

An Analysis of Internet Dependency and Happiness Quotient Among Youth

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the present study is to examine and analyze the relationship between the internet dependency and happiness quotient among youth. There is a widespread notion that increased usage and dependency on internet is connected to the subjective happiness of the youth of the day. The study was conducted by comparing internet addicted and non-addicted college students on the measure of subjective happiness. It was hypothesized that there will be significant difference between no, mild and moderately (internet) addicted college students on the measure of subjective happiness. For this purpose, the Internet Addiction Test (IAT) and the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) was administered on college going students, males or females between the ages of 18 to 21 years. The data was gathered for $n = 44$ and subsequently for $N=143$ non-addicts, low and moderate internet addicted college students. For $N=143$, the results were found to be insignificant. Reasons for the findings, limitations of the study and suggestions for future research have been discussed in the light of the available literature and supported by the study results.

Keywords: college students, internet addiction, subjective happiness, youth

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INTRODUCTION

The Internet is a computing network on a global level that connects the local networks to one another. According to [3], the internet is a “multifaceted medium” comprising a number of discrete functions: e-mail, which is primarily a communication medium analogous to the telephone and fax machine; chat environments, allowing synchronous or asynchronous communication; and the World Wide Web, an information medium. The origin of the internet can be traced back to the 1960s military technology which led to the development of a network of computers that were linked to each other (known as ARPANET). The creation of the World Wide Web (WWW) was in 1989 and then browsers were soon developed which allowed easy access to multiple sites, which was followed by search engines. These too were linked to thousand sites.

INTERNET DEPENDENCY

Internet addiction or dependency first came to the forefront in Dr. Kimberly Young’s 1998 book, ‘Caught in the Net: How to Recognize the Signs of Internet Addiction’. Internet addiction is characterized by excessive or poorly controlled preoccupations, urges or behaviors regarding computer use and internet access that lead to impairment or distress and interferes with daily life. It has been described as an impulse control disorder, which does not involve use of an intoxicating drug and is very similar to pathological gambling. Internet users might progress towards having an emotional attachment towards on-line friends and activities that they create on their computers. The users may enjoy facets of the Internet that allow them to meet, exchange ideas and socialize through chat rooms, social networking sites, or even ‘virtual communities.’ Like

in other addictions, these people make use of the virtual fantasy world to connect with real people using the Internet. It acts as a substitute for real-life human contact, which they are incapable of achieving normally. It has not been included in the DSM, but Internet addiction has, however, been formally recognized as a disorder by the American Psychological Association.

For Dr. Jerald Block, who advocates the inclusion of Internet addiction in the manual, the proposed disorder exhibits four common characteristics of addiction: Excessive use, which may be accompanied by impaired sense of the passage of time and/or neglecting basic drives (such as hunger or the need for sleep); Withdrawal (when prevented from going online), which may be manifested as anger, tension or depression; Tolerance, which in the case of Internet addiction may be indicated by longer use or a perceived need for upgrades or new software; Negative repercussions to the behavior, which may include arguments, fatigue, problems at school or work, lying, lack of achievement and social isolation. Internet addiction is also called by other names such as Internet addiction disorder, pathological computer use, problem Internet use, pathological Internet use and heavy Internet use.

No definite reason has yet been identified as a cause of internet addiction but various factors have been put forth as contributing towards it. The way a person addicted to shopping feels a pleasurable change in his/her mood and a 'rush' by indulging in the various acts associated with a spending spree- driving to the mall, going into the favorite store, checking credit cards etc. similarly a person with internet addiction might feel the similar rush from visiting favorite websites and booting up the computer. Furthermore, from a biological standpoint, there may be a combination of genes that make a person more susceptible to addictive behaviors.

Those suffering from depression and anxiety disorder are seen as being predisposed to having Internet or computer addiction. The use of the internet helps them fill their lack of emotional support. Being unhappy and stressed can also contribute towards the development of Internet or computer addiction. Overly shy people or ones who cannot relate to their peers easily are also at a greater risk of developing the addiction. The pleasurable feelings and thoughts which the person experiences while using the net may reinforce its use.

