

Article Title: Digital Addiction and Its Repercussions on the Mental Health of University Students

Dr. Haoues Hadjer

Faculty of Social and Human Sciences

Department of Psychology

Mohamed El Bachir El Ibrahimi University – Bordj Bou Arréridj.

Email: hadjer.haoues@univ-bba.dz

Haoues Hadjer, Lecturer (Grade B)

Soumission : 10/12/2025

Acceptation : 20/03/2026

Publication : 30-04-2026

Abstract:

This study aimed to analyze the phenomenon of digital addiction in its various forms, including addiction to social media, electronic games, visual content through digital platforms such as Netflix, in addition to addiction to browsing and excessive acquisition of information. The study focused on reviewing the most prominent recent global and Arab statistics to estimate the extent of the spread of these phenomena among youth and university students, and analyzing the psychological, social, and technological factors contributing to them.

The findings derived from systematic reviews and international studies showed that the prevalence rates of digital addiction range between 5% and 45% depending on the type and geographical region, with relatively high rates among young age groups. Studies also demonstrated that digital addiction is closely associated with anxiety disorders, depression, weak social relationships, and lack of sleep.

The study concluded with the necessity of developing standardized Arabic measurement tools to study the phenomenon more accurately, and launching awareness and educational programs aimed at promoting healthy and balanced use of technology, in addition to encouraging multidisciplinary research to understand the causative factors and propose effective therapeutic strategies.

Keywords: Addiction – Digital Addiction – Mental Health – University Youth – Psychological Mechanisms of Addiction.

Introduction

Digital transformation has caused a profound earthquake in the pillars of the educational system, placing university students before a completely new reality represented by a hybrid space. Today, the university campus carries its modern meaning; it is no longer merely green spaces and stone corridors, but is measured by the strength of the internet, the speed of servers, and the availability of virtual educational platforms. The “university” has gone beyond the concept of a physical place to an “integrated learning environment” extending behind the screens of smart devices, opening the door to access global libraries, international lectures, and opportunities for global cooperation with just one click. However, despite this tremendous development, this transformation is not free from challenges that contradict its benefits. While the screen provides a wide gateway toward knowledge, it may at the same time turn into a

source of distraction and digital addiction. This paradox reflects the nature of the digital world in the life of university students: it is an environment rich in educational possibilities, but also full of psychological and behavioral challenges that pose unlimited risks. It can be described as a double-edged sword; an indispensable tool for research and learning, yet it may also become a trap that drains time and energy. A student who resorts to educational platforms for studying may find themselves distracted by social media notifications competing for their attention. Those searching for academic sources may sink into the labyrinths of random browsing and endless video clips. Thus, the line separating “purposeful use” from “random consumption,” and “supportive tool” from “draining source” of psychological effort and mental energy, fades away.

Previous Studies:

The study of Mohammed (2020) aimed to understand the relationship between the use of social media and the social problems faced by university youth. The results showed that the most used social media platforms were Snapchat, WhatsApp, and Instagram, and that the average use among university youth reached 5 hours daily. The study also indicated that the most important reasons for use were electronic games, communication with family, and spending free time.

Nasr (2020) conducted a study on modern trends in research on the uses of social networking sites and their psychological and social effects. The study indicated that Arab studies focused on certain groups such as rural women, vocational education students, and teachers, whereas foreign studies relied on large samples. The study recommended applying Arab studies to large samples in order to generalize the results, especially in research on social effects.

Likewise, Abu Al-Ataa (2019) conducted a study aimed at exploring the relationship between internet addiction and loneliness, using the descriptive correlational method. The study sample included 300 individuals, and the tools used were the Internet Addiction Scale and the Psychological Loneliness Scale, both developed by the researcher. The results showed a statistically significant relationship between internet addiction and psychological loneliness among students.

Melebari (2018) discussed the use of social media in Arab societies with the aim of defining and organizing the concept of consumerist obsession with social media. The results showed signs of exclusion within the study community such as isolation, lack of interaction, and low social communication, as well as the emergence of moral alienation and cultural invasion. The study recommended the necessity of mechanisms to monitor the use of social media, proposing legislation to protect users’ privacy and provide cybersecurity.

The study of Al-Shami and Shehha (2017) aimed to understand the impact of social media use by university youth on their life skills. The results showed a negative relationship between social media use and life skills, and statistically significant differences in social media use based on gender in favor of males. The study concluded with the necessity of activating parental supervision over youth use of technology.

Research Problem:

The boundaries separating our physical world and our digital lives have dissolved, and the screens we carry in our pockets have become windows through which we not only look at the world, but have also become an integral part of the formation of our relationships, identities,

and daily reality. We live, work, and love through these interconnected networks, but have we stopped to ask about the hidden price we pay?

