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# Internet Addiction in Malaysia Causes and Effects

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## ABSTRACT

The Internet started as a divine gift to the human society, it was meant to enlighten the human society by transferring knowledge, making available all the information needed for human well being, growth and prosperity. But as the Internet grew, it created its own set of problems—one of the key ones being Internet Addiction. According to Dr. Jerald J. Block, from the Center for Internet Addiction, "Internet addiction" affects as many as one in eight Americans. Block also defined Internet addiction as a compulsive activity involving excessive use, withdrawal and negative repercussions including social isolation, lying, low achievement and fatigue. As the Internet grows in Malaysia, Internet addiction is surfacing as a key problem, particularly amongst the younger generation here. This research outlines a method to examine the level of Internet addiction amongst Malaysian youth. The purpose of our study is to identify the use of Internet among Malaysian youth and the relation of excessive use to the addictive level. We have devised an online survey to study the Internet use among the youth; the findings of this study indicate that the youth are indeed susceptible to Internet addiction.

**Keywords:** Internet Use; Internet Addiction; Addictive Behavior; Surfing Addiction; Malaysian; Youth

## 1. Introduction

With the evolution of technology and the creation of the Internet, the cyber world has created a culture of on-line communication and virtual connectivity. Decades of Internet growth and with it the usage of computer systems have brought about a change in peoples lifestyle which rely on Internet—just a few clicks away for all the important and abundance of information available online. Un-doubtly the Internet has revolutionized the way we think and occupies an important place in our private lives and the society as a whole.

Internet addiction inherits the symptoms of chemical addiction, and yet, it does not consume any chemical substance like other drug addiction, alcohol addiction, and so forth. Internet addiction can be well defined through the observation of one's behavior [1]. The definition of behavioral addiction varies, however, one may think of behavioral addictions as a repetition of a habit that has a potential to cause imbalance in lifestyle or social issues or worst of all, affect one's health. For behavioral addictions, there is always a sign of uncontrollable force when the addicts try to control or cut back the amount of addictive use. It was suggested that behavioral addiction acts as a medium to escape from the underlying emotional stress [2].

Over the last couple of years, Internet addiction has become a global concern to the public and can be classified as a health issue. There is even a proposal to include Internet addiction in the next revision of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder 5th Edition (DSM-V), as a cause of mental disorder [3]. Addictive behaviors were suggested to cause improper life style and impairment to personalities, especially amongst the young. The education system has evolved and the use of technology is now encouraged at much younger ages. Children are getting exposed to computer technology and the Internet at early ages.

Even though the study on Internet addiction is not new to clinical studies, prior studies had always been attributed to psychological terms [4-7]. It is believed that Malaysians surfing the Internet for long hours are not aware of the consequences of surfing for long hours and are addicted to the Internet unknowingly? What causes them to surf for long hours and what activities do they engage in while Online, lead to the questions that have motivated us to do this study on the usage of Internet among Malaysian youth. We have devised a set of questions accordingly to diagnose the pattern of online behavior among the youth. An on-line survey on Internet

Surfing and Addiction was launched nationwide to get a response from the youth about their online behavior. We focus on the youth because they are presumed to be more adaptable to the fast changing Internet world. The aim of the survey is to identify the Internet addiction among the youth caused by surfing long hours.

The paper is organized as follows: Section II talks about Internet addiction, Section III states the Research Methodology involved, Section IV—Results of the Study, and followed by the conclusion in Section V.

## 2. About Internet Addiction

This section sheds light on topics that are relevant to our proposed research and have been examined in the following sections.

### 2.1. Internet Addiction Test (IAT)

Internet Addiction Test (IAT) is a measure devised on a Likert scale to rate the degree of the Internet use. The questions range from personal daily life, social life, life performance, emotional feelings and so forth. Total IAT scores are used as a measure of the addictive level. Highest score suggested that a person is addicted to the Internet and vice versa. The IAT had been further tested by researchers in its reliability and validity; and it is suggested to reliable measure to study Internet addiction [8].