Those with other symptoms or mental disorders such as anxiety, depression, stress or feelings of isolation may 'self-medicate' by the use of internet in a way that few people use alcohol or drugs of abuse to self-medicate the symptoms of their mental disorder.

Looking from an interpersonal or social viewpoint, familial factors might also prompt the use of the Internet. For example, a person may escape family conflict by surfing Web. Peer behavior or social dynamics may also prompt excessive use of the Internet. The internet has many interactive aspects such as e-mail, interactive games and chat rooms, that seem to lead to Internet addiction more rather than just solitary web surfing.

Internet addiction can be apprehended better by its comparisons to other types of addictions. The Internet here, like drugs or food in other addictions, provides the 'high' which leads to dependence on this cyberspace to feel normal. Substitution of healthy relations is done by unhealthy ones. Temporary pleasure is opted over the deeper qualities of 'normal' intimate relationships. Internet addiction follows the similar gradual nature as of other addictions. Addicts struggle to restrict their behaviors, and experience distress and despair over their failure to do so.

Self-esteem keeps decreasing, which fuels the need to escape even further into the addictive behaviors. Addicts are overwhelmed with a sense of powerlessness.

While women seek out romantic partners, close friendships, and prefer anonymous communication where they can hide their appearance, men seek out sexual fantasy and dominance on the internet. Men are more likely to become addicted to cyber-porn, online games and online gambling, while women become addicted more to texting, social media sexting and online shopping. The stereotypical image of men and women in our society and the attributes of gender played out on the internet are parallel to each other.

A question concerning Internet addiction is whether it's a distinct type of addiction or just an instance of a new technology that is being used to encourage and maintain other addictions. For example, gambling casinos on the Internet can reinforce a pre-existing gambling addiction. Similarly, addiction to shopping can transfer from the local mall to online stores. Thus, there is a need to determine whether there is such a disorder as pure Internet addiction.

The types of Internet addictions are:

SEXTING AND ONLINE SEX ADDICTION

It is the most common form. The extensive availability of sexual content has led to cases of online sex addiction from mobile use. This has led to emergence of problems related to online affairs and internet infidelity as a sub-type of Internet abuse which is giving rise to new trends in marital separation and divorce.

Sexting and Pornography Addiction is a specific sub-type of Internet addiction.

While sexting is a significant problem with women, pocket porn has become a problem among men. People who experience distorted body image, suffer self-esteem issues, prior sexual addictions or an untreated sexual dysfunction, are more likely to develop this addiction. Its costs range from physical health problems and emotional issues to relationship, family, legal and career consequences. Addicts go to a great degree to hide their online behavior and feel shame or guilt because of the secret hurt they are inflicting on their real-life partners.

INTERNET INFIDELITY AND ONLINE AFFAIRS

Individuals can become over-involved in relationships made online or may participate in virtual adultery. This addiction leads to having online friends who become more important at the cost of real life relations with family and friends. This often leads to separation, divorce or family instability.

INTERNET GAMING DISORDER

Internet and gaming disorder is an addiction. This is an addiction to online video games or any other interactive gaming/role defining /online environment or games. Unlike offline activities, features of these games give a social kick. Also, the competitive natures of these games challenge you to work with or against other gamers. This can make it hard to take a break. Gamers, who play regularly or for extended periods of time, sacrifice their personal as well as social activities. In order to play they find excuses. Many a times, they get restless or irritable if they are unable to play. The fastest growing forms are video games. Video games involve players in superfluous, complex, realistic yet unhealthy gaming situations combined with the support of

technologies. Their high appeal virtual life leads to potentially addictive scenario.

NET COMPULSIONS

Internet gambling, shopping etc. are nothing but compulsive behaviors. In a way, they are screen addiction. Their focus on winning at any cost can often cause financial, legal, relationship problems, including work-related problems. The online gambling businesses are typically unregulated and illegal. It also offers no consumer protection. Internet has provided easy access to virtual gaming sites. Gaming sites that are easy to use for even the non-techno-savvy unassuming adults. It is the accessibility and ease of usage that makes it convenient and threatening to real life by inducing virtual life at any hour of the day. It is nothing but instant gratification and falsely satisfies the impulsive whims.

