

Internet Addiction and Subjective Wellbeing in University Students

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Abstract

While the internet brings some conveniences to the life of the individual, it may cause some problems from the other side. One of the most important problems encountered in recent years regarding internet usage is problematic usage of the internet or internet addiction. The purpose of this study is to analyze the relationship between internet addiction and subjective well-being in university students. Study sample included 293 university students studying at a public university, Turkey. The age of the participants varied between 17 and 33 years. The average age was 19.42 (SD = 1.29). The participants were 63% female and 37% male. Regression analysis used to investigate the association between internet addiction and subjective well-being indicators. The results of these analyses showed that positive feelings and life satisfaction predicted internet addiction negatively; but negative feelings predicted the internet addiction in a positive way. The findings discussed and some suggestions were presented for research and practice.

Keywords.

Internet, addiction, internet addiction, well-being, subjective well-being.

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While the internet brings some conveniences to the life of the individual, it may cause some problems from the other side (Arslan, 2017). One of the most important problems encountered in recent years regarding internet usage is problematic usage of the internet or internet addiction. When it comes to addiction, people think of cigarettes, alcohol, heroin (Cengizhan, 2005). People see themselves happier, more excited and more vivacious while using internet. When there is no internet, they feel unhappy and they push all their other feelings to the negatives for this reason. They feel uncomfortable in environments where they do not have internet, and feel relaxed and relieved when they have it (Chou and Hsiao, 2000). Internet addiction is defined as “an impulse-control disorder that does not involve an intoxicant” (Young, 1998; p. 244). One of the first studies on Internet addiction was carried out in the University of Texas on 531 students by Scherer (1997). In this study, some of the reasons why people are addicted to the internet are; news, games, social media conversation pages, and it has been observed that to be used for online relationships in general. In such a study, Young (1998) observed that internet addicted users experienced many problems in their social lives, such as other addicted people, in their professional lives. Failures in the students' lectures, failing the classes, or even being expelled from the university have been observed. In furtherance, it has been stated that one of the most important reasons for expelling students from university is internet addiction reason in Alfred University. When people have been asked how many hours they spend on the internet, they tend to say less than it actually is or they do denialism. They do not want you say a word to their internet and they may respond with reaction. They never accept that they show symptoms of addiction and they may think that you are defaming them. However, it can be said that even “denial” situation is also a symptom of addiction. Although this situation creates remorse, feeling of guilt in some people; it is perceived as pleasure or amusement environment (Karaman and Kurtoğlu, 2009). It is observed that they do not sleep much at nights due to spending excessive time on the internet and social media accounts. Even this situation has reached such an advanced dimension that even shopping is made over the internet. As a result of this situation insomnia, fatigue, decrease in work efficiency, socialization, health problems due to inactivity, etc. situations have become inevitable (Suler, 1996). While spending time with family members bores them, the temporary happiness of the cyber world is always more attractive to them. They want to forget the negativities, pain, feelings of real life through internet. They can introduce themselves to the other people with the characteristics of the people they imagine or admire on the internet (King, 1996). When evaluated as a whole, the internet can cause many negativities in the life of the individual.

Although there has been an increase in studies on internet addiction in recent years, the consequences of excessive and uncontrolled internet usage remain unknown (Arslan, 2017). Especially the relationship between internet addiction and happiness-subjective well-being has been one of the topics that researchers are curious about. Subjective well-being is not a one-dimensional concept. Subjective well-being consists of positive, positive emotions and life satisfaction of the individual (Diener, 1984). Happiness, joy, excitement, interest, confidence are the positive feelings that bring positivity to the individual. Anger, irritability, sadness, and faulty are the negative feelings that cause an individual to be negative. Life satisfaction is the pleasure that individual obtains from the work he has done throughout his life or from his accomplished desires (Myres and Deiner 1995). Many fieldwork (adolescents, children, etc.) about positive and negative emotions and life satisfaction that people have felt throughout their lives have been studied and often emphasized. Şenol-Durak and Durak (2011)

investigated the cognition about problematic internet use and the balancing role of subjective well-being, emotional elements, life satisfaction and self-esteem in the study of university students. According to the study done, internet addicts were found to be in a loop with negative feelings as a result of losing their trust feelings at first. Akin (2012) investigated subjective well-being and subjective stamina' relationship with internet addiction, and reported that subjective well-being and subjective stamina predicted internet addiction negatively. Kabasakal (2015) reported that there is a negative relationship between life satisfaction and problematic use of the internet. Furthermore, it is stated that there is a relationship between psychological well-being and internet addiction in university students and psychological well-being is a significant predictor of internet addiction (Baş, Soysal ve Aysan, 2016). As a result, studies show that internet addiction in university students may be related to subjective well-being. In this context, the aim of this study is to examine the relationship between internet addiction and subjective well-being in university students.

