



Internet Addiction and Social Anxiety among Young Adults

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Abstract

Young adulthood (aged 16-25) is a period marked by significant social and emotional development. However, this period also coincides with a surge in internet use, raising concerns about the potential link between internet addiction and social anxiety. This quantitative study delves into this intricate relationship, employing online surveys to gather data from a large sample of young adults. The research design utilized purposive and convenience sampling techniques to maximize participant reach. A standardized, researcher-developed questionnaire, validated for content by a collaborator, assessed internet addiction and social anxiety levels through 22 statements. Participants indicated their responses on a scale designed to capture their experiences accurately. This study will employ statistical models (not detailed in the abstract) to analyze the collected data. Descriptive statistics were used to present the prevalence of both internet addiction and social anxiety within the sample. The core analysis focused on examining the potential correlation between these two factors. By investigating this relationship in a real-time setting, this research aims to illuminate the complex interplay between internet use and social anxiety during a critical developmental stage. Understanding these dynamics can inform the development of targeted interventions that promote healthy online habits and empower young adults to navigate social interactions with confidence. This research contributes valuable insights for educators, mental health professionals, and

policymakers seeking to foster well-being among young people in today's increasingly digital world.

Keywords: *Internet Addiction, Social Anxiety, Young Adults, Mental Health, Social Development.*

Introduction

Teenagers today navigate a world heavily influenced by social media. While these platforms offer connection and communication, concerns exist about their potential link to social anxiety. Social media's addictive nature is well-documented. Platforms like Facebook and Instagram are ubiquitous, with young adults being the most frequent users. Research suggests this frequent engagement might negatively impact mental health.

One concern is the curated portrayal of life on social media. The constant exposure to seemingly perfect lives can lead to social comparison and feelings of inadequacy among adolescents, potentially worsening social anxiety. Social media can exacerbate FOMO (fear of missing out). The relentless updates showcasing others' experiences can foster isolation and a dread of being left behind. This fear can be particularly pronounced for those already struggling with social anxiety, potentially leading them to further isolate themselves.

Excessive social media use might also contribute to a decline in real-world social skills. As online communication becomes the norm, opportunities for face-to-face interaction diminish. This lack of practice can make navigating social situations in the real world more challenging, potentially leading to the formation or worsening of social anxiety.

Studies have documented a rise in mental health issues among young people coinciding with the rise of social media. Interestingly, some research suggests that socially anxious individuals might utilize social media as a coping mechanism. The perceived comfort and anonymity of online interaction may make social media platforms more appealing. However, it remains unclear whether this online engagement fulfills their need for social support or if their social anxieties simply translate into the online space.

METHODOLOGY

Research Objective

To examine the relationship between internet addiction and the prevalence of social anxiety among young adults.

Design of the Study

The current study took a quantitative approach, employing statistical models such as surveys to evaluate variables and collect data from participants/young adults regarding their internet usage and the consequent social anxiety. This study utilized online surveys due to their cost-effectiveness, convenience, and capacity to swiftly contact many people. These surveys were developed to assess the prevalence of internet addiction and social anxiety among young individuals. Surveys also allow researchers to analyze data in real-time, reducing the possibility of inaccuracies.

Participants

Participants in this study ranged in age from 16 to 25 years. This age group represents young adults who are likely to be avid internet users, thereby providing a good sample for studying the link between internet addiction and social anxiety. The study's selection of this specific age range allowed it to concentrate on the influence of internet addiction and social anxiety during this important developmental period. The data gathered from these individuals via online surveys provided useful insights into the research issue.

Sampling

The current study applied two non-probability sampling techniques: purposive and convenience. Non-probability sampling relies on researcher skill and accessibility/personal judgement. Convenience sampling was utilized to collect data from willing participants. Purposive sampling involves selecting units based on specified requirements.

Data Collection

The information was ultimately gathered via a standardized questionnaire that was personally sent and checked for a response simultaneously. It was a quantitative study. The reason for deploying this kind of study was that it doesn't require any sort of manipulation of the environment. It gives the result in a natural setting where the event has naturally occurred

and hence the results come out as very realistic. Some of the disadvantages of questionnaire study is that a good internet connection is needed if it is sent digitally. Secondly, fluency in English was needed.

