

# RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SENSATION SEEKING AND INTERNET USE AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to explore the relationship between sensation seeking and level of Internet use. This study is a quantitative research and a convenient sampling method as used to select 313 male and female international students in a public university in Malaysia. In this study, three questionnaires were used including Demographic Questionnaire, Sensation Seeking Scale, and Internet Addiction Test. Descriptive analyses and Pearson correlation was used to explore the relationship between level of Internet use and sensation seeking in participants. The results showed that there is significant positive relationship between sensation seeking and level of Internet use among students.

**Keywords:** *Sensation Seeking, Internet Use, International Students*

## INTRODUCTION

Though the Internet has contributed towards the betterment of people's lives, excessive Internet use is said to have caused serious hurt in serious areas such as social, academic, career, and physical wellbeing (Anderson, 2001; Grohol, 1997). Hence overuse of the Internet and its consequences are increasingly becoming an area of concern, debate and research.

Excessive use of Internet is an increasingly negative phenomena of youth online activities. It is described by several expressions like 'problematic Internet use', 'pathological Internet use', 'computer addiction', 'compulsive Internet use', 'Internet dependence', and 'net addiction' (Shaffer, 2002; Young, 1999; Caplan, 2002; Davis, 2001). The main characteristics of problematic Internet use are unrestrained motivation and uncommon actions that lead to distress or disorder (Rosenberg & Feder, 2014).

Problematic Internet use refers to Internet usage to elude negative sentiments, persistent use the Internet despite the desire to cease usage, having disagreeable emotions when unable to surf the Internet, or engaging in recurring thoughts about the Internet as well as

facing other contrast or even self-conflicts following Internet use (Van der Aa *et al.*, 2008). There is proof that problematic Internet use has negative implications for education (a drop-in grades), personal relationships (hiding extreme Parents use the Internet), physical well-being (Lack of sleep after long hours of use of the Internet), psychological well-being (depression), and economics (Price of Internet accumulated costs) (Chou, Condron, & Belland, 2005; Kraut *et al.*, 1998). As noted by Kandell (1998), applications involving interactive communication such as online messaging, texting, email and online games have been related to inappropriate use of the Internet by young people.

Kandell (1998) defines excessive Internet use as encompassing any type of action when logged on to the Internet. He described Internet addiction as "a psychological dependence on the Internet and is characterized by a) an increasing investment of resources on Internet-related activities, b) unpleasant feelings when off-line, c) an increasing tolerance to the effects of being on-line, and d) denial of the problematic behaviors". Basically, Internet use becomes a disorder when it intrudes into significant aspects of one's life, such as crucial relationships, work, school, mental

health, or physical health (Holmes, 2006).

The biggest growth in Internet usage has been in homes and academic institutions. Students organize their own chat rooms and e-mail lists to hold study groups or share classmates' input at assignments. Internet access is easily available in university hostels, attracting potential students who consider the Internet as a critical learning resource (Lavin, Marvin, McLarney, Nola, & Scott, 1999).

**Sensation Seeking.** Sensation seeking is a biological personal trait. According to Zuckerman (1994) sensation seeking is "a trait defined by the seeking of varied, novel and complex experiences, and the willingness to take physical, social, legal and financial risks for the sake of such experience". As shown by the (Michel *et al.*, 1999), original design Theory from Zuckerman is premised upon the idea of "Optimal Stimulation Level", where the sensation seekers continue to seek pleasure to a high degree.

The current position of sensation seeking is probably largely unexplored in Internet usage. The aim of this study is, therefore, to help close this gap in the knowledge base on the relation between the search for sensation and Internet use level. and it is therefore important and interesting to explore the extent of sensation seeking and the use of the Internet between students.

### **Problem Statement**

The significant impact of electronic communication has been observed in every society. The younger generation considers Internet activity as a form of social communication and an essential tool for learning, as the Internet was introduced in their lives at a very young age (Tsai & Lin, 2001). Educational institutions use the Internet as a super highway to high technology and innovativeness. Students attempt to develop their personal identities and interpersonal relationships or even intimacy. They explore the vast social network through the Internet to satisfy their personal needs (Tsai & Lin, 2001).