INFORMATION OVERLOAD

This occurs when one tries to deal with more information than one is able to process to arrive at sensible decisions. It leads to delays in decisions making, or arriving at wrong decisions. It is common to get way too many reports, e-mails and incoming messages to be able to deal effectively with all of them. Screen addiction then, results in spending huge amounts of time looking for and collecting data and organizing information from the web. Reduced work productivity and obsessive compulsive tendencies are associated with this.

The short-term effects of online addiction encompass forgotten responsibilities, unfinished tasks and weight gain. It can lead to eating irregularities, (such as skipping meals), failure to look into one's personal hygiene, and irregular, disturbed sleep. Long-term effects reflect more through the physical symptoms such as headache, backache, neck pain, and

problems in vision or dry eyes from continuous staring at the screen. It can lead to bankruptcy, more so, if the time is focused on gambling, shopping and gaming. It may also give rise to social withdrawal, feeling at ease with online virtual people rather than in person.

Addiction to the internet can lead to problems in varied fields of the individual such as academic, personal including with family members and even financial. Work life can also be negatively affected due to this. Such issues are also found in other addictions. Addicted individuals are more secluded and do not involve themselves with interactions and meeting real people. They also hide the quantity of their time that is being put to use over the internet and this eventually leads to mistrust and unstable relationships.

Many create profiles or personas where they hide and change their identities while pretending to be someone else. Those at highest risk for this are ones with low self-esteem, fear of disapproval and feelings of inadequacy. Self-concepts such as these can lead to clinical problems of anxiety and depression.

Those who attempt to quit the excessive Internet use experience some withdrawal including: depression, relief, anger, mood swings, anxiety, irritability, fear, sadness, loneliness, restlessness, boredom, procrastination, and upset stomach.

SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING AND HAPPINESS

Subjective well-being (SWB) is defined as 'a person's cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life' [4]. The cognitive element points to how one sees his satisfaction with life in both domain and global terms which means looking at particular areas like relations and one's life as a whole respectively. The moods and emotions are the affective elements. An

individual who has high life satisfaction while also less of negative but more of positive affect is considered to have high levels of subjective wellbeing.

When an individual is emotionally and mentally healthy which is elucidated by positive emotions which may span from satisfaction to immense joy, it is called happiness. It's a blend of satisfaction from life and the comparative incidence of negative and positive affect.

Subjective happiness is a subjective assessment of whether one is a happy or an unhappy person. Fundamentally, it is about maximizing pleasures and limiting or minimizing pain. Some people feel attainment of happiness with sufficient wealth, whereas others need spiritual salvation, true love, or simply a rosy disposition. Economic forces, goals, activity levels, life events, adaptation levels and dispositional factors are all essential to determine subjective happiness. Levels of subjective well-being are influenced by internal factors, such as personality and outlook, and also external factors, such as the society in which they live. A person's inborn temperament, the societies they live in, the quality of their social relationships, and their ability to meet their basic needs are some major determinants of SWB. It also encompasses the fact that some people consider themselves to be happy in spite of personal obstacles, tragedy or lack of any great love or wealth, while there are others who perceive themselves as unhappy despite having all the comforts and advantages. Happy people are more likely to be healthier, live longer, and have better social relationships, and be more efficient and productive at work. SWB thus is an important factor in our future success. Living in an economically developed nation is helpful for life satisfaction because when people have to struggle to obtain shelter, food and other basic

necessities, they tend to be dissatisfied with lives. Relationships with others seem rather important than living in just a wealthy society. Individuals in nations with high internal conflict or conflict with neighboring nations experience low subjective wellbeing and happiness. A certain level of income is essential to meet basic needs, and thus extremely poor people are often dissatisfied with life. However, higher and higher incomes make less and less difference to happiness. Perhaps in seeking money such people sacrifice other important things way too much, such as relationships, spirituality, or pursuing their interests. Or it is probably that materialists never get enough money to fulfill all their dreams.

