



## **Social Problems Leading to Internet Addiction and Consequences Arising from Internet Addictive Behaviours among Undergraduates in Imo State, Nigeria**

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### **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Authors CRO and MCO conceptualized and designed the study. Authors MCO, CRO, JN and ESO collected the data, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol, and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors CRO and JN managed the analyses of the study. Authors CRO and ESO managed the literature searches. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Aims:** This study assessed the social problems that led to internet addiction as well as social problems that arose from such addictive behaviours among undergraduates of two tertiary institutions in Imo State, Nigeria.

**Study Design:** A correlational study guided by two research questions; what are the problems that lead to internet addiction, and what are the social problems arising from internet addictive behaviour were utilised in this study.

**Methodology:** A total of 390 students were surveyed with the Internet Addiction Test (IAT) questionnaire adopted for this study.

**Results:** Findings revealed that meeting people online 72.1%, education 95.4%, romance 99.0% , need to talk to someone 100% among other factors lead to internet addiction while social

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consequences that arose from internet addictive behaviour included salience 35.1%, frequent use to achieve desires 50.8%, withdrawal 23.3%, loneliness 66.7%, poor relationships 30.8%, poor school performance 37.4% amidst other factors. There was statistically significant relationship between social problems that lead to internet addiction and social problems arising from internet addictive behaviour,  $p < 0.05$ .

**Conclusion:** Social problems that lead to internet addiction can also give rise to consequences. Creation of awareness of problems arising from internet addiction, counselling, seminars and workshops on internet addition will help reduce the menace.

*Keywords: Internet addiction; social problems; consequences; undergraduates; Imo State.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The internet has been defined as a global network connecting each other and making it possible for people to communicate worldwide regardless of time and location. It is the largest computer network in the world consisting of more than 12,000 world-wide interconnection of academic, commercial, government, and private networks. What makes the internet unique is its worldwide collection of digital telecommunication links that show a common set of computer network technologies and application [1,2]. Internet addiction is an impulse control disorder which does not involve use of an intoxicating drug, however, it is very similar to pathological gambling. It is also pertinent to state that being addicted means physically dependent on a particular interest or activity, beyond expected. Some internet users may develop an emotional attachment to online friends and activities they create on their computer screen such that it replaces their real life interactions. These internet users enjoy aspects of the internet that allow them to meet, socialise and exchange ideas through the use of chat rooms, social networking websites, or virtual communities. While not condemning the internet, other users simply spend few hours researching topics of interest online or blogging [3].

It was further reiterated by some authors that internet addiction has been perceived as a possible societal epidemic [4]. They classified internet addiction into five specific types as follows; cyber sexual addiction – Addiction to adult chat room, cyber relationship addiction – online friendship made in chat rooms, news groups that replace real life friends and family, net compulsion – compulsive online gambling, online auction addiction, and obsessive online trading, information overload – compulsive web surfing or data searches, and computer addiction – obsessive computer game-

playing programming aspects of computer science [4].

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Internet addictive behaviour is now a serious social and public health issue globally [4,5,6]. It has caused some problems like loss of jobs and lives as some road traffic accidents have occurred while people were utilising one application or another on their electronic devices. The undergraduates also have been found by Okwaraji in Enugu, Nigeria, [7] as well as Shaw and Black in the United States of America [8] to spend excessive amount of time on the internet at the expense of other aspects of life such as attending functions, churches (people still use the mobile applications in churches), meetings, and academic classes. These have affected their performances negatively in various ways, such as low grades, copying of wrong cultures and laziness to even do simple summations.

### 1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the social problems leading to internet addiction and the social consequences arising from such addictive behaviours among undergraduates in tertiary institutions. The study further explored the social influences of these addictions on the undergraduates.

### 1.3 Research Questions

This research posed the following questions to guide the study.

1. What are the social factors that leads to internet addiction among students in tertiary institutions of Imo State
2. What are the social consequences arising from internet addiction amongst undergraduates?