Some researchers found that many international students preferred to use the Internet as the primary means for maintaining interpersonal relationships, especially with family and friends, because it is cheap, easy, and fast (Chen, 2004).

Palmgreen, Donohew, Lorch, Hoyle, and Stephenson (2001) reported that high rather than small sensation seekers to search for novel experiences. Sensation-seeking was predictive of young people's risk taking behavior (Donohew *et al.*, 1999). For example, some individuals with high level of sensation seeking search for arousing content on the Internet, such as pornography, games, music, and communication in the form of Internet chat and instant messages to fulfill a particular need (Weisskirch & Murphy, 2004). They are typically seeking out materials that will provide an optimal level of arousal (Weiddkrich & Murphy, 2004).

Lin (2001) explained that pathological Internet users are heterogeneous. They act and perceive the Internet differently, and are more sensation seeking or uninhibited than normal users. Lin and Tsai (2002) reported that the score of total sensation seeking and uninhibition of Taiwanese Internet-dependent adolescents was higher than that for the Internet non-dependents. In another study, Weisskirch and Murphy (2003) indicated that greater sensation seeking was related to obtaining sex-oriented materials from the Internet. More specifically, the highest degree of sensation seeking was associated with getting sex-oriented materials, downloading or playing music, playing games, and chatting, which are indicative of the intense sensation seeking activities provided by the Internet.

The function of sensation seeking is largely unexplored in Internet usage. The aim of this study is, therefore, to help close this gap in the knowledge base regarding the relation between SS and Internet use level. In comparison, this report will explore the relationship between gender and level of Internet use in international students to identify this relationship in Malaysia context. Addressing these issues is key not only to understanding the etiology of problematic level of Internet use but also to developing effective intervention programs

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Study Design**

To meet the aim of this research, a quantitative method was chosen. Researcher uses correlational research in order to explore the relationships between variables (Lomax & Li, 2013). Thus, correlational research is fit for this research because the goal of this research is to explore the relationship between sensation-seeking and

the level of Internet use among Malaysian university students. In this research, questionnaire is used to collect information and then analyze the collected information to draw a conclusion (Devin, 2015).

### Participants and Sampling Method

The target population for this study is international students in University of Malaya. The sampling method that proposed to use in this research is convenient sampling method and 313 students participated in this study. The approval for this study was obtained from UCSI University.

The inclusion criteria of participant are male and female students who are from 18 to 28 years old and study at a public university in Kuala Lumpur (University of Malaya), Malaysia. In this study, I consider University of Malaya for data collection because it has huge number of international students. The reason to consider International students is that according to the university requirement, the students must be in very good level of English language. Therefore, they won't face any difficulty in understanding and answering research questionnaires. According to the aim of study, which is studying level of Internet use, the participants must be Internet users. So, the exclusion criteria were who do not use Internet.

### Instruments

In this study three questionnaires will be used, which are Demographic Questionnaire, Sensation Seeking Scale, and Internet Addiction Test.

Demographic Questionnaire. The questionnaire comprises questions about age, class, marital status, nationality, major and the faculty of study, hours per day that the participant uses the Internet, the person has been using the Internet for a long time.

Sensation Seeking Scale (SSS, Form V). Zuckerman's Sensation Seeking scales consist of 40 items. The SSS has four factors with ten items each, namely: (1) Thrill and adventure seeking, (2) Experience seeking, (3) Disinhibition, and (4) Boredom susceptibility. One score was given for each item chosen corresponding to response format. Form V of the SSS was developed based on factor analyses of form IV using a large heterogeneous sample of English twins of both sexes (Zuckerman, 1979).

Internet Addiction Test (IAT). Young's (1998) Internet Addiction Test (IAT) was used toward measure the participants' level of Internet use. The IAT consists of 20 items. As proposed by Young, cut-off grades for the IAT Classify Internet users due to their addictive actions (Young, 1998). In the Analysis, the similar cut-off grades are: Average users (scores 20 to 39): Regular internet users who can occasionally use the web for a bit but have full control over their Internet use; Over users (scores 40 to 69): Many who encounter regular or occasional problems caused by Internet use; Addictive users (scores 70 to 100): Those with noteworthy problems caused by Internet usage (Yang *et al.*, 2005).