There are psychological in factors that influence happiness as well-such as our aspirations, adaptation and social comparisons. People's outlook and resilience are also very important to happiness. Although it is beneficial to be happy, it does not mean that people should always be euphoric. It is appropriate and helpful too, to be sad or to worry at times. Changes are needed in case a person is chronically unhappy, in which scenario, professional intervention would help as well.

The Internet was originally designed to facilitate communication and research activities. However, the dramatic increase of Internet usage in recent years has led to pathological use (Internet addiction). A study was done by [5] titled 'Internet Addiction in Students: A Cause of Concern'. Two groups of dependents and non-dependents were identified. Significant behavioral and functional usage differences were revealed between the two groups. Dependents were found to delay other work to spend time online, lose sleep due to late-night logons, and feel life would be boring without the Internet. The hours spent on the Internet by dependents

were greater than those of non-dependents. On the loneliness measure, significant differences were found between the two groups, with the dependents scoring higher than the non-dependents.

The Internet has been accused of encouraging adverse psychological consequences. These are depression or anxiety symptoms, and many more. The study by [6] titled 'Internet Use by the Socially Fearful: Addiction or Therapy?' offered an alternative understanding. It suggested that Internet may be used as a forum for expanding social networks. This could consequently enhance the chance of meaningful relationships, self-confidence, social abilities, and social support. This is a contrarian view and in favor of the internet. Results however suggest that there is no relationship between online activities and depression, anxiety, or social fearfulness. On the contrary, the users opine that chatting online helps and is psychologically advantageous. However, they accept that its regular usage can be habit forming and lead to isolation. Internet has the potential of being addictive. Ones who chat online are often seen as being afraid of social interactions. Internet perhaps helps them to practice their conversation by providing a virtual life and help improve social skills which in turn might lead to improvements in their confidence.

A study on 'Loneliness as the Cause and the Effect of Problematic Internet Use: the Relationship between Internet Use and Psychological Well-Being' was conducted [7]. The investigation takes its lead from the assumption that one of the major factors driving individuals' to the use of Internet is the belief that it helps relieve psychosocial problems (e.g., loneliness, depression). Internet use behaviors consequences in undesirable life outcomes due to obsessive or compulsive need. The negative effects that emanate from over

dependency further isolate the individual and make him prone to seclusion. Research done earlier has advocated usage of internet for entertainment.

A research [8] aimed to investigate the social connectedness derived from the use of Face book. Study 1 investigated whether offline social connectedness and Face book connectedness were separate constructs. Results revealed Face book connectedness to be distinct from offline social connectedness. The relation between depression, anxiety and subjective well-being and social usage of Facebook was seen in Study 2. The results showed that use of Facebook corresponded to low levels of anxiety and depression and a higher life satisfaction. Also, it might give people a platform to form and continue interactions and connections in the virtual world. Thus, the conclusion was that Facebook might provide a social platform where one can make and retain their connections and also present the people with various positive psychological results.

As a source of media, internet is a recent addition to life and its use is increasing exponentially. Though extremely useful, its excessive use can be harmful and damaging to the physical and mental health. In the light of the literature reviewed, the aim was to analyze the relation between internet addiction and happiness quotient among youth.

HYPOTHESIS

The objective of the present study was to compare internet addicted and non-addicted college students on the measure of Subjective Happiness.

Based on the literature reviewed, the hypothesis formulated for the present study was:

There will be significant difference between no, mild and moderately

(internet) addicted college students on the measure of subjective happiness

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The total sample consisted of 143 nonaddicts, low and moderate internet addicted college students (N=143). The groups included both boys and girls of 18–21 years age groups.

Sampling

Convenience sampling was used for the present study. It is a non-probability sampling method. It is a technique where subjects/ participants are selected because of their convenient accessibility and availability [9].

Design

The objective of the present study was to analyze the relation between internet addiction and happiness quotient among youth. This was achieved by comparing internet addicted and non-addicted college students on the measure of Subjective Happiness. An ex post facto design was followed. It is one in which the investigators attempt to trace an effect which has already occurred to its probable causes. Thus, this term means that the researcher has conducted the study after the events have occurred [10].

