



A Study on Alexithymia, Loneliness and Internet addiction among Young Adults

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Abstract: Young adults today live in a world that is connected online 24/7 yet they have never felt so more alone. As online connectivity has expanded, internet addiction has become an increasing concern as it led to internet dependency, affecting psychological adjustment. Furthermore contributing to feeling of loneliness defined as perceived social isolation and limiting emotional awareness (alexithymia) significantly contributing to compulsive internet behaviour. The study aimed to explore the relationship between internet addiction, loneliness and alexithymia among young adults, a total of sample of 70 (35 males, 35 females) was collected in the young adults (20-30 years). Standardized scales were used to measure internet addiction, loneliness and alexithymia. Significant relationships were found between alexithymia, loneliness and internet addiction, however, no gender differences were found. The study draws attention to mental health risk links with virtual dependency, it suggest the need for emotional awareness programs, responsible technology use workshops, social engagement initiatives to reduce loneliness and maladaptive internet use.

Keywords: *Alexithymia, Loneliness, Internet Addiction, Young Adults*

1. Introduction

“Loneliness does not come from having no people about one, but from being unable to communicate the things that seem important to oneself, or from holding certain views which others find inadmissible”

Carl Gustav Jung

In today's screen dominated world, young adults are trapped in constant connectivity and emotional numbness, the irony of online connection and real - world distance. Over the past few years conversation on loneliness has evolved from being primarily viewed as elderly issue mainly to young adults issue characterized by constant changes, spotlighting an emerging issue the dynamic connection between loneliness, internet addiction and alexithymia (difficulty identifying and expressing emotions). Alexithymia tends to be prevalent in young adults as this developmental stage often deals with emotional challenges and issues related to self understanding, changing social dynamics, therefore, making emotional awareness and communication challenging. Young adults are more susceptible to internet addiction due to factors such as loneliness, life stress, and the easy accessibility of the internet. Individuals often use online activity as an avoidance strategy. Young adults report increased levels of loneliness, despite having numerous virtual connections, as text-based communication does not adequately replace genuine human interaction.

A study was conducted by Plasterwala and Deshpande (2022) on relationship between internet addiction, anxiety and loneliness among 165 young adult. The study found out strong positive association between internet addiction and anxiety, similarly with internet addiction and loneliness. Additionally, the research revealed that internet addiction was a significant predictor of both anxiety and loneliness.

A research was conducted by Ursoniu et al. (2024) on associations between social media addiction, alexithymia and empathy. The study found out that alexithymia was a mediator between social media addiction and empathy.

A 2025 Times of India report, citing WHO, highlights that loneliness leads to nearly 871,000 deaths globally each year. Despite widespread online connections, many feel a gap between perceived and actual social ties, increasing mental health risks. WHO urges policy changes and greater social participation to address this issue.

Alexithymia

Alexithymia is “a multidimensional construct comprised of difficulty identifying one's own feelings (DIF), difficulty describing feelings (DDF), and an externally orientated thinking style (EOT) whereby one tends to not focus their attention on their emotions. In other words, people with high levels of alexithymia have difficulty focusing attention on their emotional states (EOT) and difficulty accurately appraising what those states are (DIF, DDF) (Preece et al., 2017; Sifneos, 1973).”

A study was conducted by Thabit, Zaki, and Shams El-Din (2023) on social media addiction, alexithymia, and loneliness among 352 nursing students at Benha University, Egypt. The results found that almost half of the students had a moderate level of social media addiction, while more than half showed possible alexithymia. Furthermore there was a a strong positive correlation between social media addiction and alexithymia, as well as between alexithymia and loneliness.

Li et al. (2021) studied Chinese university students and found that depression, alexithymia, boredom, and loneliness were significantly associated with gaming disorder. Both loneliness and boredom showed positive links with gaming disorder, with loneliness identified as the central factor among all variables.

Mahapatra and Sharma (2019) examined the association between internet addiction and alexithymia by analyzing questionnaire based studies results were, 12 studies found a consistent positive relationship, showing that individuals with alexithymia were more likely to display internet addiction /problematic internet use. Authors highlight that the internet serve as a medium to regulate emotions and fulfil unmet social needs.

Arslan et al. (2016) examined the relationship between alexithymia and internet addiction among 1,107 university students in Turkey. Results showed that 12.5% of students were alexithymia and 13.5% were internet addicts. Internet addiction scores were significantly higher among alexithymia students compared to non-alexithymia ones. Furthermore, the results found gender differences, where females scored higher in difficulty identifying feelings, and males in externally oriented thinking.