### RESULTS

In this study the demographic profile included age, gender, marital status and nationality. Three hundred and thirteen students from the selected university who completed the questionnaires were total participants. At the time of the study data collection the age of the participants was measured in years. Participant average rates were 25.3 years old (SD = 2.43), with ages ranging from 18 to 28 years old. The number and the percentage valid of 219 (70%) were male students, and 94 (30%) was female students. As to their marital status, 207 (66.1%) was single, 102 (32.6%) was married, four (1.3%) was divorced.

To explore the percentage of each group among participants, we use the cut-off scores which are recommended by Young (1998) to classify Internet users to Average Users who can often use the web for a little while but have enough control over their Internet use, over users those facing irregular or recurrent difficulties caused by Internet usage, and Addictive users those having substantial difficulties produced by Internet usage. Classification of the 313 respondents by their total IAT scores yielded a group of 183 average users, a group of 103 over users, and a small group of 27 Internet addicts.

The outcomes of Pearson Correlation analysis displayed a significant and positive correlation between sensation seeking and Internet use ( $r = .814, p < .001$ ) with strong correlation. The correlation is positive; suggests that if the level of sensation seeking increases the level of internet use would also increase. In another term, if the individual is seeking a higher degree of sensation, he is spending more on Internet using, and if the individual is

seeking a lower degree of sensation, he spends less on Internet usage. Table 1 shows the statistics of Pearson Test for the correlation between sensation seeking and Internet use in participants of the study.

**Table 1: Pearson Correlation between Sensation Seeking and Internet use (N= 313)**

	Internet Use	
	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2_tailed)
Sensation Seeking	0.814**	0.000

\*\**p* < .01

**DISCUSSION**

Taking into account research results, similar findings have previously been reported regarding the Internet use among student population (Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2000). The finding of this study is same with the previous findings, which mentioned the prevalence statistics of Internet addiction among youth vary widely from 2% (Johansson & Götestam, 2004) to 20% (Ha *et al.*, 2006) across cultures and societies.

This result is also in line with earlier reports that stated a percentage of university students who use the Internet are considered internet dependent. For example, in a study by Scherer (1997) results showed that 13% of students who participated in the study were categorized as Internet dependent users. Moreover, in another studies Moayedfar, Habibpoor-Gatabi, and Ganji (2007) and Dargahi and Razavi (2006) found that approximately 30% of Internet users have high level of Internet use. This outcome is constant with the results of a latest report by Gogi and Rayala (2018) that mentioned 65%, 22%, 1% is the prevalence of mild, moderate, and severe addiction in Internet use among university students in their sample of research.

The results showed that the Significant relationship between total sensation finding score and Internet use was found. It means that by increasing the sensation seeking score the internet usage level is also increasing. It means that those who met the criteria for Internet addiction, scored higher on overall sensation seeking.

Consistently, Lin and Tsai (2002) It has been recorded that internet-based youth scored significantly higher in terms of sensation seeking. This result also supports earlier research by Velezmoro, Lacefield and Robert (2010), that disinhibition and boredom susceptibility which are items in sensation seeking are related with

Internet misapplication, for non-sexual purposes; however, they did not discover any substantive relationship between complete sensation seeking and sexual or non-sexual harassment on the Internet (Chen *et al.*, 2018).

According to Gogi and Rayala (2018) excessive Internet use is related to participants' personality traits which are prone for addiction. Extreme time over a device and overuse of the network may be disadvantageous toward numerous characteristics of their lives, including the social, practical, physical and mental aspects, the elimination of other critical urgencies in the process, the possibility of a number of diseases and even deaths. With the remaining advances in computer and Internet capacity and connectivity this problem is likely to become prevalent slowly (Gogi & Rayala, 2018).

Even though some investigators have recommended that Individuals with better internet access are more likely to grow into a high Internet usage status (Davis, Smith, Rodrigue, & Pulvers, 1999) further research is however required to conclude what influences may cause those to become dependent to the Internet.