### 1.4 Hypothesis

The following hypothesis tested at level of  $p < 0.05$  significance was formulated by the researchers;

- (1) There is no significant relationship between the social problems such as compulsively meeting people online, business, education and romance that lead to internet addiction and social factors such emotional stress, attitudinal change, loneliness, escapism, marital strife amongst other issues.
- (2) There is no significant relationship between the social consequences arising from internet addiction such as salience, loneliness, withdrawal, compulsive use to achieve desires, low school performance with the age, sex, religion, and level of study of undergraduates in Imo State.

$e =$  level of significance set at 0.05  
 $N =$  Population size of students in education department of both institutions  $\sim 10,000$

Substituting for the above;

$$\frac{10,000}{1 + 10,000 (0.05)^2}$$

$$= \frac{10,000}{26}$$

$$= 384.615$$

$$= \sim 400$$

For this study, 390 copies of the questionnaires out of 400 distributed among students were returned, that is 195 from each institution were returned for data collation. This gives a 97.5% response rate.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Study Area

The study was conducted in Imo State University and Alvan Ikoku Federal College of education both located in Owerri municipal local government area of Imo state. Imo is a State in South-Eastern Nigeria.

### 2.2 Study Population

The populations for this study consisted of males and females, who were undergraduates from the faculties of education and social sciences of Imo State University and Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education. The respondents were aged between 15-35 years, and were also regular students of the institutions. These schools were chosen because they are the two Federal institutions with Faculties of Education in the State and within similar municipalities in the State capital.

### 2.3 Sample Size Determination

The sample size for this study was calculated using the Yaro-Yamane formula [9] as stated below.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where  $n =$  Sample size sort

### 2.4 Study Design

A correlational study was utilised in this research to assess the problems arising from internet addictive behaviours among 390 male and female respondents of Imo State University and Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education in Owerri, Imo State.

### 2.5 Study Instrument

The main instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire originally developed by Young (1996) [10] and adapted for this study. It is an Internet Addiction Test (IAT) questionnaire which was adapted for this study. The questionnaire had only 20 items that addressed internet addiction but this was modified to this study to include social problems that could lead to internet use and the consequences arising there from.

### 2.6 Data Analysis

The data collected, coded, and keyed into the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21, using Microsoft Windows 10 system. Results were tallied and the relevant frequency tables generated. The level of significance was set at  $p \leq 0.05$ . Correlation in the analytical arm of SPSS was used to determine the acceptance and rejection level. Pearson test of significance, with  $p$ -value set at  $\leq 0.05$  levels. Any value above 0.05 on the analysis table was not significant and

null accepted while less than 0.05 rejects null hypothesis.

### 2.7 Ethical Consideration

The permission to conduct the study was sought and approved by the Imo State University, faculty of Education under the Head of Department of Sociology of Education. Informed consent was obtained from the students participating in the study. Respondents were assured that involvement in the study was voluntary and they were at liberty to withdraw at any stage. They were also assured of the anonymity of their identity and the confidentiality of their responses.

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1 Analysis of Results Concerning Research Question One

What are the social factors that lead internet addiction among undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Imo state?

Table 1 shows that meeting people 72.1%, education 15.4%, and business 7.9% are reasons for internet use that could lead to internet addiction.

### 3.2 Analysis of Results Concerning Research Question Two

What are the social consequences arising from internet addiction among undergraduates?

In Table 2, it was shown that social consequences arising from internet addiction includes loneliness (66.7%), pleasure and mood alleviations (62.1%), frequent use to achieve desires (50.8%), low school performance (37.4%), salience (35.7%), and poor relationship with family and friends (30.8%), among others.

### 3.3 Analysis and Results Concerning Hypothesis One

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant relationship between the social problems that lead to internet addiction such as compulsively meeting people online, business, education, and romance and social factors such as loneliness, emotional stress and others.

Table 3, shows that there is a statistically significant relationship between problems that leads to internet addiction and social factors that make undergraduates go online. P-value is .124\* at 0.05 level (2 tailed). The researcher, therefore, rejected null and concluded that there is a statistically significant relationship between social problems that lead to internet addiction and social factors that influence such addiction.