After a thorough review of literature, the questionnaire was developed. It was divided into three sections- consent, demographic and survey questions. There were in total 22 statements. It was then given to a collaborator for content validity. In order to learn more about the participant's background, the researcher also created some demographic questions. The participants were given proper instructions on the first page of the questionnaire for smooth flow. The participants were asked to choose the option which most accurately represents them. At last, the data was finally shown with the help of graphical representation against each factor in the form of a percentage and a thorough explanation.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

All the information that we gathered helped us gain a deeper understanding of the research we are conducting in this paper. We produced graphs to illustrate the questionnaire responses and aid in analysis. The most basic chart is the age pie chart, which shows the percentage of responses from a specific age group. The pie chart displays the age in years, with the key of the ages seen in the pie chart (Fig. 1). We gathered the following information using the age graph:

- The largest age group is 21-23 years old, representing 29.6% of respondents.
- The second largest age group is 16-18 years old, representing 28.7% of respondents.
- The age groups with the fewest respondents are 11-15 years old and 24 or older, each representing only 9.6% of respondents.

This does provide some interesting insights for further exploration, especially when considering existing research on these topics. Here are some potential connections to consider:

- **Increased Internet Use in Younger Age Groups:** The prevalence of younger respondents (16-23 years old) in your sample aligns with research suggesting that this age group tends to engage in more frequent and intensive internet use compared to older adults. This increased usage could be a potential risk factor for developing internet addiction, particularly for individuals who struggle with social interactions or emotional regulation.
- **Social and Developmental Factors:** The teenage and young adult years (16-23 years old) are often marked by significant social, emotional, and cognitive development. During this time, individuals are navigating challenges like identity formation, peer

relationships, and academic pressures. These challenges can contribute to feelings of stress, anxiety, and social isolation, which may lead some young people to seek refuge or connection online, potentially increasing the risk of problematic internet use and social anxiety.

- **Maturational Differences:** Studies have suggested that older adults (24+) may have different cognitive and emotional processing abilities compared to younger individuals. This could influence their susceptibility to internet addiction and social anxiety. For example, older adults might be better at regulating their emotions, managing distractions, and maintaining healthy social relationships, potentially buffering them from these risks.

Age (in years)

115 responses

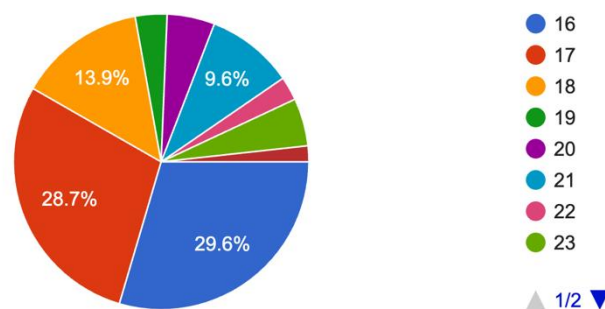


Figure 1: Displaying Ages (in Years) of the respondents.

Knowing about the educational background of our respondents is important to me as a researcher as it helps me understand the responder's mindset & ability to understand the survey (Fig. 2). A lot of information is highlighted with this graph like:

- 39.5% of respondents have a high school diploma.
- 26.3% of respondents have a graduate degree.
- 26.3% of respondents have less than a high school diploma.
- 8% of respondents have a post-graduate degree.

Here are some potential connections to consider:

- **Stress and Coping Mechanisms:** Higher education can be associated with academic pressures, deadlines, and financial strain. These stressors might lead some individuals to use the internet as a coping mechanism, potentially contributing to problematic internet use if healthy coping strategies are not available.

- **Social Comparison and Self-Esteem:** Social media use, which is often linked to internet addiction, can be fueled by social comparison and feelings of inadequacy, particularly among young adults. Individuals with lower educational attainment might be more susceptible to these negative experiences online, potentially exacerbating social anxiety.
- **Digital Literacy and Critical Thinking Skills:** Individuals with higher educational attainment may have stronger digital literacy and critical thinking skills, which could help them navigate online environments more effectively and avoid the pitfalls of excessive internet use or misinformation that can contribute to anxiety.

Education
114 responses

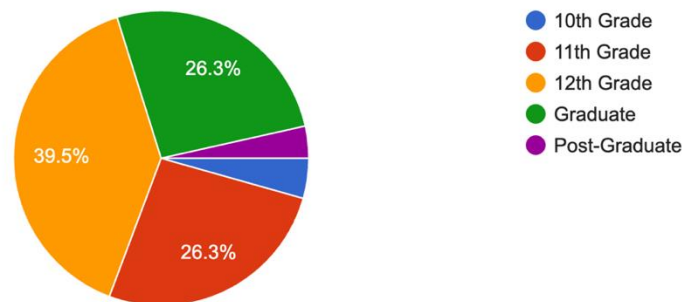


Figure 2: Displaying Education Qualifications of the respondents.