Loneliness

Loneliness is often defined “as the feeling that one's desired quantity or quality of social connections is unfulfilled (Peplau and Perlman, 1982; Hawkley and Cacioppo, 2010).

According to Rana and Sharma (2024), a study was conducted on loneliness and internet addiction among adults (18 to 30 years). Results revealed that there was a significantly positive correlation between loneliness and internet addiction.”

A study conducted by Imran et al. (2023) examined the association between alexithymia, loneliness, and psychological distress on university students in Lahore, Pakistan. Results revealed that alexithymia was strongly and positively correlated with both loneliness and psychological distress. Loneliness was also significantly associated with psychological distress Additionally,

there were also gender differences female students reporting higher levels of alexithymia, loneliness, and psychological suffering compared to males.

A study conducted by Erol and Cirak (2019) explored the relationship between loneliness and internet addiction among 489 college students in Turkey. The results found out younger participant had significant higher loneliness than older participants, furthermore there was significant positive correlation between loneliness And internet addiction and cumulative grade point average (CGPA) significantly predicted students' internet addiction levels.

Internet addiction

Young (1995), defines Internet Addiction as “any compulsive online behaviour that interferes with a user's normal way of life and places stress on those who are close to him or her, whether they be family members, friends, or coworkers.”

A study was conducted by Hassan et al. (2020) on the frequency and associated factors of internet addiction among 454 young adults in Bangladesh, aged 19–35 years. Using Young's Internet Addiction Test, Results revealed overall prevalence of 27.1%, with higher rates among the younger subgroup (19–24 years). Internet addiction was significantly associated with living away from family, detached family relationships, excessive daily internet use, reduced physical activity, and smoking. Social media was identified as the most common online activity. The study highlighted the importance of family and lifestyle factors in influencing internet addiction among young adults.

A meta-analysis was conducted by Saadati et al. (2021) on the relationship between internet addiction and loneliness, using databases such as PubMed, Scopus, and Embase. The analysis included 26 studies with a combined sample size of 18,496 participants. Results revealed a significant positive association between internet addiction and loneliness. The study highlighted the importance of addressing early symptoms of loneliness in individuals with internet addiction.

Alheneidi et al. (2021) examined loneliness and problematic internet use during the COVID-19 lockdown using the short form of the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale and the Internet Addiction Test, data were collected from 593 participants in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Results found out a significant association between loneliness and problematic internet use, as well as between loneliness and the number of hours spent online. Younger participants reported higher loneliness, and relationship quality during lockdown also influenced loneliness levels.

1.1 Purpose

The purpose is to study Alexithymia, loneliness and internet addiction among young adults.

1.2 Hypothesis

H1: There will be a significant positive relationship between internet addiction and loneliness.

H2: There will be a significant positive relationship between alexithymia and internet addiction.

H3: There will be a significant positive relationship between loneliness and alexithymia.

H4: There will be no significant difference between male and female.

2. Method

2.1 Sample

A total sample of 60 young adult in the age 20 – 30 was collected from Chhattisgarh, India.

2.2 Measures

PAQ-S: The PAQ-S was used to measure alexithymia. The scale was developed by Preece, Mehta, Petrova, Sikka, Bjureberg, Chen, Becerra, Allan, Robinson, & Gross (2023). The scale consisted of 6 items and the likert scale including Strongly disagree, 2, 3, Neither agree nor disagree, 5, 6, Strongly agree. no of items are 6

UCLA Loneliness Scale – Questionnaire (short version): The UCLA Loneliness Scale – Questionnaire (short version) was used to measure loneliness of an individual. The scale was developed by Daniel Russell, Letita Peplau and Cutrona, (1980). The scale consisted of 10 items and likert scale including Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Always. no of items are 10

Internet Addiction Test: The Internet Addiction Test was used to measure internet addiction of an individual. The test was developed by Dr. Kimberly S. Young (1998). The scale consisted of 20 items and the likert scale including Rarely, Occasionally, Frequently, Often, Always. Total number of items are 30.

2.3 Procedures

For this study 70 (35 male and 35 female) young adult were selected. All the participants were provided with detailed instruction about the research and it's purpose. Data were collected using Google Forms and the participants actively cooperated throughout the process and completed the responses.

