
Certificate in CyberPsychology

Internet Addiction and Problematic Internet Use

Addiction, Internet

Related terms: Problematic Internet Use, Compulsive Online Behavior

A chronic, uncontrolled pattern of online activity that interferes with daily responsibilities, relationships, and wellbeing. Individuals may spend increasing amounts of time on social media, gaming, or browsing despite negative consequences. Assessment tools such as the Internet Addiction Test (IAT) help quantify severity. Practical application includes integrating screening into primary-care visits. Challenges involve distinguishing high engagement from true addiction, especially in cultures where extensive online work is normative.

Compulsive Use, Online

Related terms: Impulse Control Disorder, Habitual Browsing

A repetitive urge to check or interact with internet services that persists even when the user is aware of the lack of benefit. Typical triggers include notifications, boredom, or stress. Example: a student repeatedly opens a messaging app during lectures, missing critical information. Interventions often employ cue-exposure therapy to break the stimulus-response loop. The main challenge is the ubiquity of triggers embedded in everyday devices.

Digital Detox

Related terms: Technology Break, Screen-Time Reduction

A planned period of abstaining from or limiting digital devices to restore mental balance and reduce dependency. Common formats include weekend retreats or daily "no-phone" hours. Practically, clinicians may prescribe a 48-hour detox as part of a treatment plan, monitoring mood changes. The difficulty lies in maintaining benefits after the detox ends, as many occupational demands require constant connectivity.

Excessive Use, Definition

Related terms: Overuse, Time-Displacement

Quantitative threshold where daily internet activity surpasses normal functional limits, often measured in hours per day or proportion of waking time. For instance, spending more than six hours online daily may signal risk. This metric guides early-intervention programs in schools. However, variability in individual schedules makes a universal cutoff problematic.

FOMO (Fear of Missing Out)

Related terms: Social Anxiety, Continuous Checking

An emotional response driving individuals to remain constantly connected to avoid feeling excluded. It fuels frequent scrolling through feeds and instant messaging. Example: a teenager feels compelled to view every story posted by peers. Therapeutic approaches target underlying anxiety through cognitive restructuring.

The challenge is that platforms are designed to amplify FOMO through algorithmic content delivery.

Griffiths' Components Model

Related terms: Six Core Components, Behavioral Addiction Framework

A theoretical model describing addiction through six elements: salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse. Applied to internet use, each component helps clinicians assess severity. For example, tolerance may manifest as needing longer gaming sessions to achieve satisfaction. Critics argue the model may oversimplify complex psychosocial factors influencing online behavior.

Habituation, Online

Related terms: Desensitization, Neuroadaptation

The process by which repeated exposure to digital stimuli reduces emotional response, leading users to seek stronger or more novel content. Gamers often chase higher scores or rare items to regain excitement. Practically, habit-breaking strategies incorporate novelty reduction, such as limiting app notifications. Challenges include the rapid evolution of online content which constantly resets habituation cycles.

Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD)

Related terms: Gaming Addiction, DSM-5 Condition

A recognized condition in the DSM-5 characterized by persistent and recurrent gaming behavior causing impairment. Diagnostic criteria include preoccupation, withdrawal symptoms, and loss of other interests. Example: an adult neglects work deadlines due to nightly MMORPG sessions. Treatment may involve structured gaming schedules and family therapy. Differentiating IGD from high-skill professional gaming remains a diagnostic hurdle.

Jet Lag, Digital

Related terms: Circadian Disruption, Sleep Deprivation

A form of circadian rhythm disturbance caused by late-night screen exposure, leading to difficulty falling asleep and daytime fatigue. Blue-light emission from devices suppresses melatonin, mimicking jet-lag symptoms. Clinicians often advise "night-mode" settings and bedtime routines without screens. The challenge is that many users find it hard to disconnect due to work or social expectations.

Keyword Trigger

Related terms: Prompt Cue, Notification Cue

Specific words or icons that prompt an automatic urge to engage with an online platform, such as the "ping" sound of a message. These triggers reinforce compulsive checking behavior. Example: hearing a phone vibration leads to immediate unlocking. Intervention may involve removing audible cues or customizing silent modes. The difficulty lies in the subtlety of visual cues that still activate the habit loop.

Latency Period

Related terms: Onset Delay, Incubation Phase

The time interval between initial high-frequency internet exposure and the emergence of addictive

symptoms. Research shows latency can range from weeks to months, depending on personality traits and content type. Early detection programs in schools aim to identify at-risk students during this window. However, inconsistent reporting of usage patterns hampers accurate latency measurement.

