

## THE GROWING PROBLEM OF INTERNET ADDICTION AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE DIGITAL AGE

*Ruzmetova Zilola Dilmurod kizi*

*1st English Faculty, Philology and Language Teaching:*

*English, Group 25-02, 1st year student*

*Uzbek State University of World Languages*

**Abstract.** The article examines the growing problem of Internet addiction among young people in the digital age. It analyzes the psychological, social, educational, and behavioral factors that contribute to excessive Internet use, with particular attention to social media, online gaming, short-video platforms, and constant digital communication. The paper argues that Internet addiction should not be understood only as a technological issue; rather, it is connected with emotional regulation, identity formation, peer influence, academic pressure, and family communication. The article also discusses possible preventive measures, including digital literacy, balanced parental control, school-based awareness programs, and the development of healthy offline activities.

**Keywords:** Internet addiction, young people, digital age, social media, online gaming, digital literacy, mental health, self-control, education.

### INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technologies has radically changed the everyday life of young people. Internet access is no longer limited to computers or special technical environments; it is now constantly available through smartphones, tablets, laptops, smart watches, and other mobile devices. For many adolescents and university students, the Internet has become a space for learning, communication, entertainment, self-expression, social comparison, and even emotional escape. Digital technologies undoubtedly provide important opportunities: they expand access to knowledge, support distance learning, simplify communication, and create new forms of creativity. However, the same technologies may also produce serious risks when their use becomes excessive, uncontrolled, and psychologically dependent.

Internet addiction is usually described as a pattern of problematic online behavior in which a person loses control over time spent online, feels discomfort when disconnected, and continues using digital platforms despite negative consequences. Scholars have noted that problematic Internet use may affect sleep, academic performance, emotional stability, family relationships, and social adaptation [1]. Among young people, this issue is especially sensitive because adolescence and early adulthood are periods of active psychological development, identity formation, and

social belonging. At this stage, digital platforms can become not only tools of communication but also sources of approval, recognition, and emotional compensation.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

One of the main causes of Internet addiction among young people is the design of digital platforms. Social media networks, online games, streaming services, and short-video applications are built to keep users engaged for as long as possible. Infinite scrolling, algorithmic recommendations, notifications, likes, comments, and reward systems create a continuous cycle of stimulation. A young user may intend to spend only a few minutes online, but the platform constantly offers new content and reduces the ability to stop voluntarily. This mechanism is closely connected with behavioral reinforcement: the user receives small but frequent rewards, and these rewards strengthen the desire to return to the platform again [2].

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Online gaming is another major factor related to Internet addiction. Many games include competitive ranking, team-based participation, virtual achievements, and reward systems. These elements may create strong involvement, especially when the young person experiences success in the virtual world but faces difficulties in real academic or social life. The World Health Organization has recognized gaming disorder in the International Classification of Diseases, which shows that excessive gaming can become a clinically significant behavioral problem when it leads to impaired control and functional damage [3]. Although not every frequent gamer is addicted, the risk increases when gaming begins to dominate daily routine, sleep patterns, study time, and relationships.

Educational pressure may also contribute to Internet addiction. Young people often use the Internet for study, research, and communication with classmates. This makes it difficult to separate necessary academic use from excessive recreational use. A student may open a device to complete homework but quickly move to social media, videos, or games. Over time, attention becomes fragmented, concentration decreases, and academic tasks require more time. Excessive digital multitasking may reduce deep learning because the mind constantly shifts between different stimuli. As a result, the student may feel busy but remain academically ineffective.

The psychological consequences of Internet addiction are complex. Excessive online activity can disturb sleep because many young people use devices late at night. Blue light, emotional stimulation, gaming intensity, and fear of missing out may delay sleep and reduce sleep quality. Lack of sleep weakens memory, attention, emotional control, and motivation. Problematic Internet use may also be associated with anxiety, loneliness, depressive symptoms, irritability, and low self-esteem [4]. These consequences may form a circular pattern: a young person feels anxious or lonely, uses

the Internet to escape, becomes more isolated, and then needs more online activity to avoid negative feelings.

Family environment is another important factor. In families where communication is weak, emotional support is limited, or conflicts are frequent, young people may use the Internet as a substitute for real interaction. Strict prohibition alone is usually ineffective because it does not address the emotional reasons behind excessive use. At the same time, complete absence of parental guidance may increase uncontrolled digital behavior. A balanced approach is needed: parents should discuss online habits, set reasonable limits, observe behavioral changes, and create meaningful offline communication. Digital discipline should not be based only on punishment; it should include explanation, trust, and shared responsibility.

### CONCLUSION

Internet addiction among young people is one of the significant challenges of the digital age. It emerges not simply from access to technology, but from the interaction between platform design, psychological needs, social pressure, educational demands, and family environment. The Internet offers valuable opportunities for learning and communication, yet excessive and uncontrolled use may weaken attention, reduce academic performance, disturb sleep, damage emotional stability, and limit real-life social interaction.

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