

## **Digital Addiction among Youth: A Perspective on the Motivations and Drawbacks of Usage**

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### **Abstract:**

Our world is witnessing a great increase in dependence on digital technology, especially with the beginning of the 21st century, where a new reality of services has emerged thanks to what has been made available by the World Wide Web. The latter provided interactive participatory services with very modern electronic templates, by passing the traditional methods that are constantly fading, leaving room for faster and better digital technology in type, sound and image. It soon took over the minds of individuals and paralyzed their thinking to the point of obsession and addiction. The transformation from the traditional addiction, which is based on the use of drugs of all kinds, including opium, heroin, and cocaine, to an addiction and a drug that is more deadly and dangerous. The digital addiction baffled specialists and educators, who are often looking for the best way to save the fragile group of children. Children or teenagers from this new drug, what is the truth about this addiction? From here, we will try in this research paper to shed light on the phenomenon of digital addiction among young people, with the aim of identifying it and highlighting its most important motives and the effects it has on children and adolescents in particular.

**Keywords:** Addiction, digital drugs, drugs, Internet

## 1. Introduction

The phenomenon of digital addiction, also known as internet addiction, is considered one of the modern social ailments that has increased in prevalence in recent years, transcending the barrier of development as its effects encompass both developed and developing countries. Wherever there are computers and the internet, there is a significant demand for websites enabled by information and communication technology for their users. Consequently, this phenomenon is closely linked to technological advancement and is a product of rapid scientific developments, which daily surprise us with more varied services and exciting and entertaining electronic games for our children and youth. It has also provided a considerable space for electronic shopping and transactions, while contributing to the rise of cybercrime. However, despite all the services it offers and the positives it brings, such as accuracy, speed, and a vast amount of information, it has simultaneously caused functional disruptions in our societies, affecting our psychological, social, and health aspects, especially among its practitioners who are considered by specialists to be digital addicts due to excessive digital usage, which may exceed five hours of daily use. Despite the differences in duration among specialists, some define it by the time spent, while others have established indicators indicating addiction.

It is observed at the empirical level and in daily life that there are significant effects on our behaviors and those of our children, including both young children and teenagers. The rates of anxiety, insomnia, back pain, lack of concentration, and vision impairment have been increasing alarmingly, signaling danger. The digital generation is suffering from social isolation and poor practices as a result of living increasingly in a virtual life, far from empirical reality. From here, the following questions can be raised: What is digital addiction? What are its risks for individuals, groups, and especially youth? How can we prevent and treat this digital ailment?

## **2 - The Nature and Motivations of Digital Addiction:**

### **2.1. The Nature of Digital Addiction:**

The internet is considered one of the manifestations of current progress due to its developed characteristics. It has contributed to the closeness of peoples and increased acquaintance and exchange of opinions. It has also allowed individuals to practice most of their interactive and participatory activities freely.

It has made social life easier for its users, aiming to obtain information and facilitate communication among a group of acquaintances and friends. It has the capability for visual and audio communication and the exchange of images.

Digital or electronic addiction is a type of disorder that some individuals suffer from, as classified by certain psychologists. It suggests a compulsive use of the internet, continuous browsing of websites, and reliance on it for all aspects of life. (Salah, H,2022)

Whether an individual browses social media, shops online, is passionate about electronic games, visits inappropriate websites, engages in social media, plays online gambling, or participates in buying and selling online, all of these are services provided by modern information and communication technology.

American psychologist "Kimberly Young" is considered the first to use the term Internet addiction at the American Psychological Association conference held in 1997, in her study conducted on approximately 500 individuals who use the Internet intensively. (Fereih, S,2021)

There are differing perspectives among scholars regarding the phenomenon; the first opposes classifying digital addiction alongside other addictions, as noted by John Grohol, who argues that there are no conclusive studies with definitive results like those found with drugs and intoxicants. Meanwhile, others categorize it as part of the addiction list, including the Austrian scientist Hans Zimmerl, who conducted an online survey in 1999. ( Al-Sakranah, ,2009, 402 )

Several indicators have been identified by specialists in the field that indicate an individual is digitally addicted. These are several signs that can be observed closely in the addict, such as an inability to stop using digital devices, the emergence of withdrawal symptoms like anger, anxiety, stress, and distress when not using them, in

addition to using digital devices secretly or hidden from others. ( Amoun,2023 )