As it is showed in different researches (Kim, Namkoong, Ku, & Kim, 2008; Gogi & Rayala, 2018) Intense and unregulated use of the Internet is significantly linked to neuroticism and not significantly linked to extraversion, acceptability and openness to experience in this research. Individuals who score high on conscience control their impulses and are disciplined, hard-working and struggling to achieve goals. Conversely, careless personalities are predisposed towards behave thoughtlessly, actuality confused, and tend to postpone responsibilities. Those who score high on acceptability tend to be sincere, trustworthy and sociable with others. Unpleasant persons, instead, are fewer enjoyable to others, quarrelsome, unhelpful, and severe displeasing personalities may go to the Internet as a way to gratify their wants for antagonism. Moreover, in a study by Mazaheri Nejadfard and Hosseinsabet (2017) the result showed that sensation seeking and attachment styles were directly connected to high level of Internet use. In the meantime, sensation seeking expected high level of Internet use indirectly.

The findings of the study, which suggested the need for sensation, are consistent with the high level of Internet usage, are in line with the conclusions of (Ko *et al.*, 2006)



who has demonstrated a high level of Internet usage is linked to the degree of sensation pursued. The assumption can be understood in this mode that Internet explorations simplify exploration and support in discovering stimulating and new facts for sensation seeking individuals who simply get tired of recurrence, foreseeable practices and everyday life matters and are novel and varied involvements. Those persons who are more courageous and are risk taker than others find it truly stimulating and wonderful to dealings with other individuals through Internet and its communication methods. Therefore, they have more tendencies to determine or discover strange stuffs over the use of Internet. These persons perhaps realize that Internet is one of the best means to gratify their pleasure dramatically (Mazaheri Nejadfard & Hosseinsabet, 2017).

As Gogi and Rayala (2018) stated, the outcomes of the current study are extraversion and the propensity of a person to invest time in social interactions, to cultivate positive emotions and group engagement, extrovert people as web users do not treat online or cyber interactions as social support.

### LIMITATIONS

This study has different limitations. First of all, due to its cross-sectional design the study faces the problem of not being able to make statements about causal relations between the variables (Bradley & Matsukis, 2000). It is not clear whether sensation seeking the quest for an inappropriate use of the Internet or how inappropriate use of the Internet leads to a high degree of sensation hunting.

Furthermore, the results of this research may be difficult to generalize to the full the spectrum of people with inappropriate usage of the Internet, as they originate from foreign students at the University of Malaya. Such groups of students may be different from older people in their use of the Internet. In addition, the current research used convenience sampling, which decreased the overall results of the study.

Besides, the researcher used Likert-scale self-report questionnaires which depend on subjective interpretations of the participants and may be biased by considerations of social desirability. The low level of internet usage reported by participants may be due to their perception that these were bad features or because they suspected the study's purpose, although

they were assured of anonymity. While sensation seeking was substantially associated with overuse of the Internet, it was not possible to explain the majority of variation in overuse of the Internet.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Future studies with larger and different community samples are required to verify that the researcher's findings are valid and generalizable to the larger population of Internet user. So the validity of the conclusions drawn up to this point would certainly be increased with a larger and various sample. It is recommended that a culturally demographically diverse and bigger sample would be helpful for use in upcoming studies. Furthermore, additional questionnaire explorations are essential to acquire a more delicate image about high level of Internet use. Also, a longitudinal design would be helpful in the determination of the direction of causality between sensation seeking and excessive Internet use by examining changes over time.

Future research should investigate the role of other variables that might increase understanding of these phenomena. Whatever the conceptualization of this problem behavior, the findings clearly indicate that those categorized as Internet addicts may need help in enhancing their psychological functioning. This study did not look at the purpose of Internet-related activities. Perhaps different type of students (local/International), different gender (male/female) and different program (undergraduate/master/PhD) and as well as sensation seeking personalities, use the Internet for different purpose. Future research should look more closely at type of Internet use when exploring motivation for excessive Internet use. Such research might also identify the online actions and types of Internet use that cause to high level of Internet use. Therefore, we need better understanding of how sensation seekers Internet addict students actually use the Internet, how they apply the information found and how the Internet helps them.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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