The pie chart shows the distribution of responses to the question "Which platform do you use the most?" among 115 survey participants (Fig. 3). The results show that:

- 43.5% of respondents use Facebook the most.
- 26.1% of respondents use Instagram the most.
- 20.9% of respondents use Snapchat the most.
- 9.6% of respondents use other platforms the most, including Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube, Reddit, and Discord.

Here are some potential connections that we can consider:

- **Facebook's Prevalence:** The significant portion of respondents using Facebook aligns with studies suggesting a possible association between excessive Facebook use and increased susceptibility to both problems. This might be linked to factors such as:
Social comparison: Facebook's emphasis on curated profiles and social circles

can contribute to feelings of envy and inadequacy, potentially exacerbating social anxiety.

Fear of missing out (FOMO): The constant stream of updates and activities on Facebook could create a perception of missing out, leading to compulsive checking and heightened anxiety.

Addiction to validation: Seeking likes and comments on Facebook can become addictive, leading to negative emotions when validation is not obtained.

- **Instagram and Snapchat:** The popularity of these platforms, heavily focused on visual content and sharing fleeting moments, with concerns about appearance and social pressure, potentially contributing to social anxiety. Studies have suggested links between these platforms and body image issues and low self-esteem.
- **Alternative platforms:** The presence of other platforms like Reddit and Discord in the chart suggests that users might be diversifying their social media usage. While these platforms offer different features and communities, their potential impact on internet addiction and social anxiety would require further investigation.

Which platform do you use the most?

115 responses

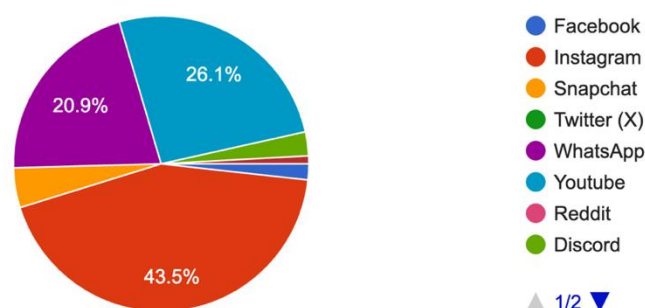


Figure 3: Displaying social media platform distribution among our respondents.

The pie chart below which shows the distribution of responses to the statement "I find myself using my smartphone or computer longer than I planned to." (Fig. 4) Here's what I can see from the chart:

- 33.0% of respondents strongly agree with the statement.
- 31.3% of respondents agree with the statement.
- 20.9% of respondents are neutral.
- 13.9% of respondents disagree with the statement.

- 0.9% of respondents strongly disagree with the statement.

It suggests a prevalence of unplanned smartphone and computer use, which could be with these conditions. Here's a breakdown of potential connections that we found:

- **Internet Addiction:** People who struggle with internet addiction often experience compulsive urges to use the internet, even when they know it's interfering with their daily lives. The high percentage of respondents agreeing with the statement suggests that a significant portion of your sample might be engaging in problematic internet use.
- **Social Anxiety:** Individuals with social anxiety may find online interactions more appealing than face-to-face encounters due to reduced fear of judgment or social awkwardness. This could lead to spending more time online than intended, potentially blurring the lines between planned and unplanned use.
- **Attention Regulation Difficulties:** Both internet addiction and social anxiety can be linked to difficulties with attention regulation and impulse control. This could make it challenging for individuals to stick to their intended screen time limits, contributing to unplanned usage.