Measures

The two tools used for the current study were the Internet Addiction Test [1] and the Subjective Happiness Scale [2]. The Internet Addiction Test assesses the impact of internet in daily life. The higher the person's score, the greater will be the level of addiction. It is a 20 item questionnaire using a 5-point liker scale. The questions were concerned with preoccupation with the internet (thinking about previous or anticipated future), needing increasing amount of time on the internet, feeling moody, restless, depressed at the thought

of stopping internet use, staying longer than originally intended on the internet, have significant loss, concealed facts about the internet use from friends and parents and using it as a solution for all problems which is Internet overuse. It is the problematic computer use or pathological computer use that interferes with daily life i.e. school performance, family relationships and adolescent's emotional state. Very high scores (above 80) indicate that internet usage is causing significant problems in the person's life. A high reliability estimate of IAT was consistently reported in adolescents with a Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.80$ in the previous studies [11].

The Subjective Happiness Scale is a self-report questionnaire designed to assess long-term subjective happiness. This questionnaire provided one positive affect dependent variable score. The questionnaire consists of 4 items, each using a 7-pointlikert scale. The internal consistency of the four items of this measure was calculated with an acceptable alpha level of 0.85 [2].

Procedure

The objective of the present study was to compare internet addicted and non-addicted college students on the measure of subjective happiness. The Internet Addiction Test and the Subjective Happiness Scale was administered on youth, both males and females. The participants were college going students between the ages of 18 to 21 years. Proper instructions were given to the subjects before the conduction. It was made sure that no item is left blank. After conduction, the scoring was done. Data was pooled in for $n=44$ and further for $N=143$ non-addicts, low and moderate internet addicted college students. Data for $N=143$ was subjected to quantitative analysis. ANOVA was used as a statistical technique to find the differences among group means of no, mild and moderately

internet addicted students on the measure of subjective happiness.

The scoring for the Internet Addiction Test was done by adding the score of the 20 items in the questionnaire. Very high scores in Internet (above 80) indicate that internet usage is causing significant problems in the person's life. The screening test scoring ranges from 0 to 19 indicating a below average range, 20 to 49, average range, 50 to 79, above average and 80 to 100, significantly above average.

The Subjective Happiness Scale was scored by adding the scores of the 4 items, with the fourth item reverse coded. A single score was arrived at by summing the scores for each item and dividing the total by 4. Higher the score on the scale, higher

is the subjective happiness of the individual (Figures 1–3, Tables 1–3).

RESULTS

Table 1. Distribution of participants on measure of internet addiction for $n=44$ and $N=143$.

Range	Percentage of participants ($n=44$)	Percentage of participants ($N=143$)
No addiction	18.6	11.19
Mild addiction	51.16	60.14
Moderate addiction	30.24	28.67

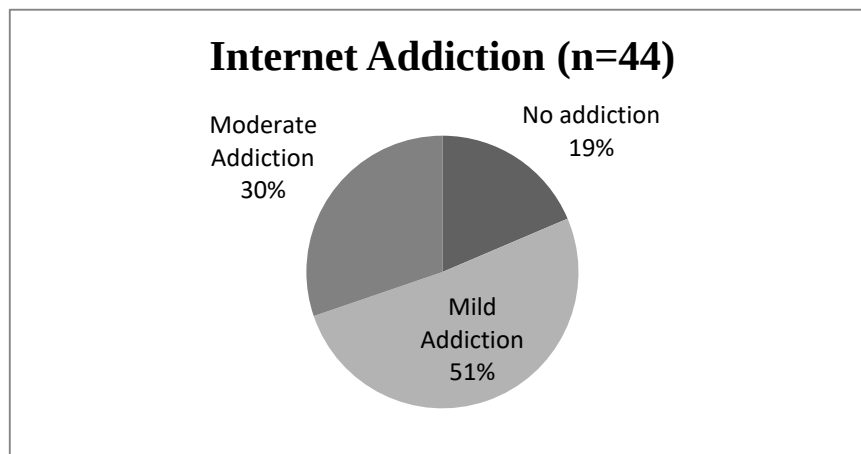


Fig. 1. Pie chart showing the distribution of internet addiction (no, mild, moderate) among college students for $n=44$.