Maladaptive Coping

Related terms: Emotion Regulation, Escape Behavior

Using internet activities to avoid negative emotions rather than confronting them directly. Common examples include binge-watching series after a stressful day. Therapy focuses on building healthier coping mechanisms such as mindfulness. The challenge is that online escapism is socially accepted, making it harder for individuals to recognize its maladaptive nature.

Neuroplasticity, Online

Related terms: Brain Adaptation, Reward Pathways

The brain's ability to reorganize its structure in response to repeated internet stimuli, strengthening reward circuits associated with likes, shares, and achievements. This can increase susceptibility to addiction. Functional imaging studies reveal heightened activity in the nucleus accumbens during gaming. Practical implication includes designing "brain-training" exercises to counteract over-activation. Ethical concerns arise when platforms exploit neuroplastic changes for profit.

Online Social Comparison

Related terms: Upward Comparison, Self-Esteem Impact

Evaluating one's own life against curated online portrayals, often leading to feelings of inadequacy. For instance, scrolling through vacation photos may trigger envy. Clinicians may use cognitive-behavioral techniques to reframe comparison thoughts. A major obstacle is the algorithmic amplification of aspirational content, which fuels the comparison cycle.

Problematic Internet Use (PIU)

Related terms: Internet Addiction, Compulsive Online Behavior

A broader term encompassing any excessive or maladaptive internet activity that impairs personal, academic, or occupational functioning. It includes gaming, social media, shopping, and pornography. Standardized questionnaires like the PIU Scale assess frequency, distress, and functional impact. Intervention plans are often multimodal, combining psychoeducation, time-management training, and family involvement. The primary challenge is its overlap with normal high-usage patterns in the digital age.

Quantitative Monitoring

Related terms: Screen-Time Tracking, Usage Analytics

The systematic recording of time spent on devices using built-in or third-party applications. Data provide objective insight into usage patterns, supporting goal-setting in therapy. Example: a client logs 4 hours of social media daily; the therapist helps reduce this to 2 hours. Limitations include privacy concerns and potential for data manipulation by users.

Reward Sensitivity

Related terms: Positive Reinforcement, Dopamine Response

Individual differences in how strongly a person reacts to rewarding stimuli, influencing susceptibility to internet addiction. High reward sensitivity may drive frequent checking of “likes” or achievement unlocks. Assessments often involve personality inventories. Tailored interventions may focus on alternative rewarding activities (e.g., sports). The challenge is that reward pathways are deeply ingrained, making change gradual.

Self-Regulation Failure

Related terms: Executive Dysfunction, Impulse Control

Inability to consciously limit internet engagement despite intentions to do so. This manifests as repeatedly overriding planned usage limits. Mindfulness-based strategies aim to strengthen self-monitoring. However, pervasive device accessibility constantly tests self-regulation, often leading to relapse.

Time-Displacement Theory

Related terms: Activity Substitution, Opportunity Cost

A conceptual model suggesting that time spent online displaces offline activities such as exercise, face-to-face interaction, or sleep. Empirical studies link high screen time with reduced physical activity levels. Practically, clinicians may conduct activity-budget worksheets to visualize displacement. Critics argue that not all displaced activities are inherently beneficial, complicating policy recommendations.

Ubiquitous Connectivity

Related terms: Always-On Culture, Networked Society

The societal norm of constant internet access via smartphones, wearables, and IoT devices. This environment lowers barriers to compulsive use and normalizes prolonged engagement. Educational programs address the cultural dimension by promoting “digital etiquette” that includes offline periods. Counteracting ubiquity requires systemic changes, such as corporate policies limiting after-hours email.

Virtual Identity

Related terms: Avatar, Online Persona

The curated self-presentation adopted on digital platforms, often idealized or exaggerated. Excessive investment in a virtual identity can fuel PIU as users strive to maintain status. Example: a teenager spends hours editing profile pictures to gain follower approval. Therapeutic work may involve aligning online and offline self-concepts. The difficulty lies in the rewarding feedback loops that reinforce identity maintenance.

Withdrawal Symptoms

Related terms: Craving, Negative Affect

Emotional or physiological discomfort experienced when access to the internet is restricted. Symptoms include irritability, anxiety, restlessness, and mood swings. A student who cannot log into a gaming server may report heightened agitation. Clinical management includes gradual reduction schedules and coping-skill training. Distinguishing withdrawal from ordinary disappointment requires careful assessment.

e-Commerce Impulsivity

Related terms: Online Shopping Addiction, Spending Sprees

Compulsive purchasing behavior facilitated by one-click buying, personalized recommendations, and flash sales. Example: a user repeatedly buys limited-edition items during midnight releases. Interventions may involve budgeting tools and “cool-off” periods before checkout. The challenge is the seamless integration of payment systems that reduce friction, making impulse control harder.

youth-centric Design

Related terms: Gamification, Engagement Hooks

Design strategies that specifically target younger demographics through bright colors, rewards, and social validation features. Such designs can accelerate PIU in adolescents. Educators can teach digital literacy that critiques persuasive design. Regulation faces pushback from industry stakeholders citing innovation and free choice.