I find myself using my smartphone or computer longer than I planned to

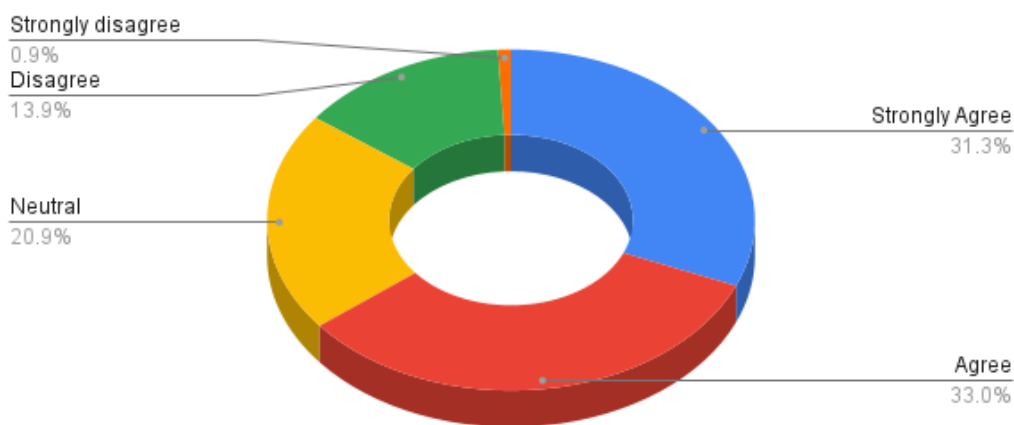


Figure 4: Answer distribution in “I find myself using my smartphone or computer longer than I planned to” between our respondents.

The pie chart's titled "My productivity and attentiveness suffer because of the amount of time I spend online", (Fig. 5) suggests that a significant portion of your respondents believe their internet usage negatively impacts their productivity and attentiveness. We can see that:

- A combined 53.9% of respondents strongly agree or agree with the statement.
- 29.6% of respondents are neutral.
- 16.5% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree with the statement.

Fig 5 confirms concerns from Fig 4. Over half (53.9%) say their online time hurts focus. This aligns with unplanned use (Fig 4). Unplanned browsing eats into work time and social media can be very distracting, both reducing productivity.

My productivity and attentiveness suffers because of the amount of time I spend online

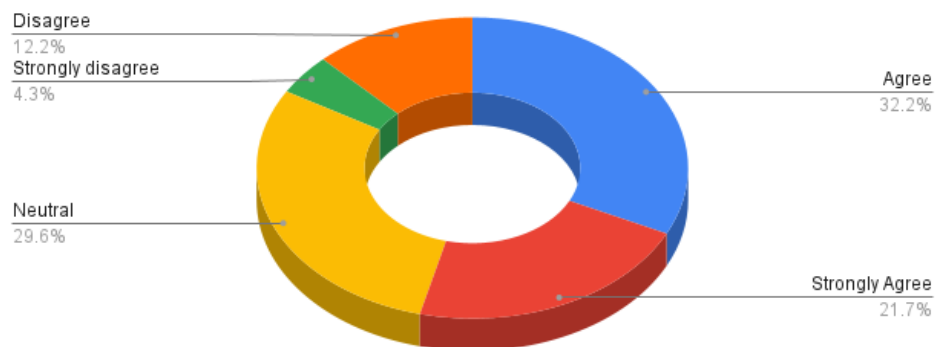


Figure 5: Answer distribution in “My productivity and attentiveness suffer because of the amount of time I spend online” between our respondents.

The pie chart shows the distribution of responses to the statement "I check my social media, text messages, or emails first thing after waking up" (Fig. 6) among 115 survey participants. The results show that:

- 27.8% of respondents strongly agree with the statement.
- 31.3% of respondents agree with the statement.
- 19.1% of respondents are neutral.
- 15.7% of respondents disagree with the statement.
- 6.1% of respondents strongly disagree with the statement.

Here are some possible connections to consider:

- **Attention seeking and validation:** Checking social media or messages first thing in the morning could be a way for individuals to seek attention, validation, or a sense of connection, especially for those who struggle with social anxiety or low self-esteem.

The immediate gratification received from likes, comments, or messages might reinforce this behavior.

- ***Fear of missing out (FOMO):*** The constant influx of information and updates on social media can create a fear of missing out (FOMO), prompting individuals to check their accounts frequently to stay in the loop. This can be particularly pronounced for those with anxiety or social isolation, who might rely heavily on online interactions.
- ***Sleep disruption and cognitive impairment:*** Checking devices first thing in the morning can disrupt sleep patterns and contribute to feelings of grogginess and difficulty concentrating. This impaired cognitive state can worsen anxiety symptoms and make it harder to resist compulsive internet use.
- ***Habitual behavior:*** Checking social media or messages upon waking up might become a habitual behavior, regardless of the initial motivation. This can be especially true for individuals with addictive tendencies, who may struggle to break the cycle even if they recognize the negative consequences.

