this phenomenon does exist. As Griffiths (1998) notes, "excessive use of Internet may not be problematic in most cases but the limited case study evidence suggests that for some individuals, excessive Internet use is a real addiction and of genuine concern"

Symptoms- Internet Addiction

Internet addiction is not recognized as a formal mental health disorder. However, mental health professionals who have written about the subject note symptoms or behaviors that, when present in sufficient numbers, may indicate problematic use. These include:

- Preoccupation with the Internet: User often thinks about the Internet while he or she is offline.
- Loss of control: Addicted users feel unable or unwilling to get up from the computer and walk away. They sit down to check e-mail or look up a bit of information, and end up staying online for hours.
- Inexplicable sadness or moodiness when not online: Dependency on any substance often causes mood-altering side effects when the addicted user is separated from the substance on which he or she depends.
- Distraction (Using the Internet as an anti-depressant): One common symptom of many Internet addicts is the compulsion to cheer one's self up by surfing the Web.
- Dishonesty in regard to Internet use: Addicts may end up lying to employers or family members about the amount of time they spend online, or find other ways to conceal the depth of their involvement with the Internet.
- Loss of boundaries or inhibitions: While this often pertains to romantic or sexual boundaries, such as sharing sexual fantasies online or participating in cyber

sex, inhibitions can also be financial or social. Online gambling sites can cause addicts to blow more money than they would in a real-life casino because users never actually see their money won or lost, so it is easier to believe the money is not real. Chat rooms can incite users to reveal secrets they would not reveal in face-to-face or phone conversations because of the same separation from reality. Also, addicted users are much more likely to commit crimes while online (e.g., 'hacking') than non-addicts.

- Creation of virtual intimate relationships with other Internet users: Web-based relationships often cause those involved to spend excessive amounts of time online, attempting to make connections and date around the Net.
- Loss of a significant relationship due to Internet use: When users spend too much time on the Web, they often neglect their personal relationships. Over time, such relationships may fail as partners simply refuse to be treated badly and break off from relations with the addicted individual.

Pathalogy of Internet Addiction

As per DSM-V, Internet addiction is not yet recognized as a disorder, but is being considered as an area in need of further research. Though there are innumerable studies globally depicting a worldwide scenario of the behavioral addiction phenomena, a lot of these studies have utilized inconsistent criteria to rate the levels of addiction, applied recruiting methods that may have caused serious sampling bias, and examined data using primarily exploratory rather than confirmatory data analysis techniques to investigate the degree of association rather than a causal relationship among variables. The absence of large-scale epidemiological studies and huge disparities in the use of diagnostic criteria have resulted in difficulties in establishing the prevalence of Internet addiction. This paper attempts to understand the patterns, prevalence, and risk factors for Internet addiction among high school students in Bhopal, the city of lakes of India. However, professionals recognize that Internet abuse is a problem that affects many people and each month additional research is being conducted to explore the ways people use and misuse the Internet.

Use of the internet can definitely disrupt one's academic, social, financial and occupational life the same way other well-documented addictions like pathological gambling, sexual addiction, eating disorder, and alcoholism can.

Effects of Internet Addiction

Commonly seen effects among students addicted to internet are:-

Impulsive behavior, being unable to stop visiting websites, clicking links or checking emails. The child continues to perform activities such as website browsing or online gaming to avoid doing important tasks such as starting an essay or making a difficult phone call. Tend to avoid family and friends which ultimately leads to reduction in social life.

Students who are addicted to internet are likely to have lower rates of productivity as they put off doing their work and are unable to focus on the work at hand, since they are easily

distracted. They end up distorting their time by either playing games online or surfing web aimlessly.

Internet addicted students have become becoming heavily involved in an online community or videogame and have been using it as a way to escape the problems that users are currently facing.

Addiction has over the time also changed the coping mechanisms of individuals who are depressed, as they use internet as a type of 'self medication' allowing themselves to escape and ignore the problems they are currently facing by immersing themselves in the online world. This can lead to further depression or anxiety when they 'log off' as they still have yet to face their problems and putting off problems often only makes them worse.

Other effects of internet addiction include:

- a reduction in personal hygiene and caring for how one looks
- feeling 'zoned out' after several hours of internet usage
- back pain as users spend long periods of time hunched forward looking at a computer screen.

Objectives

- To study the underlying causes of internet addiction among high school students.
- To study the socio environmental conditions which promotes students to cling towards internet usage.
- To study the trends which follows among the peers promoting more use of internet.