### 2.2. Subtypes of Addictive Behavior

Addictive behavior to the Internet develops when an individual starts engaging in activities of obsession. It is shown as a compulsive preoccupation while at the same time losing control against the addicted activity [9].

1) Excessive Gaming: One key contributor to gaming addiction has been the creation of the interactive environment for the game's platform that provokes a sense of awe and wonder, even amazement, to the fantasy world far beyond the reality, thus gaming as an activity that gives gamers the room for imagination. Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game (MMORPG) is one of the appealing forms of gaming addiction for problematic Internet users [10]. Common signs of gaming addiction are shown in several ways: a) gaming preoccupation; b) being dishonest about the excessive gaming; c) social retreat. Nevertheless, gamers do make virtual friends in participating with the groups, forums, chat room and so forth [11]. However, these do not substitute the social relationships in real life [9,10].

2) Online Sexual Preoccupation: This can be caused by Adult websites loaded with the sexual content for the purpose of arousing a sexual interest. Similar to the gaming addiction, sexual addiction provides the Internet addicts with a room for imagination. Online sexual pre-

occupation usually refers to the activities of online viewing, downloading sexual materials, participating in the adult chat rooms, or uploading adult-content materials for the purposes of trading [12]. Internet users who are addicted in this category, find this as an easy alternative to access sexually explicit materials while remain anonymous, thus are allured into this form cyber addiction [13].

3) Emailing or Texting: Emailing or texting prevails to be an effective communication tool in the emergence of mobile Internet network. The ease of access to the Internet with the use of mobile devices incentivizes individuals to engage in mailing or texting activities more frequently. Online communication also helps them express their emotions more openly. Although interactive response through text or email seems to be an advanced step to managing a long-distance relationship, it does not replace the conventional form of face-to-face communication. Internet users who are addicted in this category usually suffer from: a) loneliness; b) lack of confidence; c) social retreat. In short, emailing or texting addiction is about finding alternatives to avoid real life confrontations [14].

### 2.3. Social and Cultural Implication of the Internet

The Internet is perceived to have both pros and cons, there are arguments that suggest that the Internet benefits the society by: 1) joining the global network of like-minded people; 2) Improves our performance and execution capabilities; 3) facilitates expressing of ideas freely; and 4) is a consolation at times of disappointment. There are the other, who suggest, that the Internet causes temptation and poisons the minds of the young as they indulge more with the virtual world of the Internet, and causes them to neglect their roles in the real life also affecting their performance at work [15].

### 2.4. Challenges of Internet Addiction

The Internet was invented with the objective of helping the development of human society whether in academia, industry, or the governments etc. However, as it evolved, like any other tools or technology, its misuse became inevitable. Excessive use of the Internet has become one of the leading challenges of the modern society and causes both physical and mental impairment. Although Academic and clinical researchers have been working on finding the symptoms and solutions for this for while, not much progress has been made, and most of the cases even today are self reported by the addicts [16]. Any solutions that were planted earlier have failed and addicts have been found to relapse to persistent addictive behavior.

# 3. Research Methodology

An online survey was conducted to study the Internet use and addiction among Malaysian youth; a questionnaire was created on the basis of Internet Addiction Test (IAT) [17], a well-validated instrument and a reliable measure that covers the key characteristics of pathological online use factors affecting the Internet addiction and the Impact of Internet addiction. A questionnaire was constructed based on the following information: 1) Demographic information, 2) A modified version of the Internet addiction test (IAT), 3) Factors affecting the Internet addiction, 4) Internet Surfing Addiction, 5) Impact of Internet addiction.