Zero-Day Limit

Related terms: Daily Cap, Usage Threshold

A self-imposed or program-enforced limit that cuts off access after a predetermined amount of daily screen time. Tools like parental-control apps implement zero-day limits to prevent overuse. While effective for some, users may circumvent limits by switching devices, highlighting the need for comprehensive family strategies.

Adaptive Coping Strategies

Related terms: Problem-Focused Coping, Emotion Regulation

Healthy alternatives to internet overuse, such as physical exercise, creative hobbies, and face-to-face socialization. Teaching clients to replace compulsive scrolling with journaling can reduce reliance on digital stimuli. Implementation requires collaborative goal-setting and monitoring. Barriers include limited access to alternative activities in certain communities.

Behavioural Conditioning

Related terms: Classical Conditioning, Operant Conditioning

The process by which repeated pairing of internet cues (e.g., notification sound) with rewarding outcomes strengthens the habit loop. Example: hearing a “ding” consistently leads to dopamine release when checking a message. Intervention may involve extinguishing the conditioned response by removing the cue. The difficulty lies in the pervasiveness of subtle cues across multiple platforms.

Compulsive Online Shopping

Related terms: Shopping Addiction, Financial Distress

An uncontrollable urge to purchase items online despite lack of need or financial means. Symptoms include frequent browsing, secretive buying, and remorse after purchases. Cognitive-behavioral therapy focuses on identifying triggers and restructuring purchase-related thoughts. Legal ramifications may arise when fraudulent credit use occurs, complicating treatment.

Disordered Gaming

Related terms: Internet Gaming Disorder, Play Addiction

A pattern of gaming that leads to impaired social, academic, or occupational functioning. The disorder often co-occurs with mood disorders and ADHD. Assessment may include game-time logs and functional impairment scales. Treatment can involve scheduled gaming blocks, parental monitoring, and skill-building for real-world responsibilities. The challenge is differentiating passionate hobby from pathology.

Escalation Tolerance

Related terms: Habituation, Increasing Dose

The need for progressively longer or more intense internet sessions to achieve the same level of satisfaction. Gamers may seek higher-level raids; social media users may scroll deeper feeds. Therapists monitor escalation patterns as early warning signs. Counteracting tolerance often requires introducing non-digital rewarding activities.

Feedback Loop

Related terms: Reinforcement Cycle, Algorithmic Reward

A system where user actions generate immediate feedback (likes, points) that encourages repeat behavior, creating a self-sustaining cycle. Platforms design these loops to maximize engagement. Intervention strategies include awareness training about the loop's mechanics. Breaking the loop demands intentional disengagement, which many find difficult due to the loop's persuasive design.

Gratification Delay

Related terms: Delayed Reward, Patience Training

The ability to postpone immediate online gratification in favor of longer-term goals. Low delay tolerance predicts higher PIU risk. Exercises such as "no-phone" intervals help strengthen this skill. The main obstacle is the constant availability of instant rewards, which undermine patience development.

Hyperconnectivity

Related terms: Network Saturation, Always-On State

The condition of being continuously linked to multiple digital networks, leading to information overload and reduced attention span. Example: a professional receives work emails, social notifications, and messaging alerts simultaneously. Mindfulness practices and notification silencing are practical countermeasures. However, organizational expectations often reinforce hyperconnectivity, creating systemic resistance.

Identity Diffusion

Related terms: Self-Concept Fragmentation, Online Persona Conflict

When an individual's sense of self becomes fragmented due to conflicting offline and online identities, potentially increasing reliance on digital validation. Therapeutic work explores underlying insecurities and promotes authentic self-expression. The challenge is that many users find safety in the anonymity of online spaces, making integration difficult.

Judgmental Bias

Related terms: Cognitive Bias, Self-Stigma

The tendency to view one's own internet use more negatively than peers, which can exacerbate anxiety and hinder help-seeking. For instance, a student may believe "Everyone else manages time better."

Psychoeducation normalizes usage patterns and reduces self-stigma. Overcoming bias requires balanced feedback from trusted sources.

Keystroke Dynamics

Related terms: Behavioral Biometrics, Authentication

Analysis of typing rhythm and speed to detect abnormal usage patterns that may indicate compulsive behavior. Some research prototypes flag sudden increases in typing velocity during gaming spikes. While promising for early detection, privacy concerns limit widespread adoption.