In the same context, "Ivan Goldberg," the director of the Institute for Psycho-Pharmaceutical Studies in New York, says that one of the signs of addiction is using the internet for extended periods, which can reach up to twenty hours a day. ( Al-Sakranah,2009, 401)

The Internet Addiction Scale was published on the pages of Islam Online from November 23, 2001, to November 1, 2002. Users answered 26 questions, some of which assess the extent of their internet addiction, while others provide indications of its effects. A total of 8,177 participants took part in this scale, most of whom were from the Arab world. This scale reflected an aspect of the reality of the internet in our Arab world.

## **2.2.Motivations for Digital (Network) Addiction:**

The motivations and reasons for individuals, both adults and adolescents, resorting to the virtual world have varied and multiplied. They can be classified into psychological, social, and health-related reasons as follows: (Salah, H,2022)

- Psychological reasons: such as a lack of self-confidence, the need to present oneself with a different identity, ongoing loneliness, and an inability to make friends, along with the association of being online with enjoyment, like playing video games, which makes a person want to repeat the experience.
- Social reasons: such as social shyness and a lack of confidence in speaking in front of others, social withdrawal, and a preference for isolation over attending events and activities.
- Health reasons: chronic pain and illnesses that keep a person bedridden for a long time, making the screen, in this case, their window to the world.

In this context, specialists have indicated a strong relationship between digital addiction and an individual's physiological and genetic personal aspects, among which we mention the following: (Amoun,2023 )

- The impact of digital media on the brain: The impact of digital media is similar to the effect of drugs, as it leads to the release of dopamine in the brain, which gives a person a feeling of pleasure and happiness. Over time, a person becomes accustomed to the feeling of satisfaction that they only experience when using digital media.

- Depression and anxiety: There are studies indicating that digital media users suffer from depression and anxiety at a higher rate than others. However, the relationship between depression, anxiety, and the use of digital media remains not definitively clear.
- Genetic factors: Some studies indicate a relationship between genetic factors and drug addiction; however, a similar relationship has not been confirmed between digital addiction and genetic factors. Nevertheless, the similarity in the impact of both drugs and digital addiction on brain chemistry suggests the possibility of a relationship in the future.
- A history of other types of addiction: Having a history of addiction to alcohol, gambling, or drugs increases the likelihood of a person being susceptible to digital addiction.

### 2.3. Theoretical Approaches to Digital Addiction

Experts have pointed out several approaches that explain this phenomenon, including the following :(Fereih, S,2021 ).

- **Social Cultural Approach to Addiction:**

This theory links a person's fall into addiction to social cultural reasons, noting that addiction varies by gender, relates to age, financial and economic status, and ethnic and religious affiliation. Despite numerous research initiatives in the Arab environment, studies have not yet clearly defined the correlative relationship between media addiction and class affiliation, considering the widespread availability of media and communication tools across different social classes, starting with smartphones that offer various electronic services.

- **The Behavioral Approach to Addiction:**

This concept is based on the theory of reward or punishment for behavior, which was established by the studies of B.F. Skinner. An example of this is the acute shyness observed in some children who refuse to interact with strangers or even meet them, resulting in their introverted behavior avoiding dialogue and conversations with others. This escapist behavior is linked to addiction, especially media addiction. Just as drugs, gambling, alcohol, shopping, and others provide escapist rewards from reality, happiness, adventure, love, liberation, excitement, emotional relief, physical comfort, and pleasure, modern media offer users feelings of pleasure.

- **Biological and Physiological Approaches to Addiction:**

The medical concept focuses on genetic and hereditary factors such as chromosomal abnormalities or cases of chemical or hormonal imbalances in the brain and neural receptors as deep-rooted causes of addiction, making the individual more susceptible to addiction than others. This is due to the role of drugs in filling the gaps in the synaptic connections of brain neurons, leading to the brain being deceived into sending false information.