Research Design

Descriptive method has been used in the research for the collection of data. As the research is related to the study of students behavior which can effectively be studied through direct questions, experimental research will not be much effective. Also, considering the time constraint, descriptive research is the most suitable design for this research.

Data Collection

To overcome the limitations of incompatibility, obsolescence, and bias, primary data was collected considering, time and money constraint, sampling method of data collection was chosen.

Data was collected through questionnaire method. The questionnaire was designed in such a way that it covered as many aspects of addiction towards internet as possible.

Sample Size

Total 150 high school students were contacted and interviewed. Out of these 25, questionnaires were rejected due to incompleteness, conflicting answers etc. therefore, the final sample size was 125.

Sampling

The internet addiction behavior of the high school students of Bhopal, within the city was studied. The samples were collected from different schools in different areas so as to reduce the biases which may come through difference in the

attitude, lifestyle, social group etc. of the students in different backgrounds.

Sample Design

Students studying in standard XI and XII of age group 17-19 were considered.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Active involvement with technology, internet, cell phone at the age of With the help of this question the study tried to understand the average age at which the respondents started using internet, cell phones etc.
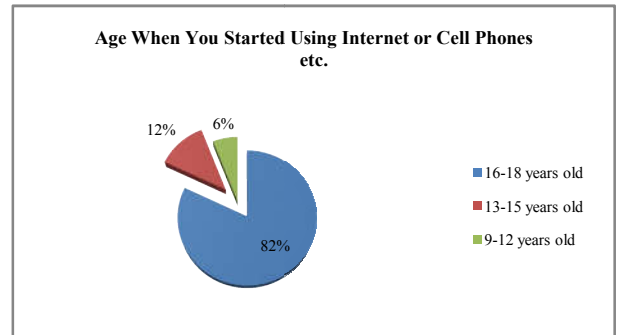

Figure 1

From the pie-chart it is clear that 82% of the respondents were involved in the internet or technology related activities between the age of 16-18 years. And only 6% have being actively involved since 9-12 years of age.

Preferred technology related activity

This question was put forth to understand the interest of the respondents in specific cyberspace activities
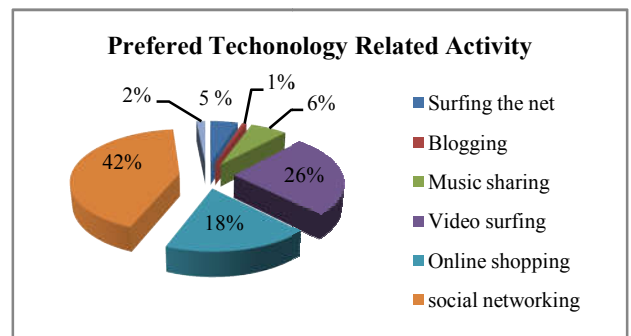

Figure 2

Figure makes it clear that the majority of the respondents are attracted towards social networking which is 42%. The second most preferred activity when working on net is video surfing with 26% responses supporting it, and least preferred activity by respondents' blogging.

Who pays for your Internet access?

The need of the question was to understand the availability of resources with the respondents which would promote them to get themselves involved in such activities.
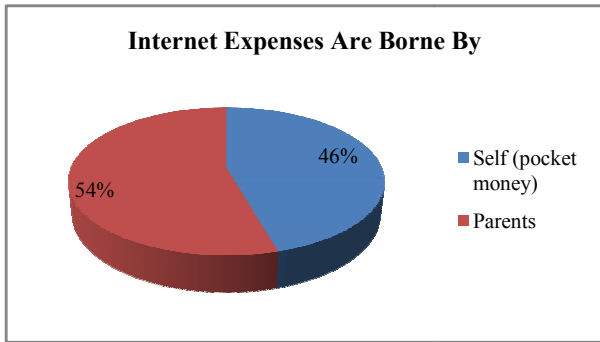
Internet Expenses Are Borne By

- Self (pocket money) — 46%
- Parents — 54%

Figure 3

It is evident from the chart that 54% of the respondents rely on their parents for their expenditure related to internet usage, which to a certain extend increases the probability of their activities or usage of internet to a higher extend. Whereas only 46% of the respondents manage their expenses related to internet usage through the pocket money which they are provided with on monthly basis.

Do you form new relationships with fellow online or video game users?