Method

Participants

Research data was obtained from 293 students studying at the state university. The age of the participants varied between 17 and 33 years. The average age was 19.42 (SD= 1.29). They were 63% female and 37% male. After the participants have been informed about the study, data collection tool has been applied to the students who are attending to the study voluntarily. The participants filled out the data collection tools in approximately 30 minutes.

Measures

Internet Addiction. Internet addiction was measured using Internet Addiction Test (IAT) developed to assess addictive internet use. The IAT is a 20 item self-report measure (e.g. "How often do you block out disturbing thoughts about your life with soothing thoughts of the Internet?", "How often do you feel depressed, moody or nervous when you are off-line, which goes away once you are back on-line?", "How often do you snap, yell, or act annoyed if someone bothers you while you are on-line?") scored using 5-point Likert scale (does not apply 1 to always applies 5; Young, 1998). Boysan et al. (2017) adapted the scale for Turkish adults and their results indicated that the scale has strong internal reliability and temporal reliability coefficient ($\alpha = .93$ and $.87$). Descriptive statistics of the scale with this sample are presented in Table 1.

Subjective Wellbeing. Students' subjective wellbeing was measured using Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) and Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS). The SWLS is a 5 item self-report instrument developed to measure individuals' cognitive evaluations about their life (e.g. "The conditions of my life are excellent", "So far I have gotten the important things I want in life") and all items scored using 7 point Likert type scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree; Diener, Emmons, Laresen & Griffin, 1985). Research indicated that the scale had adequate internal reliability with Turkish university sample ($\alpha = .86$; Yetim, 1993). The PANAS is 20 item self-report instrument developed to assess positive and negative emotions, including two subscales: Positive Affect Scale and Negative Affect Scale. Each scale consists of 10 items (e.g. "Active", "Guilty") responded using 5-point scale (1 = Very slightly or not at all to 5 = Extremely; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Research showed that the scales had an adequate internal reliability for Turkish sample (positive affect $\alpha = .83$ and negative affect $\alpha = .86$; Gençöz, 2000). Descriptive statistics of the scales with this sample are presented in Table 1.

Data Analyses

The obtained data has been transferred to the computer environment for analysis. Firstly, after the transfer has been completed, incorrect and missing data have been examined. After the data set has been erased from the bad and missing data, the data analysis process has started. Initially, descriptive statistics on variables have been examined. The normality assumption has been tested with kurtosis and skewness values. The values of kurtosis and skewness being between the range of -1 and +1 is considered to be normal distribution. Then, in order to see the relationship between the variables, correlation and regression analysis have been performed. SPSS 22 program has been used for the analysis.

Results

Descriptive statistics indicated that skewness and kurtosis scores renege between -.54 and .71, and all variables had relatively normal distribution. Following, individual moment correlation analysis was conducted, and these outcomes demonstrated that internet addiction significantly and negatively correlated with life satisfaction and positive affect, whereas significantly and positively correlated with negative affect. Descriptive statistics and correlation results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis results

Variables	Descriptive statistics				Correlation results			
	Mean	SD	Skew.	Kurt.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Internet addiction	30,91	16,79	,71	,52	1	-,25**	-,23**	,24**
Life satisfaction	21,78	6,93	-,33	-,54	-,25**	1	,35**	-,32**
Positive affect	33,19	7,23	-,29	,19	-,23**	,35**	1	-,11
Negative affect	20,69	6,03	,45	,38	,24**	-,32**	-,11	1

Note. ** $p < .001$

After examining descriptive statistics and correlation analysis, regression analysis was conducted to investigate the predictive effect of subjective wellbeing on internet addiction among university students.