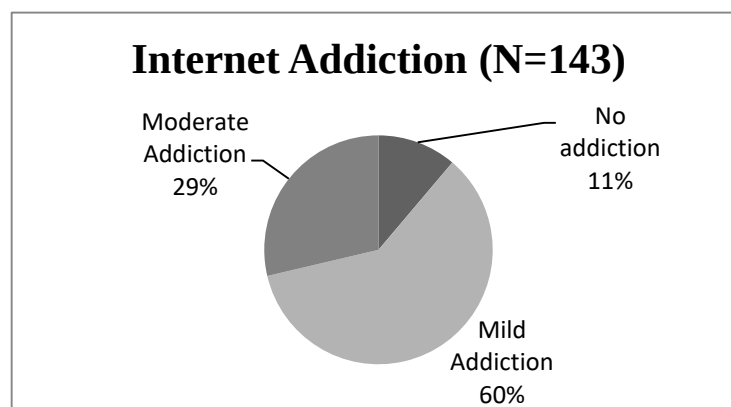


Fig. 2. Pie chart showing the distribution of internet addiction (no, mild, moderate) among college students for $N=14$.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) on measure of subjective happiness for n=44 and N=143.

Range	n = 44		N = 143	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
No addiction	4.5	0.46	4.58	0.64
Mild addiction	4.28	1.05	4.58	1.02
Moderate addiction	4.17	1.12	4.34	1.05

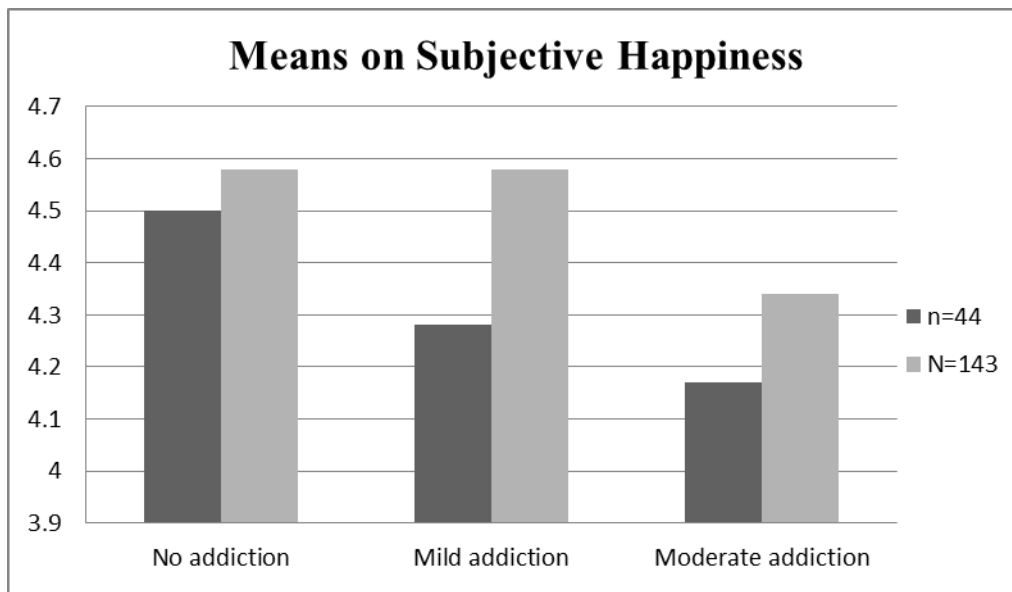


Fig. 3. Bar graph showing means for participants' on subjective happiness for n=44 and N=143

Table 3. Showing one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) for the measure of subjective happiness.

Measure	Treatment	SS	df	MS	F	p
Subjective happiness	Between	1.651	2	0.825	0.83	0.44
	Within	139.474	140	0.996		
	Total	141.125	142			

CONCLUSION

The objective of the present study was to analyze the internet addiction and happiness quotient among youth. This was achieved by comparing internet addicted and non-addicted college students on the measure of subjective happiness. Internet addiction is characterized by excessive or poorly controlled preoccupations, urges or behaviors regarding computer use and internet access that leads to impairment or distress and interferes with daily life and subjective happiness is a subjective assessment of whether one is a happy or an unhappy person. The Internet Addiction

Test (IAT) [1] and the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) [2] were administered on males or females. The participants were college going students between the ages of 18 to 21 years. The data was pooled in for n=44 and further for N=143 non-addicts, low and moderate internet addicted college students. Data for N=143 was subjected to quantitative analysis. ANOVA was used as a statistical technique to find the differences among group means of no, mild and moderately internet addicted students on the measure of subjective happiness.

