

Reference document

Internet addiction



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Introduction

Internet addiction, also known as cyber addiction, is a relatively new phenomenon that has not yet been fully recognized by the medical community. Internet addiction is part of a series of new health problems in 21st century society. While undocumented, it tends to be categorized as a mental disorder based on the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), the 5th edition of which is planned for May 2013. Researchers agree that this is a behavioural dependence.

According to the Addiction Prevention Centre (APC), 6% of Quebecers are addicted to the Web: people 18 to 24 years of age are the most affected. This is enough to worry any manager who might not be familiar with this problem. Currently, Internet addiction is very rarely used as a cause of medical disability; instead, cyber addicts present signs of generalized anxiety disorders, depression or burnout, which could generate the disability.

The informed manager will pay attention to employees who suddenly isolate themselves, become obsessed by a game or virtual relationship, become attached to an online application and spend long hours on it whether at night, during breaks or even at work. They always seem exhausted. Other signs can appear: changes in the person's normal functioning or performance, relationship problems (family, loved ones, friends, colleagues), a loss of interest and time spent on other work activities, employees who lie even though they never did before or who owe significant amounts of money.

Causes and symptoms

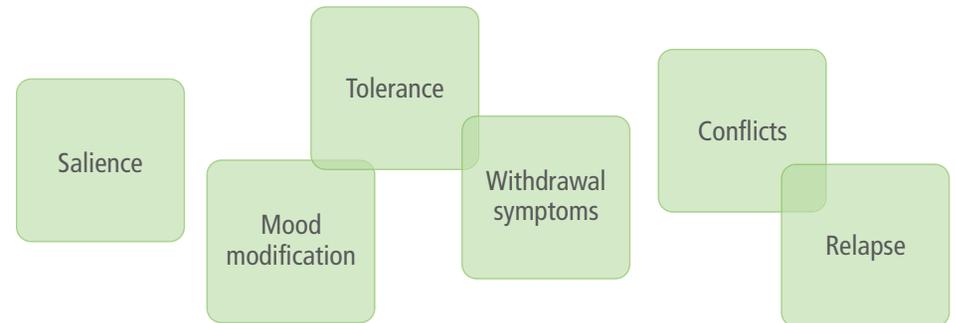
According to Internet addiction specialist Dr. Kimberly Young, no single behavior pattern defines Internet addiction. These behaviors or symptoms of Internet addiction, when they have taken control of addicts' lives and become unmanageable, include a compulsive use of the Internet, a preoccupation with being online, a lying or hiding the extent or nature of your online behavior and an inability to control or curb your online behavior.

Definition

Problematic use of the Internet and new technologies, commonly referred to as Internet addiction, is defined as a use of technologies or means of communication offered online which leads to difficulties for the individual. Internet addiction brings about a feeling of distress as well as psychological, social or professional problems (Caplan, 2002; Young, 1998, 2004).

It affects individuals who suffer from obsessive compulsive disorders. "The individual dreads an omnipresent idea or thought that is amplified to the point of becoming an obsession. This is followed by compulsion, characterized by repetitive behaviour, often irrational and illogical, and causes suffering." It is important to consider the following criteria when the interaction between a human and technology becomes a problem (Griffiths, 1998).

Six criteria



Psychological symptoms

- A feeling of well-being and euphoria while at the computer;
- An inability to stop using the computer;
- A need to spend an increasing amount of time on the computer (the person affected starts to wake up during the night to use the Internet);
- A lack of interest in activities with family or friends;
- Attendance problems or problems performing at work or at school;
- Lying to family or friends about the time spent online;
- Irritability or an empty feeling when not online;

Physical symptoms

- Dry eyes;
- Migraine headaches;
- Backaches;
- Carpal tunnel syndrome;
- Irregular or skipped meals;
- Poor personal hygiene;
- Insomnia or changes in sleep cycle.

Jean-Marie Lacrosse, a sociologist at the Université catholique de Louvain, mentions that Internet addiction stems from hypermodern technology. "Ceasing to be dependent on others (a form of slavery) and setting religion aside, man has become self-dependent. The "sicknesses of desire" grow and become more attractive as does contemporary individualism."

This particular form of dependence came into being once computers became accessible to more and more people.

How do we become addicted to the Internet?

According to psychologist Jean Garneau (1999):

- The initial wonder;
- The discovery of a special section;
- New habits;
- Compulsive compensation;
- Invention of a new ME.

Four standard profiles of a cyberaddict/video game

- Type 1: These types of player are looking for excitement.
- Type 2: These players like to manipulate on screen the pixel figures and avatars that represent various aspects of themselves.
- Type 3: They play solely to be recognized.
- Type 4: They like the company.

Online games of chance (gambling)

Young people are turning more and more to online gambling because of its anonymous and practical aspect. One student in ten claims to have already gambled online for money. Several online betting sites are free: players do not play for money but they do instill the habit and taste for gambling in young people; it is much easier to "win" on these training sights, so much so that when young people have credit cards, they are ready to access sites that handle real money. Moreover, an increasing number of social networking sites such as Facebook offer gambling applications. Poker hold'EM is an example of one of these applications. Celebrity gambling (ex. Jonathan Duhamel, who won \$9 million at poker) accentuates the phenomenon.

Online penny auction sites

Interactive penny auction sites are growing in popularity. Their number grew 1,500% since last year (2010). These sites worry analysts who fear the spread of pathological gambling. Moreover, they are not regulated by any government agency (*La Facture*, SRC, episode 493).