### **3. The impact of digital addiction and its dangers:**

The postmodern French thinker Jean Baudrillard is considered one of the most prominent contemporary theorists on media and communication. He believes that electronic media differ significantly in their effects and depth of impact compared to any other cultural products, as he sees that they have led to profound transformations in our lives, permeating every aspect of our existence behind an overly saturated world ( Giddens, ,2005, p513 ), The true reality no longer truly exists, as it has been replaced by what we see and hear from modern media. In general, the internet and smartphones have profoundly influenced us, leaving behind significant effects that vary between values, ethics, mental health, and more.

#### **3.1. The impact of digital addiction on the level of values and moral attitudes:**

The misuse of the internet, especially by youth and children, has led to the emergence of various risks, including health, religious, cultural, and social dangers. All of these risks are equally significant. On one hand, many studies have shown that the most common use of these sites is for negative, aimless activity, which is limited to browsing adult content for long hours, downloading ringtones, copying songs, and focusing on exchanging pictures and meaningless chats, Many researchers have written about the ethical issues arising from the internet, such as Richard Joseph's study on pornography, moral panic, social construction, and social problems, and Joho-Hoj's study on pornography, hate, and character building among American youth. There is also an Arab study regarding the impact of the internet on young people's attitudes towards the ethical issues of Egyptian society, which aims to determine the extent of the dangers posed by young people's use of the internet. Among its key findings are the following:(Amin Saeed,2008,p131).

- Entertainment ranks first among the topics that young people browse online, followed by culture and sports in second place.
- The risks of the internet are varied, including addiction to adult websites, cultural invasion, religious extremism, and political hacking.

The spread of social media among the youth has profoundly impacted societal values, especially in terms of ethics. This is further exacerbated by the rise of what is known as "online pornography" on the internet, where explicit photographs are exchanged freely. There are now pornographic clubs in the West that operate with the help of the global web. While the West has often overlooked adult pornography under the pretext of the right to privacy, this does not apply to young children, especially with the increase in "child prostitution." Given the severity of this issue, UNESCO organized the first international conference to combat child prostitution on the internet in 1999.( Al-Laban,2000, p130).

In this context, Ibrahim Al-Akhras clarified that the internet has a significant role in the proliferation of crimes against individuals and morals. It can lead to risks of death, incitement to suicide, emotional harm, and threats of murder. Additionally, it contributes to the dissemination of misleading and false information, encourages minors to engage in illegal sexual activities, and spreads obscenity through the distribution of sexual images.( Al-Akhras, 2008,p 295 ).

Its role is not limited to spreading pornography and stripping away modesty from the youth, but it forcefully aims to undermine values and national identity. The internet network is capable of broadcasting extremist ideas—political, religious, and racial—to dominate the psyche of the youth, exploiting their ambitions, impulsiveness, inexperience, and superficial thinking to spread their doctrines and incite rebellion. It also takes advantage of their suffering to achieve goals that contradict the interests and stability of the nation. ( Bayumi, A ,2008,p218).

### **3.2. The impact of digital addiction on health:**

The complications of electronic addiction are serious and lead to many psychological, physical, and mental harms, as well as

negative behaviors. Among these, we mention the following: (Sha'ban, F, 2023).

-The internet and mental illnesses: Numerous studies have been conducted on the impact of electronic addiction on mental health, as individuals spend many hours browsing the internet, which affects their ability to communicate socially, in addition to causing severe depression and anxiety.

-Depression and disorders: Most electronics addicts are exposed to what is called comorbid disorders, which appear in many individuals through certain behaviors, including difficulty in planning ahead and poor time management, resulting from its impact on mental health.

-Addiction can lead to physical and mental exhaustion, general weakness, increased aggression and irritability due to violent video games, diminished cognitive abilities in children, a shift towards drug addiction and various intoxicants, neglect of studies and assignments, and failure in education. The impact of the internet is not limited to ethical, health, and physical aspects; it has also resulted in increased social isolation, fragmentation, and disintegration in the fabric of social life. Anthony Giddens highlighted that many internet addicts tend to lean towards loneliness and social isolation from family and friends, lacking communication with others, and preferring the virtual world they inhabit. This is corroborated by several sociological studies, including a 2000 study conducted at Stanford University on a sample of 4,000 adults of both genders, which revealed that internet users spend less time with others compared to non-users. ( Giddens,A, 2005,p517)

What we gather from the above is that the effects of internet addiction pose a significant risk to all aspects of society, leading to deviance and inappropriate behaviors, especially among children and adolescents. The dominance of the internet over various life aspects has become an undeniable reality, making its management imperative and a necessity for all stakeholders and specialists in order to live in a healthy manner.

