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Sensation seeking and internet dependence of Taiwanese high school adolescents

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Abstract

The present study examined excessive Internet use of Taiwanese adolescents and a psychological aspect of users, sensation seeking, thus to differentiate motivation of Internet dependents and non-dependents. Seven hundred and fifty three Taiwanese high school students were selected using cluster sampling and 88 of them were categorized as Internet dependent users. Results indicated that Internet dependents spent more time on-line than non-dependents. While Internet dependents perceived significantly more negative Internet influences on daily routines, school performance, and parental relation than non-dependents, both Internet dependents and non-dependents viewed Internet use as enhancing peer relations. Making friends through the Internet has become a popular activity among adolescents, potentially leading to its excessive use. Internet dependents scored significantly higher on overall sensation seeking and disinhibition than Internet non-dependents. However, both groups did not differ in the life experience seeking subscale and thrill and adventure seeking subscale. This finding contradicts that of Lavin, Marvin, McLarney, Nola, and Scott [CyberPsychol. Behav. 2 (2000) 425]. Possible reasons for this discrepancy and for the relation between Internet dependence and disinhibition in Taiwanese adolescents are also discussed. © 2002 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Sensation seeking; Internet dependence; Internet addiction; Internet abuse; Internet usage patterns; Adolescence

1. Introduction

Owing to the Internet's recent emergence as a popular media for mass and personal communications as well as its potential to enhance global competitiveness, Taiwanese government has strongly advocated Internet use island-wide for commercial and educational purposes. Internet use in Taiwan has exploded in terms of the growth rate of subscribers to Internet Service Providers (ISPs) since popular con-

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sumption took hold in 1995. An Internet survey company, Iamasia, recently estimated that 30% of the Taiwanese population, approximately 6.4 million people, have used the Internet at least once in the past 4 weeks (Chen, 2000).

Despite the widely perceived merits of the Internet, policy makers and educators have been cautioned to realize its negative impacts, especially excessive use of the Internet, the related physical and psychological problems, and harmful consequences toward significant others (Brenner, 1996, 1997; Egger & Rauterberg, 1996; Greenfield, 2000; Griffiths, 1998; Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, Kiesler, Mukopadhyay, & Scherlis, 1998; Young, 1996b, 1997). These studies adopted quantitative and qualitative methods to identify Internet addicts, sometimes used terms such as Internet dependents, technology addicts, problematic Internet users, or pathological Internet users. Several researchers in Taiwan (e.g. Chen, 1998; Chou, Chou, & Tyan, 1999; Chou & Hsiao, 2000) have also reported on excessive Internet use among Taiwanese university students, roughly 20 hours weekly, i.e. a pattern closely resembling the findings of American and European studies.

Having connected the campus computer networks of universities island-wide, the Taiwanese government is promoting the establishment of networks that would connect high school campuses. Despite the anticipated effects, high school students that gain more access to the Internet will possibly become more vulnerable to Internet dependence. Although excess Internet use among high school students is likely to surface, empirical evidence on Internet dependent adolescents is still lacking. Previous studies on Internet addiction focused mainly on undergraduate students, adults, or general users who voluntarily responded to Internet surveys (Greenfield, 2000; Griffiths, 1998).

This study is a second year follow up of a research project "Internet addiction among Taiwanese high school students". During the first phase, Lin and Tsai (1999) and Tsai and Lin (1999) designed a measurement tool to (a) identify Internet dependence among Taiwanese adolescents, (b) examine its reliability and validity, and (c) investigated how Internet vulnerability and perception in using the Internet are related. During the second phase of the study, this study analyzed whether sensation seeking is related to adolescents' excessive use of the Internet.

Sensation (novelty) seeking is a prominent feature of adolescence (e.g. Farley & Cox, 1971; Newcom & McGee, 1991) and closely related to risky or adventurous behaviors, such as drug use (Donohew, Hoyle, Clayton, Skinner, Colon, & Rice, 1999), drinking driving (Johnson & Cropsey, 2000; Jonah, 1997), diving or parachuting (Zarevski, Marusic, Bunjevac, & Vukosav, 1998). Surfing the Internet or many online activities are widely viewed as a global high tech adventure and, therefore, could be considered a form of sensation seeking. In sum, exploring how sensation seeking and Internet dependence among adolescence are related is of relevant interest.

2. Related studies

Griffiths (1998) characterized Internet or computer addicts as individuals who tend to be "socially unskilled male teenagers who have little or no social life and/or self confidence, and are described by names such a nerd, geek, and/or anorak" (p. 63).

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