Behind the colorful interfaces of applications and the nonstop flow of notifications, deep and radical transformations are taking place in the way our brains function and our emotions are shaped. Science reveals day after day unexpected, and sometimes shocking, facts about the effect of this intense digital integration on our mental health. Attachment to digital tools or excessive use of technology is considered a fundamental, multidimensional danger to the mental health and educational mission of university students in the age of information flow. Sources indicate that this continuous interaction leads to radical behavioral and psychological challenges. According to the findings of Ahmed bin Ali Al-Zahrani's study (2024), there is a relationship between digital addiction and the decline of social skills, and university students addicted to digital media suffer from difficulties in verbal and nonverbal communication and interaction with others.

Likewise, the study of Nassar (2022), which analyzed university youth use of the TikTok application, revealed that this application helps users fill emptiness and overcome feelings of loneliness. As for the negative social effects, they included weak social communication, isolation, withdrawal, and negative influence on academic performance.

Accordingly, studies see that the causes of digital addiction are multiple; some are linked to personal factors such as anxiety, depression, or escaping psychological pressures, while others result from the design of digital applications and platforms that rely on increasing repetitive behavior through notifications and instant rewards.

The danger of this addiction lies in the fact that it is initially invisible and begins with simple symptoms that gradually increase until they affect the quality of life in general. Most often, these signs are not clear at first, but over time they become influential and may lead to deeper psychological problems if not dealt with consciously.

Based on the above, through this research paper we attempt to explore the reality of the serious repercussions on the mental health of university students by trying to answer the following questions:

1. How does digital addiction constitute an existential threat to the mental health of university students in the era of information flow?
2. What are the psychological and social repercussions of the different patterns of digital addiction among university students?

Objective of the Study:

The current study aims to provide a theoretical conceptual framework for digital addiction through presenting the psychological effects resulting from the different patterns of this phenomenon and the extent of its threat to the psychological, social, and academic entity of university students.

Importance of the Study:**Scientific and Cognitive Importance:**

1. Filling the cognitive gap in scientific studies regarding the impact of digital transformation on mental health in the academic context.

2. Developing an integrated theoretical framework to understand the complex psychological and social mechanisms of the relationship between the digital world and mental health in the university environment.
3. Enriching scientific dialogue on the challenges of digital transformation in higher education institutions.

Practical Future Importance:

1. Making optimal use of technological practice as a tool for development rather than a source of problems.
2. Designing counseling programs to deal with digital addiction problems in the university environment.
3. Developing educational strategies compatible with the requirements of the digital age while preserving academic depth.
4. Protecting human capital and investing in the education of youth who represent the future of society.
5. Preparing for future challenges related to artificial intelligence and digital technologies.

Study Methodology:

The adopted methodology is the theoretical descriptive analytical method based on extrapolation and analysis of literature, previous studies, and related psychological and social theories.

Operational Concepts:

Digital Addiction: It is the excessive and uncontrolled use of digital devices, the internet, and digital platforms whether connected to the internet or not.

Mental Health: It is a positive state that includes psychological and social adjustment, feelings of satisfaction and happiness, and the ability to exploit potentials and achieve self-realization.

1. Conceptual Framework of Digital Addiction

1.1 Definition of Addiction:

Definition of addiction: When we attempt to define the concept of addiction, we find some difficulty in doing so. The concept of addiction differs linguistically; some refer to addiction, abuse, misuse, non-medical use, dependence, or compulsive use.

Scholars differ in defining the term “addiction.” Some insist that the term applies to substances consumed by humans, after which they are unable to do without them, and when they stop using them, withdrawal symptoms occur that expose them to serious problems. Consequently, they cannot stop suddenly but need a rehabilitation program using substitute substances and gradual withdrawal of the original substance, as is the case in most drug addictions.

Both “Brattar and Forey St” define it as a behavioral model of compulsory drug use characterized by severe attachment to consuming the addictive substance, securing sources of supply for it, as well as the tendency to relapse into use after withdrawal ends. (Solhawi & Khizar, 2022)

Addiction is also defined as a chronic relapsing disease resulting from adaptive changes in brain structure and function, which affect the social context.

Many researchers, including “Shaffer” and “Kennit Son,” agree that addiction can be defined based on repetitive excessive behavior and exaggerated emotional response. Advanced brain

imaging techniques show that brain activity and biochemistry are affected in the same way as drug and alcohol use, causing changes in neural circuits that help sustain behavior.