#### **4. methods and ways to prevent and treat digital addiction:**

After gathering literature on the subject, we found a wealth of information regarding the treatment and preventive strategies proposed by specialists, which can address the condition of digital

addiction. One of the most important approaches is to seek help from healthcare professionals in treating this type of addiction. Treatment also involves making adjustments to the individual's behaviors and lifestyle, such as joining specialized support groups focused on treating digital addiction, engaging in physical and sports activities, and discovering new hobbies. (Amoun, 2023)

In the same context, Hadeel Salah proposed several therapeutic methods aimed at reducing the severity of this invasive disease on our health, which can be outlined as follows: (Salah, H,2022)

- Motivational interviewing: A technique that helps in learning new behavioral skills so that the patient can let go of the behaviors that lead to addiction.
- Reality therapy: This therapy encourages improvement in life through behavioral changes and learning how to manage time, as well as finding alternative activities, and has proven effective in treating addiction.
- Cognitive behavioral therapy: This involves undergoing behavioral rehabilitation sessions aimed at changing lifestyle patterns and discussing with a psychiatrist how to manage time and control internet usage.
- Medication treatment is rarely used in cases of internet addiction, but a psychiatrist may resort to medical drugs if the addict suffers from certain mental disorders, such as depression, anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive disorder, requiring inhibitors to reduce the negative addiction to the internet.

Among the treatments is what "Kimberly Young" has introduced, as she created an online site that helps visitors discover for themselves the extent of their addiction or how close they are to being affected, and she believes that there are ways to treat addiction, including the following: ( Al-Sakranah,2009,p399/401)

- Reverse action: reducing the use of smart devices by waiting, with the aim of gradually changing behavior.
- Setting usage time: the addict is required to decrease and organize their internet usage hours, distributing the hours of use over the days of the week.
- Preparing reminder cards: The patient is asked to prepare cards listing five problems caused by excessive internet use, such as neglecting their family. They should also write down five benefits

that arise from quitting this bad habit. These cards should be kept in their pocket to remind them of the issues from time to time in order to help them break these bad habits related to internet use.

- Joining a support group: Expanding the social space by joining sports teams or learning hobbies, so that the addict has a group of real friends.
- Redistributing time: By thinking about the activities they engaged in before their internet addiction, such as reading the Quran and exercising.

It should be noted when discussing treatment, that the most difficult stage is convincing the addict that their use of the internet has reached the level of addiction. Therefore, solving the problem is challenging as it primarily relies on direct persuasion, which is supported by psychologists. Meanwhile, others advocate for and consider the optimal solution to be a gradual reduction of internet use under the supervision of specialists. (Al-Sakranah ,2009 ,p397)

Overall, prevention and treatment of digital addiction require a combination of therapeutic methods, particularly a supportive social and psychological approach from various active parties within the community structure. The first of these structures is the family, the primary unit of society, as it serves as the essential foundation for addressing an individual's psychological aspects. It is the most important supporter in this approach by promoting dialogue and discussion within the family, while emphasizing the harms of digital addiction. Families are capable of uniting members and spending time with relatives and friends away from digital media. Additionally, it is essential to intensify awareness campaigns through various media outlets, such as television, radio, theater, and mosque platforms, after raising awareness of the negative effects and encouraging a reduction in digital consumption.

## 5. Conclusion:

The spread of digital addiction in societies has become an inevitable phenomenon that cannot be avoided, especially since entering this world is a technological necessity called for by both official and unofficial entities. There is no denying the advantages it has brought to keep pace with the changes of the era; however, our use of this technology is linked to how we exploit it in a non-harmful way, whether on our psychological, social, or health lives. We should

allocate specific time for it to benefit from it and facilitate our lives, rather than complicate them or escape into the virtual world. Thus, the best solution to the problem of digital addiction is not to stop using the internet altogether, but to reconsider how to manage its use correctly and effectively to serve our lives and development.

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