- Each bet costs you money, even if you don't win the bet.
- Penny auction sites make people happy by letting them win a car for less than \$20.00, but it also makes losers out of a lot of people as well. Each \$1 bet only raises the auction bid by a penny.

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- Some sites are fraudulent.
 - Is it an auction or a lottery?
 - Canada's auction law should be updated.

Cyber relationships

Two types of dependencies

Psychic dependence (craving)

Insistent and persistent desire to play which can sometimes result in psychosomatic manifestations.

Physical dependence

An organism's state of adaptation which is manifested by significant physical problems when the activity is suspended or prevented. There is no physical dependence on video games, unlike that on drugs such as nicotine or alcohol.

Online sexual activities sexting

Definition: A relationship that has barely started or which is continuously generated by way of the Internet in order for meetings and communications to take place.

Sexting, a portmanteau for *sex* and *texting*, is a message or photo of a sexual nature that is usually sent to a close friend. According to the PEW Internet & American Life Project, four percent of 12 to 17 year olds have sexted and 15 percent have received a sext message; these percentages increase to eight and 30 percent respectively for 17 year olds.

Sexting is used by youth in three typical contexts: as a substitute to sexual activity among young people who are not yet sexually active (usually at the end of primary school and the start of secondary school), as a mark of affection towards a person with whom the individual would like to start a romantic relationship and as part of a romantic relationship among sexually active teenagers. In the latter case, exchanging nude photos is proof of one's commitment towards the other.

Internet research

People can be cyberaddicted to text messaging, social networking, compulsively checking emails... New platforms can bring about new problems... (little known, little normed technologies.)

According to Csikszentmihalyi (translated by Barth, 1993, p. 155), the optimal experience has eight major characteristics:

- The task started is achievable;
- The task requires heavy concentration;
- The activity has a precise and well understood objective;
- The activity provides an opportunity for immediate feedback;
- We act by being fully involved, but without really feeling the effort;
- The feeling of exerting control over one's action;
- Worry about oneself disappears;
- The notion of time is altered.

This can be true about other Internet addictions as well.

Cyberhoarding

Cyberhoarding is also a form of Internet addiction. It is characterized by:

- Significant time spent searching for information online;
- Reduced productivity (professional, academic tasks);
- Reduced time for tasks in general;
- Work hour overload;
- Increased stress factors.

Sharing files online/Peer to peer

On file sharing sites, files are not the only things shared...

Access to a file sharing network involves downloading a particular type of software. Even if it is free, there is a price to pay.

Internet addiction to information (The YouTube effect...)

Video sharing is a worldwide phenomenon: according to YouTube, 20 hours of video are posted on this site every minute and one billion videos are watched each day. **This type of website is extremely popular among young people, who use them overwhelmingly to watch videos.**

Cyber misinformation

Misinformation is a **way of manipulating opinion**. It utilizes all means of communication and consists of presenting:

- false information as true (e.g.: having seen a UFO);
- a portion of true information as an independent and true totality of itself (e.g.: a hazelwood necklace is harmless but there is no scientific proof that it helps reduce stomach aches/Marcel Leboeuf story/*La Factore* SRC 2010-2011);

- a portion of false information as an independent and true totality of itself (Raeliens capable of cloning humans/Brigitte Boisselier/Affair, Dec. 2002);
- true information as false (e.g.: writing that Auschwitz-Birkenau never existed!)

Instant messaging

Instant messaging is one of the most common methods of bullying, sexual harassment and psychological victimization.

How to break free

According to Kimberly Young (2009) of Netaddiction.com

- Practice doing the opposite;
- Use external alarms;
- Set realistic objectives;
- Use reminder cards;
- Incorporate pleasant, social or relaxing activities;
- Abstain from using certain software or applications.

Conclusion

It is important to remember that the computer is a tool first and foremost, like a pick or a shovel. The medium used is not the problem in itself. The problem mainly resides in using the tool to excess.

It is necessary to establish a clear policy with regard to using the Internet at work referring to the limits acceptable to the company, not to the equipment or platforms used.

Finally, when facing a Internet addiction problem, keep in mind the affective and psychological attractions for the employee who is affected by this and ask yourself what the person is trying to avoid or what the resulting needs may be (e.g. escaping from work problems, family problems, breaking away from isolation, managing anxiety, etc.)

References

Young, K. S. Internet Addition Signs and Symptoms (Online), Available: <http://www.healthyplace.com/addictions/internet-addiction/symptoms-internet-addiction/>

Young, K. S. (1996) Internet addiction: the emergence of a new clinical disorder, Paper presented at the *104th Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association*, Toronto.

Caplan, S. E. (2002) Problematic Internet use and psychosocial well-being: development of a theory-based cognitive-behavioral measurement instrument, *Computers in Human Behavior*, 18, 553-575.

Psychologie Québec, magazine de l'Ordre des psychologues du Québec, **La cyberdépendance : l'autre côté de la réalité des branchés**, vol. 13, no. 3, mai 1996

Other useful resources

<http://www.cyberdependance.ca/>

Marie-Anne Sergerie, psychologist: <http://www.masergerie.com/>

Jean-Pierre Rochon : <http://www.psynternaute.com/>

The Centre Dollard-Cormier in Montreal: <http://www.centredollardcormier.qc.ca/>

An electronic document edited by the Centre Dollard-Cormier can be downloaded for free at: <http://www.centredollardcormier.qc.ca/cdc/documents/cybercomplet.pdf>

The following resources can also be helpful for Internet addiction:

- Browse the FAQ
- Take advantage of Tandem
- Turn to your company's EAP
- Confide in a qualified professional in case of emergency