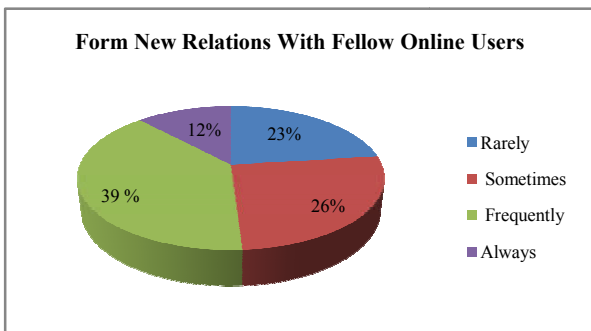The basic aim of this question is to understand the respondents' psycho-social behavior.

Form New Relations With Fellow Online Users

- Rarely — 23%
- Sometimes — 26%
- Frequently — 39%
- Always — 12%

Figure 4

From the above graph we can say that 39% of the respondents frequently form new relations with fellow on line users or video game users. 26% of the respondents are sometimes involved in forming such relations, 23% of the people rarely form such relations and 12% of the respondents are actively involved in forming such relationships.

Soon after spending time on internet do you feel happy, or contended?

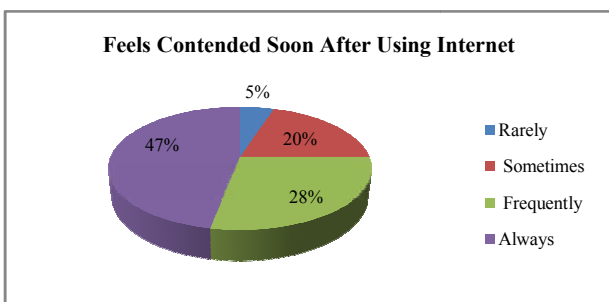The question was added to understand the respondents' state-of-mind after spending hours on internet.

Feels Contended Soon After Using Internet

- Rarely — 5%
- Sometimes — 20%
- Frequently — 28%
- Always — 47%

Figure 5

From the above graph one can say that majority of the respondents i.e., 47% always feel happy and contended soon after using internet. 28% frequently experiences such happiness, 20% sometimes, and 5% rarely experiences such contentment.

While using internet do you feel your self-development/ self grooming takes place?

The above question is added in order to see the individual's perception about their involvement in cyber space activities, and do they feel that their involvement is grooming them in any way or not.
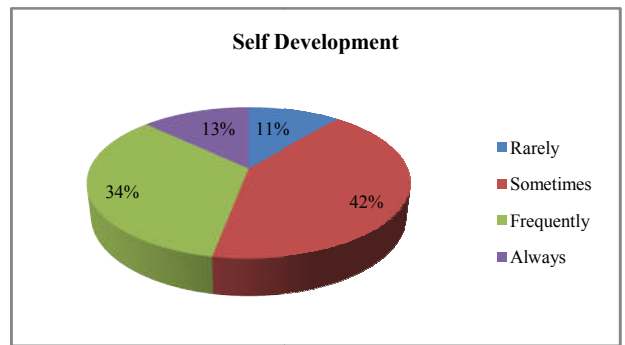
Self Development

- Rarely — 11%
- Sometimes — 42%
- Frequently — 34%
- Always — 13%

Figure 6

Looking at the above chart we can say that only 14% respondents feel that using internet is helping them to groom their personality or increase their knowledge every time they invest their time on internet. Whereas, 42% of them feel that sometimes it leads to the same and 11% of the respondents feel that rarely their knowledge level increases while using internet.

Do you feel relaxed when occupied with internet?

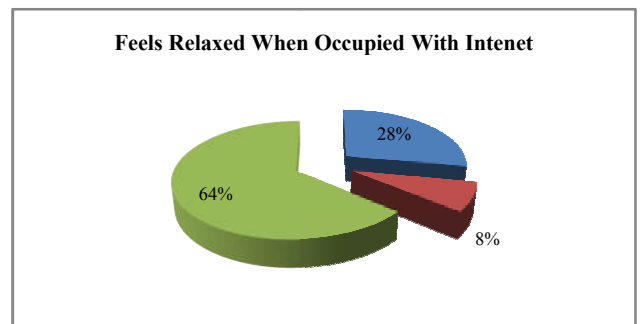**Feels Relaxed When Occupied With Intenet**

- 28%
- 64%
- 8%

Figure 7

From the above graph it could be seen that 64% of the respondents always feels relaxed when they are occupied with internet, while only 8% of them feels relaxed sometimes and 28% of them rarely feels relaxed when occupied with internet.