Table 2. Results of predictor role of subjective wellbeing variables on internet addition

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p	95,0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	SE	Beta			LB	UB
(Constant)	40,10	6,67		6,00	,000	26,95	53,26
Life satisfaction	-,40	,15	-,17	-2,62	,009	-,69	-,10
Positive affect	-,29	,14	-,13	-2,11	,035	-,57	-,02
Negative affect	,43	,17	,16	2,50	,013	,09	,78

$F(3, 261) = 10.922, p < .001$
 $R = .334, R^2 = .112$

Findings from regression analysis showed that subjective wellbeing variables were significant predictors of internet addiction, and all variables accounted for 11% of the variance in students' internet addiction. Internet addiction was significantly and negatively predicted by life satisfaction ($\beta = -.17, p < .01$) and positive affect ($\beta = -.13, p < .05$), while negative affect was a significant and positive predictor of internet addiction ($\beta = .16, p < .05$). These results demonstrate that university students with higher levels of internet addiction have lower levels of subjective wellbeing compared to those with lower levels of internet addiction.

Discussion

This study has analyzed the relationship between internet addiction and subjective well-being. The study results have shown that students with high-level internet addiction have low-level life satisfaction and positive emotions, and high-level negative feelings. The findings obtained from regression analysis have found that while students' life satisfaction and positive feelings predict internet addiction negatively, negative feelings predict positively. These results show that as individuals with higher levels of subjective well-being have lower levels of Internet addiction compared to those who have lower.

The research findings have shown that, consistent with previous studies, life satisfaction in university students is an important predictor of internet addiction. Studies have shown that individuals with a high level of life satisfaction experience less emotional and behavioral problems and have a low level of problematic use of the internet (Morsünbül, 2014). For example, Durak Batıgün and Kılıç (2011) observed that in their study which analyzes internet addiction and life satisfaction, there is a negative correlation between internet addiction and life satisfaction; as the life satisfaction increases, the internet addiction rate decreases evenly. In his study where Morsünbül (2014) analyzed the relationship between life satisfaction and internet addiction, he observed that individuals with higher life satisfaction have less internet addiction; individuals who spends less time on the internet have higher life satisfaction. Consequently, this finding from the study has revealed that lower life satisfaction has a relationship with internet addiction or problematic use of the internet in young adults.

Additionally, research results have shown that negative feelings predict internet addiction positively; and positive feelings predict the internet addiction significantly in a negative way. Feelings play an important role on the thoughts and behaviors of the individual (Arslan, 2015). Therefore, it can be said that feeling is a concept which is related to internet addiction. Consistent with the findings of this research, studies have shown that people with internet addiction have negative feelings and people with positive feelings are less connected to the internet (Derin, 2013). Baş, Soysal and Aysan (2016) found that psychological well-being meaningfully predicts the problematic use of the internet in the university students. Derin (2013) according to the results that are collected from the study analyzing the relationship between positive-negative feelings which is sub-dimensions of internet addiction and subjective well-being; concluded that in the case of increase in negative feelings the internet addiction increases, in the case of increase in positive feeling the internet addiction decreases. In order to increase subjective well-being, he indicates that positive feelings need to be increased which is one of the sub-dimensions of subjective well-being; states that the more positive feelings, the higher subjective well-being will be. When it comes to positive feelings, "happiness rate" comes to the minds. It is concluded that young adult individuals (teenagers) want to be in touch with people, love-respect, be successful, seek pleasure etc., reduce negative feelings and increase their positive feelings in order to be happy (Eryilmaz, 2010). As a result, consistent with previous studies, the results obtained from this study have supported that individuals with high-level internet addiction have low-level subjective well-being.

Findings in this study have shown that internet addiction is negatively correlated with positive feelings and life satisfaction; but it is positively correlated with negative feelings. From the findings obtained, activities can be planned that will enable individuals to have positive feelings who are addicted to the internet and studies that will ensure high life satisfaction can be done. According to individual internet addiction symptoms, programs can be prepared and monitored in order to reduce this addition. By providing continuance of these studies, individuals can be supported while coping with internet addiction. Besides the results obtained in the research, the findings obtained without the research can be evaluated within some limitations. This study was conducted on university students. Purposive sampling method was

used in the collection of the data. When these limitations taken into account, it would be beneficial that further studies are conducted on different samples and by using different sampling methods. Another limitation is that the data in the study were collected via self-report and the study was organized according to the relational screening model. Therefore, different studies can be done using different data collection methods (e.g. qualitative). Particularly, it will be useful to conduct longitudinal studies.

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