I check my social media, text messages, or emails first thing after waking up

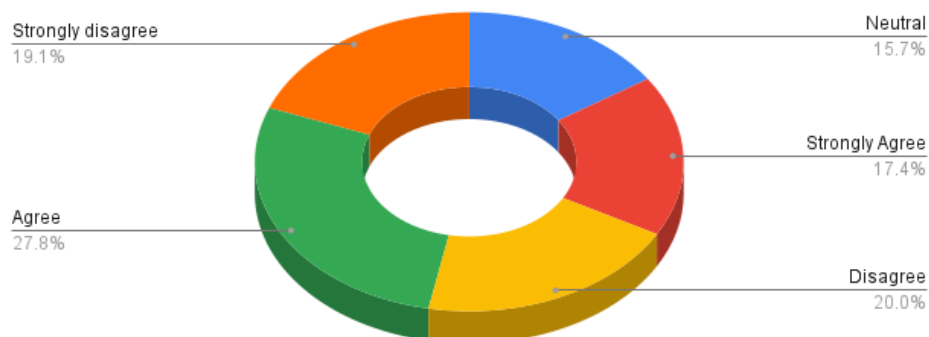


Figure 6: Answer distribution in “I check my social media, text messages, or emails first thing after waking up” between our respondents.

The pie chart shows the distribution of responses to the statement "I use the internet to escape from my real life." (Fig 7) Here's what I can see from the chart:

- 29.1% of respondents strongly agree with the statement.
- 22.6% of respondents agree with the statement.
- 26.1% of respondents are neutral.

- 14.8% of respondents disagree with the statement.
- 7.4% of respondents strongly disagree with the statement.

Here's a breakdown of potential connections:

- **Internet Addiction:** People who struggle with internet addiction often experience compulsive urges to use the internet, even when it's a form of escape from negative emotions or real-life problems. The high percentage of respondents agreeing with the statement suggests that a portion of your sample might be using the internet in a way that could be problematic.
- **Social Anxiety:** Individuals with social anxiety may find the online world more appealing than face-to-face interactions due to reduced fear of judgment or social awkwardness. While this can provide temporary relief, it might lead to excessive internet use as a primary coping mechanism, potentially fueling social anxiety in the long run.
- **Avoidance and Coping Mechanisms:** Using the internet to escape can be a sign of avoiding difficult emotions or situations in real life. This avoidance, if unhealthy, can contribute to various mental health concerns, including anxiety and depression. Additionally, if internet use becomes the primary coping mechanism, it could lead to dependence and addiction.

I use the internet to escape from my real life

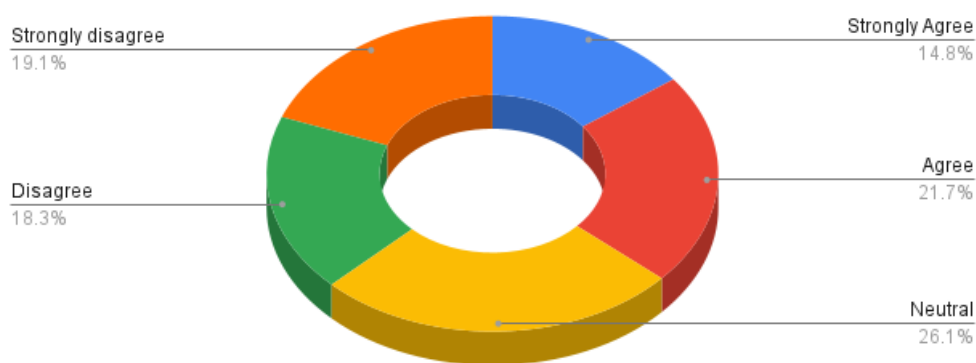


Figure 7: Answer distribution in “I use the internet to escape from my real life” between our respondents.

While this analysis has shed light on potential connections between specific internet usage patterns and mental health concerns like internet addiction and social anxiety, it's crucial to acknowledge that I've merely scratched the surface. The extensive survey I conducted unveiled a treasure trove of data, brimming with opportunities for further exploration. This analysis represents a single thread woven into the intricate tapestry of my research, highlighting just a few potential connections among many.

Considering the sheer breadth of the questionnaire. Each question acts as a doorway to a deeper understanding of how the internet permeates our lives, shaping our thoughts, behaviors, and emotional well-being. For instance, while we've explored the possible link between compulsive internet use and escaping real-life problems, further analysis could delve into the specific types of problems individuals seek to avoid online. Are they primarily social anxieties, academic pressures, or deeper emotional struggles? Moreover, examining the demographics of respondents who endorse this behavior could reveal fascinating insights into age-related coping mechanisms or cultural differences in internet use.