Latency to Craving

Related terms: Time-to-Urge, Trigger Interval

The period between exposure to an online cue and the onset of craving. Short latency suggests heightened addiction vulnerability. Real-time monitoring apps can alert users when cravings emerge, prompting coping strategies. Accuracy of self-reported latency remains a methodological challenge.

Media Multitasking

Related terms: Task Switching, Cognitive Load

Simultaneous engagement with multiple digital media streams, such as watching a video while texting. This habit reduces deep focus and can accelerate dependence on constant stimulation. Training programs teach single-task focus to improve productivity. The difficulty lies in workplace cultures that reward rapid response across channels.

Neurofeedback Intervention

Related terms: Brain-Training, EEG Biofeedback

A therapeutic technique that provides real-time brain activity data, helping users learn to down-regulate reward-center activation during internet use. Pilot studies show reduced gaming time after sessions. Implementation requires specialized equipment and trained practitioners, limiting accessibility.

Online Peer Influence

Related terms: Social Contagion, Group Norms

The impact of friends' digital habits on an individual's own usage patterns. A peer group that frequently streams videos can normalize binge-watching. Group-based interventions leverage positive peer pressure to set healthier norms. However, strong online communities may resist outside advice, complicating change.

Psychological Dependence

Related terms: Mental Addiction, Emotional Reliance

A state where the individual feels unable to cope without internet access, leading to anxiety when offline.

This differs from physical dependence but shares similar withdrawal phenomena. Cognitive-behavioral therapy addresses underlying emotional triggers. Distinguishing dependence from habitual use requires nuanced clinical judgment.

Quantified Self

Related terms: Self-Tracking, Data-Driven Insight

The practice of using apps and wearables to monitor personal metrics, including screen time, mood, and sleep. While promoting self-awareness, excessive tracking can become compulsive, feeding PIU. Balanced use involves setting clear data-review intervals. Over-reliance on metrics may diminish intrinsic motivation.

Risk Factor Assessment

Related terms: Vulnerability Screening, Predictive Modeling

Systematic evaluation of personal, familial, and environmental variables that increase susceptibility to internet addiction. Factors include high impulsivity, low social support, and exposure to persuasive design. Tools combine questionnaires with usage analytics to generate risk scores. The challenge is ensuring cultural relevance and avoiding over-pathologizing normal behavior.

Social Reinforcement

Related terms: Peer Approval, Likes

Positive feedback from others that strengthens online activity, such as receiving comments on a post. This reinforcement drives repeated posting and checking. Interventions may involve limiting exposure to social metrics or fostering offline validation sources. Platforms often amplify reinforcement through algorithmic prioritization, making mitigation complex.

Temporal Discounting

Related terms: Delay Aversion, Immediate Reward Preference

The tendency to prefer smaller, immediate internet rewards over larger, delayed goals (e.g., finishing a project). High temporal discounting predicts higher PIU risk. Training in goal-setting and reward postponement can improve self-control. The digital environment constantly supplies immediate incentives, reinforcing discounting habits.

Usability Trap

Related terms: Design Pitfall, Ease of Access

When a platform's intuitive design lowers barriers to excessive use, creating a "trap" for vulnerable users. Example: auto-play videos remove decision points. Designers can incorporate friction (e.g., login prompts) to reduce overuse. Regulatory approaches may mandate "break-reminders" after prolonged sessions. Resistance from industry stems from profit motives tied to engagement metrics.

Virtual Reality Immersion

Related terms: VR Addiction, Presence

Deep sensory engagement in simulated environments that can heighten addiction potential due to intense

reward feedback. Users may neglect real-world responsibilities while immersed. Clinical protocols recommend limited session lengths and debriefing after VR exposure. As hardware becomes affordable, monitoring VR-related PIU will become increasingly important.

Withdrawal Management

Related terms: Detox Protocol, Relapse Prevention

Structured approaches to mitigate symptoms during periods of reduced internet access, including coping-skill rehearsals, scheduled activities, and social support. Example: a client uses a "no-internet" day with a support buddy to manage cravings. Success depends on consistent follow-up and addressing underlying triggers. High relapse rates underscore the need for ongoing maintenance.

e-Learning Overload

Related terms: Academic Burnout, Digital Fatigue

Excessive reliance on online educational platforms leading to mental fatigue and reduced retention. Students may experience compulsive checking of lecture recordings. Strategies involve blended learning models that balance offline study. The challenge is that pandemic-driven shifts have normalized constant digital presence, blurring healthy boundaries.