A random sample of 203 Malaysian youth was selected to participate from all over Malaysia in the study. Our questionnaire consisted of 30 questions; the questions were distributed as following:

1) 7 questions were asked on demographic information ranging from sex, age, and so forth.
2) 10 questions were asked on the degree of the Internet use. A modified version of the Internet addiction test (IAT) was used as the measure of scale. The questions were devised to be in form of close-ended question which summarize on Young's research on a 10-item based questionnaire [8].
3) 4 questions were asked on the factors that affecting the Internet surfing behavior, ranging from the purposes to the emotional feelings.
4) 3 questions were asked on the contents of surfing to find out the most visited websites.
5) 5 questions were asked on the impacts of the Internet addiction, ranging from psychological concern to task effectiveness.
6) An optional open-ended question was asked on the participants' opinion towards the Internet addiction to find out what people may think of the Internet use.

The Survey was conducted for a total duration of seven days. It was sent through emails, or through a link provided by the On-line survey builder along with a brief description of the study. Once the survey was finished, participants could submit it online and the data was stored as a spreadsheet on an online database. The Survey took approximately 20 minutes to complete. Results were collected on for further analysis. The information provided by the participants was considered confidential and would not be disclosed for any other purpose.

The Internet Addiction Test (IAT) conducted was used to evaluate the degree of addictive behavior. The answers to "yes" were counted, if seven yes were marked for particular participant, then the participant was considered as susceptible to Internet addiction. Based on the survey, 58 participants (29%) were considered to be at risk of addictive behavior.

# 4. Results

A total of 203 participants took part in the Survey; general description of the participants is as below:

The participants were categorized into four segments based on the hours spent on the Internet usage: 1) normal user; 2) moderate user; 3) at-risk user; and 4) extreme user. Before participants proceed with the IAT modified version measure scale, a question was asked to self-identify if they considered themselves as Internet addict or Not. A large number of participants (64%) consider themselves as Internet addicts whereas the opposite (36%) did not consider that they were addicted. The ethnicity of the sample participants was as follows: Chinese (50%), Indian (26%), Malays (22%), and other ethnic groups (2%). Most of the participants were ranging from 20 - 25 years old (64%) and studying a bachelor's degree (51%). Northern States of Malaysia (53%), east coast of Malaysia (8%), Southern States of Malaysia (8%), Sabah and Sarawak (6%) and other states (25%) constitute the sample of survey. The gender and age classification of users is also specified in the **Table 1** as below:

A) Factors Affecting Internet Addiction were found as follows:

1) Task-relevant Factor: There were many reasons to go online, including the distant learning, working online and so forth. 83% of the participants go online for task-related purposes; where as the remaining 17% of the participants do not use the Internet as a tool for study or work purposes. **Figure 1** shows the findings for the dependence on the Internet for school or work related purposes. The results skewed towards the frequent usage of the Internet.
2) Ease of Access: the ease of access is an important factor to determine how long the user stay connected to the Internet.
3) **Figure 2** shows the findings for the access location appropriate for the Internet users.
4) Motive: The motive to stay Online often followed by reasoning. **Figure 3** shows the findings of motive that compel Internet user to engage in online activities.
5) Impulsive Surfing: The first reaction proceeds from a natural feeling when a user opens a browser window. **Figure 4** shows the findings for impulsive surfing

B) Impact of Internet Addiction was found to be as follows:

1) Insomnia: Refers to those who surf the Internet until late at night and have sleeping disorders. 69% participants did not suffer from insomnia, whereas (31%) were found to suffer from the late-night log-ins and problems related to sleep.
2) Physical Changes: Refers to immediate impact on the physical changes such as weight loss, backaches or headaches. 57% participants were found to experience
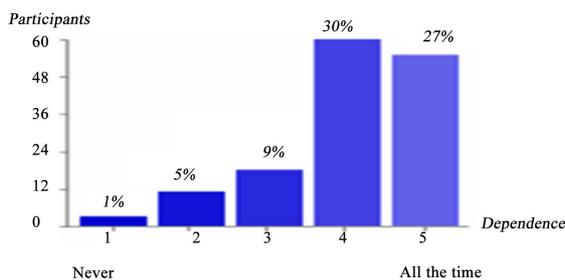
**Figure 1. Task-relevant factor to the Internet use.**
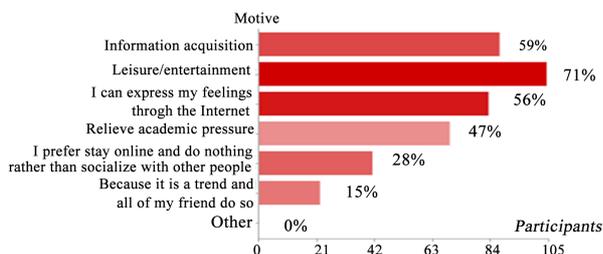


