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**Academic Integrity Statement: By submitting this assignment I acknowledge that this work is completely my own.**

Internet addiction

-A very realistic problem we faced

Nowadays, if we discuss what had deeply changed the way we live, there are many answers. Some may say the car, some may say the telephone. However, when we talk about the thing that has changed our lives most profoundly, I believe that most people will vote for the internet. There is no doubt that Internet has greatly change our life. It makes our work and contacts easier, gives us quick access to knowledge, and enriches our recreational life. However, there are two opposite sides to everything. While Internet bring us benefits, it also brings some negative effects to our lives. These have become a problem that cannot be ignored by now. One of the serious problem is Internet addiction.

Below is an Internet addict’s daily life description:

He felt the magnetic power of his phone and its tentacled apps at inappropriate times (dinner, watching movies, Christmas Eve). There was no doubt that sometimes the medium overtook the messages. He would tweet something solely so it would be retweeted. He would check Instagram twice in 10 minutes.”(qtd in Madrigal)

It is just an epitome of the many Internet addicts. There are many people like him, just with different levels of fascination. Some are addicted to social networking sites, some are addicted to online games. Such a life will eat up a lot of our time and energy meaninglessly.

Addiction to the Internet is not only a waste of one's time and energy, but it can even be mentally damaging. One study specifically looked at the severity of Internet use and its relation to psychopathology and self-esteem in college students. Through a questionnaire survey of 200 students, they found that Individuals having high usage of internet showed depression and anxiety. They also found Internet addiction is associated with obsessive‑compulsive symptoms and interpersonal sensitivity. found Internet addiction is associated with obsessive‑compulsive symptoms and interpersonal sensitivity. (Mondal)

As a college student, I also face the problem of surfing the Internet. Especially during the pandemic, being indoors for long periods of time can make me involuntarily spend more time on the Internet. I also sometimes get addicted to games or videos for hours. However, this is not a good feeling. When I get out of the Internet, I feel depressed and frustrated. If I put my phone down and go for a walk outside or talk to a friend, I feel much more relaxed. Such experiences can also reflect that Internet addiction does have a negative impact on people's mental health.

All these negative effects make us take internet addiction seriously. People may confused why Internet can make us addicted. How can it do it? Humans are most commonly addicted to cigarettes because of the large amounts of cocaine in them, but can the Internet emit addictive substances? Robert Wright in his article answer it by putting forward a view that the susceptibility to internet addiction is in our genes. Our body naturally have a kind of Incentive system. Eating delicious food, hearing an interesting joke, or having sex all can trigger it and release reward chemicals like dopamine. (Wright) This was originally our trait and habit, but nowadays it brings a lot of bad effects to our life through Internet.

Behind this is also the promotion of the website and game designers. They have made good use of our genes to design websites or games that appeal to us for commercial gain. We can see their intelligence in a successful example.

There is a very popular game called World of Warcraft. The game that has been cited as the greatest MMORPG of all time and one of the greatest video games of all time has attracted hundreds of millions of people to play. Also this game is known to be highly addictive. Many players even take up most of their time and energy in their daily life to play it. Here's an addict's confession:

On weekends and during the summer, it wasn't uncommon for me to log in right when I woke up, play for a few hours, maybe eat some dry cereal I kept in my room, and play all day. I skipped lunches. I ate frozen pizza because it was quick and easy. I drank too much Coke and would pile the cans up around my desk. I would play upwards of 14 hours a day and at night my eyes would be so dry it would hurt to blink. Sometimes when friends asked if I could hang out, I'd say no just because I wanted to play more and had already set aside that time in my head as WoW time.(qtd in Beck)

Why is this game so addictive? It cannot be separated from the game mechanics design implemented by Blizzard. Ken Savage have summarized the eight factors that make World of Warcraft addictive. It includes Epic Meaning & Calling, Development & Accomplishment, mpowerment of Creativity & Feedback, Ownership & Possession, Social Influence & Relatedness, Scarcity & Impatience, Curiosity & Unpredictability, and, Loss & Avoidance. (Savage) Many of these factors work well to hook people into addiction. They set a variety of tasks for people to complete and gain a sense of accomplishment. By setting up various unknowns, people are always curious about the next step. These will stimulate people's dopamine all the time and keep them engaged in the game.

From the above example, we can see an attractive design for player. Designer using different kind of moves to latch onto the players' hearts. The design of the other sites is the same. As you scroll through video after video on youtube, as you follow the likes on Facebook, you are in the designer’s framework. “Tech companies have the smartest statisticians and computer scientists, whose job it is to break your willpower.” Said by Michael Schulson, an American freelance writer and an associate editor at Religion Dispatches magazine. (Schulson)

Internet addiction is a very serious problem. But once we recognize how it develops, then we have ways to overcome it. The most direct way is “digital detox”, that is, cut off our connection with the source of addiction. For example, we can simply leave our phone in another room or close it when we need to focus on something to prevent distraction. In addition, preventing addiction from design is also a very important way. When we get addicted to the Internet, we usually look to ourselves for the cause and blame ourselves for our weak willpower. However, as I mentioned above, the designers of websites and games whose designs are the major cause of our addiction should also be responsible for this. Michael Schulsonis put forward that we need to regulate the design of the website to let them contribute to people's lives. “Still, regulation can send a message. And it can target some of the most common tools that designers use to draw users into a digital machine zone.”(qtd in Schulson)said by Michael Schulsonis. He proposed three measures for it. First, require major social media and gaming sites, email providers and smartphone makers to offer distraction dashboards, so users could control certain elements of their experiences. Second, sites should be required to flag users who display especially compulsive behaviors and set a cut-off point for them. They should alert these people when they use the site for more than a certain amount of time. Third, sites or browsers would be required to provide tools that let users monitor themselves. People can set their own usage time, and the program will lock them out of the site when they the set usage time. I think his suggestion is effective, but how to urge the designers to act is the problem to be solved afterwards. Overall, I think we should work on two fronts simultaneously. This is the two way we could do to prevent the risk of Internet.

Some people have different views on Internet addiction. Caroline Miller, the editorial director of the Child Mind Institute, cited neuropsychologist Dr. Anderson’s words in her article:

Some parents may see addict-like behavior, Dr. Anderson adds, when kids get angry if they’re required to stop, insist on more and more screen time, spend a lot of offline time thinking about how and when they will get back online. But these kind of behaviors can be prompted by many pleasurable activities, and don’t constitute an addiction. “More often than not, what I see are parents who are concerned about their teenager’s behavior around screens use the word addiction when it doesn’t really fit.” One reason to be cautious about using the term, he added, “is that we have a tendency right now within the zeitgeist to pathologize normal adolescent behavior.”(qtd in Miller)

I do agree with Dr. Anderson’s view that some online behaviors do not constitute addiction. As a neuropsychologist, I believe that he can technically identify whether a behavior constitutes an addiction or not. However, things are always evolving. Based on the addictive nature of the Internet, people's normal online behavior at the moment may evolve into addiction in the future. The current Internet habits of many teenagers are pathological, and some of them even go around the clock in order to access the Internet. This pathology is developed from those seemingly normal online behavior that we ignore. Just like smoking, some experts will say it is okay to smoke in moderation, but many people lose their vigilance and end up smoking more and more and becoming addicts. I'm not saying we should quit the Internet, I just think we should not ignore these seemingly normal behaviors and be vigilant in advance in order to prevent Internet addiction.

The Internet has revolutionized our lives to some extent. It is a mixed blessing that has brought us convenience as well as challenges. We should make reasonable use of it so that it can better benefit mankind.

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