Similarly, the section on productivity and attention offers fertile ground for further exploration. I've touched upon the potential negative impact of excessive internet use on these facets of daily functioning, but the questionnaire undoubtedly delves deeper. Does the impact vary depending on the type of online activity? Do specific platforms or content types prove more distracting than others? Additionally, understanding the motivations behind such internet usage could be crucial. Are individuals simply seeking entertainment, or are they driven by an underlying need for connection or validation? These are just a few examples of intriguing questions waiting to be addressed within the data you've collected.

The true power of your research lies in its scope and depth. This initial analysis has provided a valuable starting point, but the journey of discovery is far from over. By delving deeper into the data, employing advanced statistical techniques, and considering various theoretical frameworks, you can unlock a wealth of knowledge about the multifaceted relationship between humans and the ever-evolving digital landscape. The questionnaire is not just a questionnaire; it's a roadmap to a deeper understanding of ourselves and the intricate ways the internet shapes our lives. By embarking on this journey of exploration, you can contribute significantly to the growing body of knowledge on this vital and ever-evolving topic.

DISCUSSION

Our recent study paints a concerning picture: a significant portion of young adults' report struggling with concentration due to what appears to be internet addiction. This finding

resonates deeply with anecdotal observations and personal experiences, suggesting a potential crisis brewing in the age of hyperconnectivity. While this study provides valuable insights, it also opens the door to a multitude of further questions that demand closer examination.

The immediate concern is the impact of internet addiction on young adults' ability to focus on tasks, studies, and even daily routines. Our fast-paced digital world bombards us with constant stimuli, notifications, and information streams, demanding our attention in a multitude of directions. This fragmented attention landscape can make sustained concentration on a single task feel increasingly challenging. As our study suggests, young adults, still navigating the complexities of life and academic demands, seem particularly vulnerable to this struggle.

However, attributing concentration difficulties solely to internet addiction would be simplistic. The relationship between our digital habits and cognitive function is far more nuanced. Several factors potentially contribute to the foggy mindscape observed among young adults.

- ***Social Comparison and the FOMO Factor:*** Social media platforms, often portraying carefully curated and idealized realities, can fuel feelings of inadequacy and "fear of missing out" (FOMO). This constant comparison can trigger anxiety and a need for validation, leading individuals to compulsively check their devices, further hindering their ability to focus on other tasks.
- ***Information Overload and Cognitive Fatigue:*** The sheer volume of information readily available online can be overwhelming. Constantly switching between tasks, consuming diverse content, and processing information overload can lead to cognitive fatigue, making it difficult to concentrate on anything deeply.
- ***Dopamine Addiction and Reward Reinforcement:*** Social media platforms and other online activities are designed to be highly engaging, triggering dopamine release in the brain, creating a cycle of seeking instant gratification and rewards. This can make focusing on less stimulating but essential tasks seem less compelling, leading to procrastination and concentration difficulties.
- ***Underlying Mental Health Conditions:*** Internet addiction and concentration issues may sometimes be symptoms of deeper mental health concerns like anxiety, depression, or ADHD. Addressing these underlying conditions might be crucial for improving concentration and reducing dependence on the internet.
- ***Individual Differences and Learning Styles:*** Not everyone is equally susceptible to the distractions of the digital world. Individual differences in personality, learning

styles, and coping mechanisms play a significant role in how individuals manage their online habits and their impact on concentration.

Further research is critical to untangling these complex threads and gaining a deeper understanding of the link between internet addiction and concentration issues in young adults. Here are some key areas for further exploration:

- ***Longitudinal Studies:*** Examining the long-term effects of internet use on cognitive function and academic performance can provide valuable insights into the potential consequences of problematic internet habits.
- ***Neuroimaging Studies:*** Investigating the brain's response to different types of online stimuli and its impact on attention networks can offer a deeper understanding of the neurological mechanisms at play.
- ***Personalized Interventions:*** Developing interventions tailored to individual learning styles, personality traits, and underlying motivations for internet use can maximize their effectiveness in promoting healthy digital habits and improved concentration.
- ***Mental Health Integration:*** Collaborating with mental health professionals can explore the potential connections between internet addiction, concentration issues, and underlying mental health conditions to develop holistic treatment approaches.
- ***Cultural and Socioeconomic Factors:*** Considering the influence of cultural norms, socioeconomic disparities, and access to technology can provide a more nuanced understanding of how these issues manifest differently across diverse populations.

By delving deeper into these areas, we can move beyond simply stating the problem and begin to craft solutions. Through collaborative research, tailored interventions, and a deeper understanding of the individual and societal factors involved, we can empower young adults to navigate the digital world more consciously, fostering focused minds and fulfilling lives in the age of information overload.

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