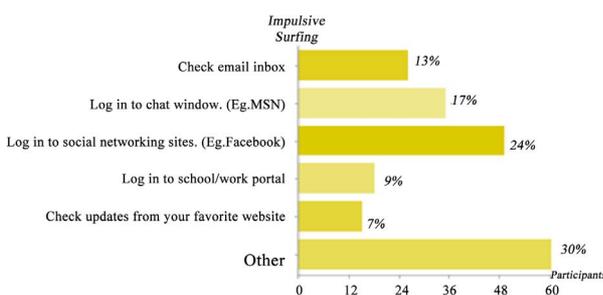**Figure 2. Ease of access to the Internet use.**



**Figure 3. Motive to use Internet.**



**Figure 4. Impulsive surfing by participants.**

**Table 1. User categorized by the gender difference.**

| User-Category (Hrs spent) | Internet Users | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | Total | Percentage % |
| Normal user (0 - 6) | 48 | 37 | 85 | 42 |
| Moderate user (6 - 12) | 41 | 34 | 75 | 37 |
| At-risk user (12 - 18) | 25 | 10 | 35 | 17 |
| Extreme user (18 - 24) | 3 | 5 | 8 | 4 |
| Total | 117 | 86 | 203 | 100 |

some form of physical changes whereas 43% had observed no physical changes.

3) Inferiority: Refers to a feeling of low esteem and unimportant in social relationships. 61% participants did not encounter difficulty in socializing with other people whereas 39% encountered some difficulty in socializing with other people.

4) Loss of concentration: Refers to immediate impact on daily activities at work or at school or otherwise. 52% participants maintained regular level of concentration while studying or at work whereas the 48% found it difficult to stay focused, resulting in drop of concentration.

5) Loss of productivity: The direct impacton outcome at work or schools due to long surfing habits. 59% participants suffered from loss of performance whereas 41% maintained regular performance and productivity.

6) Withdrawal Syndrome: When a person stops using the Internet, they experience unpleasant feelings or physical effects. We found that a large number of the participants who suffered any of the above symptoms were also susceptible to Withdrawal Syndrome and felt uneasy and missing something if they did not access the Internet a few times daily [18,19].

## 5. Conclusions

Internet addiction is described broadly for Internet overuse or excessive use of computer that may lead to interfere or changes in ones regular daily life. For a while now, our society has been obsessed with the abstract world of the Internet, which is beginning to have a deep effect on it now. Our findings in relation to Internet addiction among Malaysian youth show that they are at high risk of Internet addiction. Those in the age range of 18 - 25 are found to be susceptible to Internet addiction, especially those going to college or university. Addictive behavior however may not be all that harmful and is subjected to the individual's intentions, actions and self-discipline, which determine the real harm to the individual and the society. The Malaysian society is quite diverse in culture and may not share a cohesive view on the Internet as a whole and its perception might change widely across the segment of the society, reflecting diverse views, attitudes and behavior toward the Internet usage, however our study has been limited to a very narrow segment of the society, the youth and mostly who go to college and or university, therefore are finding apply to only for this segment.

The findings of this research are preliminary and can be used as a basis for further broader research in this area. Empirical work needs to be done to complement this research and further research on Internet Addiction. We

understand the limitations of this study and propose that the boundaries of the hypothesis be tested in future research.

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