Frequency of checking E-mail, social networking or going online before doing something that needs to be done

The pie-chart represents the frequency of the respondents for checking their mails, going online or checking their social networking apps before involving one-self in doing something that needs to be done.
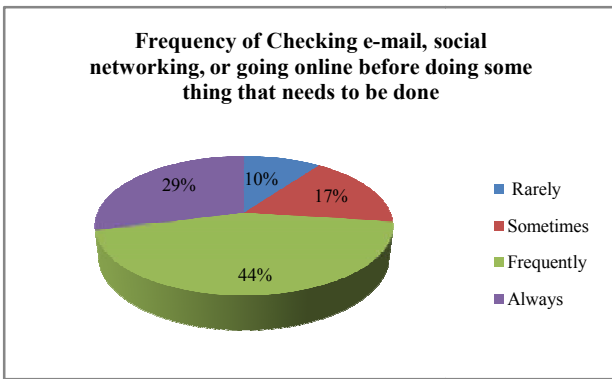
Frequency of Checking e-mail, social networking, or going online before doing some thing that needs to be done

- Rarely 10%
- Sometimes 17%
- Frequently 44%
- Always 29%

Figure 8

Do you block disturbing thoughts about your life with soothing thoughts of the video gaming, video surfing, net browsing etc

Do you block disturbing thoughts about your life with soothing thoughts of video gaming, video surfing, net browsing etc.

- Rarely 6%
- Sometimes 18%
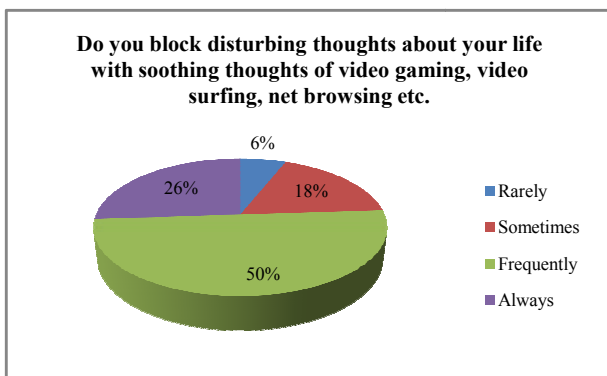- Frequently 50%
- Always 26%

Figure 9

From the above graph we can say that

- 50% off the respondents frequently think about using internet or turning towards watching videos or browsing net, in order to avoid disturbing thoughts of their life.
- While merely 6% of the people would rarely apply such a strategy.
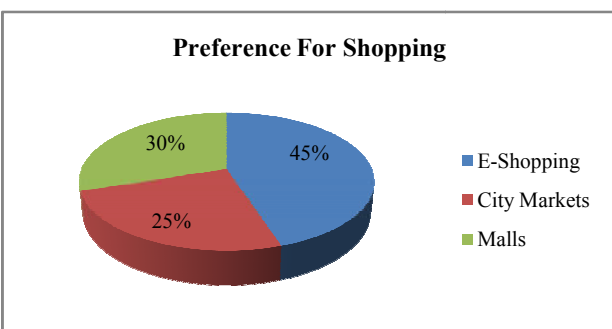
Shopping preferences

Preference For Shopping

- E-Shopping 45%
- City Markets 25%
- Malls 30%

Figure 10

From the above graph we can say that

- 45% of the respondents prefer online shopping in comparison to city market shopping or shopping from malls.
- 30% of the respondents prefer shopping from malls

- 25% of the respondents prefer shopping from city markets instead of shopping from malls or online shopping.
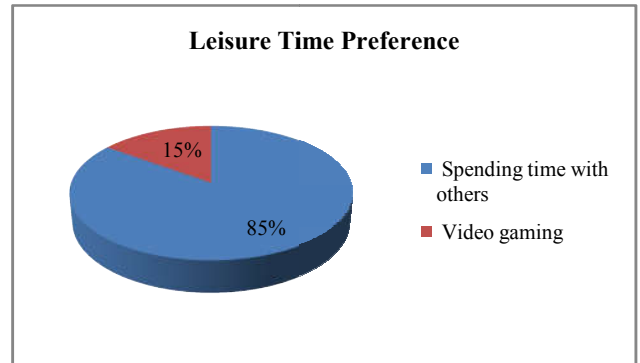
Spending leisure time

Leisure Time Preference

- Spending time with others 85%
- Video gaming 15%

Figure 11

The pie-chart represents that 85% of the respondents prefer spending time with others in their leisure time. While 15% would prefer video gaming in their leisure time.