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant relationship between the social problems arising from internet addiction such as salience, loneliness, withdrawal, compulsive use to achieve desires, low school performance and the age, sex, religion, and level of study of undergraduates in Imo State.

Table 4 shows that there was statistically significant relationship with age and level of study with salience (115\* and 154\*\*), loneliness with sex (124\*), religion and withdrawal (-.179\*), compulsive use to achieve to achieve desires with sex & religion (.127\*, .127\*), low school performance and religion (-175\*\*), as well as relationship problems with sex and religion -.162\*\* & .121\* respectively. The researcher, therefore, rejected null and concluded that there was statistically significant relationship between social problems arising from internet use as a result of addiction and socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.

**Table 1. Reasons for internet use that could lead to internet addiction**

| Variable                   | Frequency | Percent | Valid percent | Cumulative percent |
|----------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Meeting people             | 281       | 72.1    | 72.1          | 72.1               |
| Business                   | 31        | 7.9     | 7.9           | 80.0               |
| Education                  | 60        | 15.4    | 15.4          | 95.4               |
| Romance                    | 14        | 3.6     | 3.6           | 99.0               |
| To have someone to talk to | 4         | 1.0     | 1.0           | 100.0              |
| Total                      | 390       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

**Table 2. Showing social consequences arising from internet addiction**

| Social problems                            | Frequency | %    |
|--|-----------|------|
| Salience                                   | Yes=137   | 35.1 |
|  | No=252    | 64.1 |
| Frequent use to achieve desires            | Yes=198   | 50.8 |
|  | No=192    | 49.2 |
| Pleasure/mood alleviation                  | Yes=242   | 62.1 |
|  | No=148    | 37.9 |
| Withdrawal                                 | Yes=91    | 23.3 |
|  | No=299    | 76.7 |
| Not happy when offline                     | Yes=262   | 67.2 |
|  | No=128    | 32.2 |
| Loneliness                                 | Yes=260   | 66.7 |
|  | No=130    | 33.3 |
| Low life satisfaction                      | Yes=112   | 28.2 |
|  | No=275    | 70.5 |
| Poor relationships with family and friends | Yes=120   | 30.8 |
|  | No=270    | 69.2 |
| Low school performance                     | Yes=146   | 37.4 |
|  | No=240    | 61.5 |
| Family conflict                            | Yes=113   | 29.0 |
|  | No=270    | 69.2 |

**Table 3. Showing correlation between social problems that lead to internet addiction and social factors that influence internet addiction**

| Correlations   |                     |                          |                                    |
|--|---------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
|  |                     | Reasons for internet use | I go online When? (Social factors) |
| Reason for internet use (problems that lead to internet addiction) | Pearson Correlation | 1                        | .124                               |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed)     |                          | .014                               |
|  | N                   | 390                      | 390                                |

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

**Table 4. Showing the relationship between social consequences arising from internet addiction and socio-demographic characteristics. (Social influences of internet addiction)**

|                                   | Age   | Sex     | Religion | Level of study |
|-----------------------------------|-------|---------|----------|----------------|
| Salience                          | .115* | .006    | -.119    | .154**         |
| Loneliness                        | -.056 | .124*   | -.011    | .035           |
| Withdrawal                        | -.038 | -.042   | -.179*   | -.050          |
| Compulsive use to achieve desires | -.029 | .127*   | -.127*   | -.051          |
| Low school performance            | -.015 | .066    | -.175*   | .009           |
| Relationship problems             | -.037 | -.162** | .121*    | -.009          |

\*\*Correlation is significant at 0.05 level

#### 4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

##### The social problems that lead to internet addiction and social factors that influence it:

The study revealed that the problems leading to internet addiction arises from lack of control or

discipline of habits and attitude affecting the way the undergraduates handle meeting people online (72.1%), business (7.9%), education (15.4%), romance (14%), and wanting to discuss with someone online (4%). These factors are not supposed to be problems; however, they

invariably lead to internet use because of compulsive and excessive use. It was also discovered that there was a significant relationship between problems that leads to internet addiction and social factors that make the undergraduates go online. These findings were congruent with a study [11], that showed how adolescents and young adults who may also be undergraduates, frequently source for information online, either educational, gaming, or for interaction with people but at the same time they are not regulated because of ease of access and less monitoring, hence they find solace for depression or anxiety and thereby get addicted to the internet.