3. Data Analysis

3.1 Result

Table 1: *N, Mean, Standard Deviation*

	Group	Alexithymia	Internet Addiction	Loneliness
N	Female	35	35	35
	Male	35	35	35
Mean	Female	23.3	41.7	26.1
	Male	23.1	45.1	23.4
Standard deviation	Female	10.3	11.4	6.31
	Male	10.4	16.1	7.25

Table 2: *Correlation between Alexithymia, Internet addition and Loneliness*

	Alexithymia	Internet Addiction	Loneliness
Alexithymia	—		
Internet Addiction	0.423***	—	
Loneliness	0.589***	0.469***	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 3: *Independent Samples T-Test*

		Statistic	df	p
Alexithymia	Student's t	0.0924	68.0	0.927
Internet Addiction	Student's t	-1.0200	68.0	0.311
Loneliness	Student's t	1.6878	68.0	0.096

4. Discussion of Results

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the relationship between internet addiction, loneliness, and alexithymia among young adults in the age group of 20–30 years. There are three key findings of the present research. First, that internet addiction was significantly positively correlated to loneliness ($r = 0.469$, $p < .001$). This suggests that individuals who engage more in internet use often experience feelings of loneliness. As a result, the first hypothesis is accepted, indicating that internet addiction is related to loneliness. Second, that

internet addiction was significantly positively correlated to alexithymia ($r = 0.417, p < .001$). As a result, the second hypothesis is accepted, indicating that internet addiction is related to alexithymia. Additionally, third, that loneliness was also significantly positively correlated to alexithymia ($r = 0.588, p < .001$). This suggests that individuals who have high internet use and experience loneliness tend to experience alexithymia (emotional blindness). As a result, the third hypothesis is accepted, indicating that loneliness is related to alexithymia.

These results were further supported by the findings. First, Koyuncu et al. (2014) found that a strong positive correlation exists between internet addiction and loneliness among secondary and high school students. Second, Wachs et al. (2020) found out that internet addiction was directly or indirectly associated with alexithymia. Third, the study by Saleem et al. (2015) found a positive correlation between loneliness and alexithymia among students in the age group of 18 to 25 years. Overall, it is interesting that Pearson correlation showed that all three variables were significantly correlated with each other among young adults, whereas the independent samples t-test showed that gender differences were not significant. These findings accept the null hypothesis.

The results indicate that internet addiction, loneliness, and alexithymia are positively related. This could be because people who have difficulty understanding or expressing their emotions (alexithymia) may turn to the internet for comfort. This reliance can create a negative cycle—reducing social interaction and meaningful connections, which increases loneliness and dependence on the internet. Still, these conclusions should be viewed cautiously due to the study's limited geographic scope and small sample size, which may limit how broadly the findings apply. Future research should involve larger and more diverse groups to better understand the links between internet addiction, loneliness, and alexithymia.

5. Conclusion

The research aimed to study internet addiction, loneliness, and alexithymia among young adults. A sample of 70 (35 males and 35 females) in the age group of 20 to 30 years was taken. Standardized scales were used to measure internet addiction, loneliness, and alexithymia. Results found out that internet addiction, loneliness, and alexithymia were all significantly positively correlated.

The results highlight the need for focused interventions that tackle issues related to internet addiction. Integrating programs that build emotional awareness and expression into school

curricula and community initiatives can help people identify, name, and manage their emotions more effectively, which may ultimately reduce alexithymia. Additionally, introducing digital regulation training for balanced screen habits through workshops and awareness programs, encouraging healthy internet boundaries, and enhancing responsible and self-aware internet engagement will help reduce maladaptive internet dependency. Further, building supportive offline communities, helping rebuild face-to-face social bonds, and engaging in meaningful relationships will help eliminate the feelings of loneliness, overall promoting mental health and well-being by emphasizing the significance of emotional intelligence and balanced internet engagement.

Although the present results clearly support a positive correlation between internet addiction, loneliness, and alexithymia, it is appropriate to recognize several potential limitations. The sample size was relatively small; moreover, the focus was on a specific age group and demographic area, which may limit the application of the findings to the broader population, as it may not reflect the experiences of other groups based on different geographic areas. In addition, the use of a cross-sectional research design makes it difficult to establish causal relationships between internet addiction, loneliness, and alexithymia.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the present study has contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the association between internet addiction, loneliness, and alexithymia. It is anticipated that this research will encourage continued scholarly inquiry into this significant area.

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