The data were pooled for $n=44$ and $N=143$ non-addicts, low and moderate internet addicted college students. In both the cases, trends were the same. The majority cases were of mild addicts (51% and 60% for $n=44$ and $N=143$ respectively), while the least amount was found in the no addict category with 19% and 11% for $n=44$ and $N=143$, respectively (refer Table 1 and Figures 1 and 2). From Table 2 and Figure 3, the mean on the measure of subjective happiness for $n=44$ and $N=143$ can be seen.

Upon seeing the results on $n=44$, it became evident that in all the three categories of no, mild and moderate addiction, there was hardly any mean difference between the two groups. In light of this, the study was then aimed at larger sample size to find meaningful impact, if any and thus, sample size of $N=143$ were obtained.

The pooled data of $N=143$ was subjected to quantitative analysis. ANOVA was used as a statistical technique to find the differences among group means of no, mild and moderately internet addicted students on the measure of subjective happiness. The F value obtained was 0.83 at p value 0.44 which is insignificant (As $p>0.5$) (refer Table 3). This is because there was no major mean difference between the three groups (4.58 for both no and mild addicts and 4.34 for moderate addicts on the measure of subjective happiness), indicating that there is no difference in the subjective happiness of no, mild and moderate internet addicts. The subjective happiness of all three groups is similar; therefore, no significant difference in the data was seen. Thus, it can be inferred from the data that internet addiction has no role in subjective happiness of an individual. There are other factors beyond internet addiction that contribute to subjective happiness of an individual. This is validated by several research studies.

A study [12] aimed to explore subjective well-being and (SWB) and happiness in an urban Indian sample. Participants were adults belonging to the city of Bangalore in South India. Higher age, being married, having higher education, higher income and working in a full time job seemed to improve life satisfaction and decrease negative effect. Life satisfaction and happiness was predicted by income, age and education.

A study found significant positive correlations between income and life satisfaction and happiness [13]. Income, as a means of assessing material wealth contributes to subjective wellbeing and happiness.

The Internet has often been argued to have adverse psychological consequences, such as depression or anxiety symptoms, among “over-users.” A study [6] titled ‘Internet Use by the Socially Fearful: Addiction or Therapy?’ offered an alternative understanding, suggesting the Internet may be used as a forum for expanding social networks and consequently enhancing the chance of meaningful relationships, self-confidence, social abilities, and social support. The results of their study suggested that there was no relationship between time spent online and depression, anxiety, well-being or social fearfulness. Ones who chat online are seen as being fearful of social interactions and contact and thus internet is seen as a way which helps them to practice their conversation and social skills which in turn might lead to improvements in their real, face-to-face interactions and situations.

Another research [8] aimed to investigate the social connectedness derived from the use of Facebook. Results suggested that Facebook use may provide the opportunity to develop and maintain social connectedness in the online environment. It was concluded that Facebook may act as

a separate social medium in which to develop and maintain relationships, providing an alternative social outlet associated with a range of positive outcomes.

The objective of the present study was to analyze internet addiction and happiness quotient among youth which was achieved by comparing internet addicted and non-addicted college students on the measure of subjective happiness. At N=143, the hypothesis that there will be significant difference between no, mild and moderately (internet) addicted college students on the measure of subjective happiness did not get proved as the results were insignificant.

The limitations of the study are that the sampling was convenience sampling and thus not representative of whole population and so the results cannot be generalized. The answers could be socially desirable. The sample size was not large enough. Both the scales used were foreign tools which were administered on Indian population while the appropriate Indian norms are not available. The study can be expanded by looking at gender as a construct and inter-generational differences can also be studied.

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