Several authors furthermore [11,12,13] implied that the students, by virtue of the use of internet for school work, and job tasks are also the most vulnerable group to internet addiction because it provides a socio-psychological proximity that makes them attached to people, make new friends, and get immediate emotional support online, thus this social factors stimulate the need to surf the web for educational purpose, meet people as well as other internet related affairs, hence internet addiction arises. Another finding by Okwaraji et al. [7] also concurred that undergraduates who have social problems of depression, emotional stress, and anxiety, seek help online to be educated on the way out (escapism), these ventures and many more eventually lead to internet addictive behaviour that results to compulsive and excessive use of the web.

Other empirical findings [5,14] also stated that since individuals have flexible access to myriad of information online, and coupled with the appealing nature of potential social networks, these undergraduates who for wont of solace, embrace online activities where identity is hidden and inculcate in themselves a global community without boundaries to let-go their problems, this in effect leads to internet addiction and may worsen social problems. Of note is that, initially, what was sought for was solution from distressing conditions (the problems that led to it) but at the long-run, the student gets addicted (socially influenced to it) to the internet.

**Social consequences arising from internet addiction among undergraduates and social influences of addictive behaviours:** It was finally shown in this study that several social consequences arise from internet addiction among undergraduates such as loneliness

(66.7%), frequent use to achieve desires (50.8%), low school performance (37.4%), poor family relationship among others. However, it was also found that there was a statistically significant relationship between the social problems arising from internet addiction and socio-demographics such as the age, sex, religion, and level of study of the undergraduates ( $p < 0.05$ ). The social consequences which propagate social influences of internet addictive behavior from this study thus includes loneliness, depression, withdrawal, relationship problems and others which eventually could lead to neurotic personality traits that may even influence to suicidal ideations as corroborated by Chia-Yi et al. [15] when it was noticed that internet addicted students in Taiwan had psychosocial deviations from the normal populace, and this phenomenon was still among the younger age groups.

Another study [7] also stated that the prevalence of internet addiction goes in hand with depressive states which could also hamper performance as noticed in this study where low school performance correlated against religion was also significant. Furthermore, a Chinese study [16] also implied that internet addiction could lead to reclusive behaviour of students, cause anxiety, disrupt family and friends relationships as is reported in this study that poor family relationship, as well as pleasure/mood alleviations are social consequences that emanated from internet addiction.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Creation of awareness by the media and all stakeholders regarding the fact that internet addiction exist as a real disorder among undergraduates with social consequences that could affect their studies.
2. Organisation of workshops, town hall meetings, and seminars by University authority for undergraduates being led by the department of Sociology and respective disciplines, regarding internet addiction and the need for time-limited use of the internet.
3. For those addicted the university administration can provide Sociologists and Psychologists to help deal with the problem.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study has revealed that problems like meeting people online, education, business, romance, and needing someone to talk to can predispose to internet addiction while giving rise to consequences such as salience, withdrawal, poor relationships, and poor school performance, hence time-limited exposure to the internet and utilisation of other recreational and educational facilities is thus advocated. Counselling implications of this study to undergraduates and indeed, therefore, reiterates the fact that some problems could drive individuals to get addicted to the internet. It has also elucidated the consequences and social problems that have arisen from compulsive addiction to internet usage and the need for reduced exposure to the internet while giving room for real life interactions beyond the virtual world.

## CONSENT

Informed consent was obtained from the students participating in the study. Respondents were assured that involvement in the study was voluntary and they were at liberty to withdraw at any stage. They were also assured of the anonymity of their identity and the confidentiality of their responses.

## ETHICAL APPROVAL

The permission to conduct the study was sought and approved by the Imo State University, faculty of Education under the Head of Department of Sociology of Education.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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