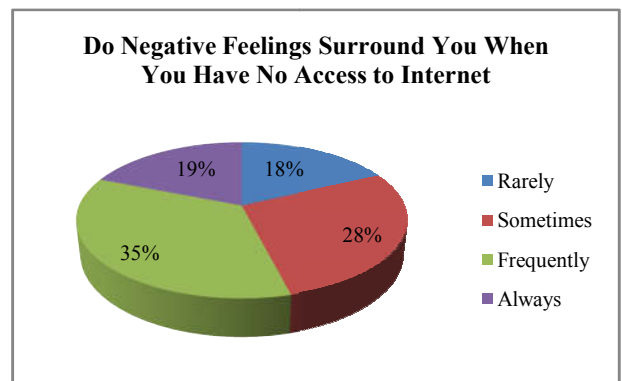***Do negative feelings surround you if you have no access to internet?***

Do Negative Feelings Surround You When You Have No Access to Internet

- Rarely 18%
- Sometimes 28%
- Frequently 35%
- Always 19%

Figure 12

From the above figure we can say that

- 19% of the respondents always feel negative and bored in no internet access.
- 35% of them frequently experience such boredom and negativity when having no access to internet.
- 28% of the respondents sometimes feel negative as their mood depends on the situation in which they are.
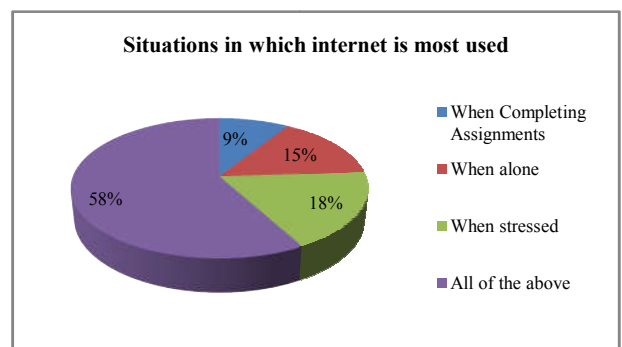- 18% of the respondents have rarely experienced such an experience.

Situations in which internet is most used

- When Completing Assignments 9%
- When alone 15%
- When stressed 18%
- All of the above 58%

Figure 13

Situations in which internet is most used

The above question is added in order to understand the situations which provoke an individual to cling towards internet.

From the above graph we can say that 9% of the respondents rely on internet the most for referring their assignments.15% of the total respondents rely on internet when they are alone, 18% of them when in stress, and 58% of them would be using internet in all the given situations.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The unique qualities of the internet contribute to the potential for internet addiction- specifically its speed, accessibility, intensity of information. Most Internet applications such as WWW are simple to use, and thus enhance human-computer interactions; furthermore, some applications, such as chat rooms, social networking sites and email, are especially good at facilitating interpersonal interactions. Availability means easy, low-cost access for users. Abundant and rapidly updating updated information is another major feature that attracts users to participate online. The diversity of ideas, subjects, attitudes, and opinions' presented on the Internet continuously changes users' perspectives accessed online, and the potency of its content. In order to understand the needs that the Internet illuminate and how and why some people become more pathologically involved with the internet four needs have been identified prominently which includes the need for (1) achievement and mastery, (2) an altered state of mind, (3) belongingness, and (4) relationships.

The internet seems to have the ability to fulfill the ability to fulfill users' needs for achievement and mastery. Internet can be a never ending source of fulfillment of curiosity and self-esteem. However, problems occur, when obsessions with Internet achievement and mastery become a never ending pursuit, but underlying needs are not fully met by internet use. People have an inherent need to alter their consciousness, to experience reality from different perspectives, and cyberspace is a new and important arena in which to satisfy that need. As one's sense of time, space and personal identity can be changed on the internet. These online personas offers the individuals an outlet for experiencing with accessing different parts of their personality, and allowing them to expand the range of emotions experienced and expressed toward others. The Internet not only provides its users with the opportunity to encounter new people, it also provides additional- if not primary- communication tools for coping with existing relationships. It was also found that majority of the respondents use the inter in order to maintain relationships with family and friends.

The "accompaniment" function is more desirable for many users than that of a television set, because the interactive feature of the internet enables these students to connect with others reciprocally at any time, they do not just passively receive broadcasted information from outside.

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