Experts also agree that addiction occurs when a certain habit takes control over brain circuits that evolved to reward survival-enhancing behaviors such as eating and sex. Thus, addiction is not only linked to drugs; addictive behavior indicates excessive use of other things, including excessive internet use. Addiction in general can be defined as persistent use of certain substances or engaging in certain activities for a long period in order to enter a state of euphoria or eliminate sadness and depression. (Solhawi & Khizar, 2022)

1.2. Definition of Digital Addiction:

Among the main definitions of digital addiction:

- **Early Definition (Kimberly Young):** American psychologist Kimberly Young (1995) was the first to describe excessive internet use and coined the term “Internet Addiction.” She defined it as using the internet for more than 38 hours weekly (Murali & George, 2007: 24).
- **Loss of Control and Weak Daily Life:** Electronic addiction is also defined as the phenomenon in which the individual lacks the ability to control internet use. This ultimately leads to impairment in aspects of daily and functional life (Fattore et al., 2014: 272).
- **Psychological Disorder:** The American Psychiatric Association (APA) recognized internet addiction among types of addiction and defined it as “a compulsive psychological disorder showing a need” resulting from dissatisfaction with internet use. A person suffering from this disorder experiences symptoms similar to other addictions (Zimbarda et al., 2021: 35).
- **The End of the Ability to Abandon It:** The term internet addiction appears when the ability to give it up disappears, and at that point, time becomes limitless.

Digital addiction is also defined as:

The weak resistance of the user to the internet in terms of leaving it or attempting to stay away from it, where it dominates them compulsively. Or it is the excessive use of the internet, such that the person becomes compulsively dependent on it, leading to impairment in daily functional performance: academic, professional, and social. (Basma Rashid Al-Ghafili, 2023)

Internet addiction is considered a growing problem. Some psychologists have pointed out that one out of every 200 internet users shows symptoms of addiction, and that some individuals spend 38 hours or more on the internet without work, affecting daily functional performance within the family, work, or social relationships. A person’s reputation and daily functional performance may deteriorate if they fall into the cycle of internet addiction for six (06) consecutive months of complete attachment. Children, adolescents, and youth are considered the age groups most exposed to this problem (Hardy, 2004).

1.3. Theoretical Diagnostic Criteria:

The diagnostic criteria for digital addiction (or internet addiction) are considered specific, and Walters established criteria for the clinical diagnosis of this behavior. There are also procedural symptoms and behavioral indicators used to determine the state of addiction.

Walters’ Clinical Diagnostic Criteria:

Walters (1996) identified seven criteria for the clinical diagnosis of addictive internet use:

1. Isolation and withdrawal from family, relatives, and friends.
2. Preoccupation with the internet, excessive use, and frequent talking about it.

3. Lack of interest in all academic, social, and professional activities.
4. Feeling attracted to internet activities.
5. Feeling happiness and comfort when returning to it after losing access.
6. Repeated and continuous internet use.
7. Tension in the event of losing internet connection.

1.4. – Types of Digital Addiction and Their Psychological Mechanisms:

Five specific types of internet addiction have been identified according to the American Center for Internet Addiction Determination.

The following is a detailed explanation of the five identified types of electronic addiction:

1- Cyber Sexual Addiction:

This type involves addicts viewing and engaging in pornographic materials through the internet, such as downloading and sending pornographic and sexual materials.

It also includes frequent participation in sex chat rooms and using the internet for prostitution trafficking. Statistics indicate that 63% of adolescents are addicted to pornographic websites displaying explicit and provocative images, and they visit them without their families' knowledge, which affects their behavior.

2- Cyber Relationship Addiction:

In this type, addicts are heavily involved in electronic relationships and cyber systems. This addiction arises with society's increasing dependence on devices connected to the World Wide Web (the information web).

3- Social Network Addiction:

This addiction is known as the syndrome of psychological dependence, and the addict's behavior is characterized by the following:

- Persistent interaction with social networking sites for long periods.
- Escaping and withdrawing from real life into virtual reality.
- The behavior in this case is compulsive and stubborn, and it is difficult to quit without therapeutic assistance to overcome addictive symptoms.
- It may involve creating fake personal profiles or impersonating others through social networking sites such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, Snapchat, Instagram, and chat applications.

This addiction may aim at creating emotional relationships and friendships. Social media addiction was mentioned as a type of electronic addiction in the theoretical framework of the study.

4- Net Gaming Addiction:

This type involves gaming for entertainment and to fill free time. Games rely on user interaction, beginning with simple levels and then developing into complex levels, often exceeding the level of challenge. Addictive games are characterized by the following:

- They are exciting, attract the user's attention, and enhance their abilities.
- They use modern techniques close to reality.
- They require continuous internet connection.
- They are often paid annual games and continuously updated. (Ahmed Zayed, 2025)

The most famous games to which university youth are addicted:

- **FIFA – EAFC:** A football game directed at everyone, simulating real-life events such as championships, player transfers, and football character updates.
- **Call of Duty:** A violent war combat game characterized by offensiveness and the use of weapons, to which adolescents and youth become addicted because of its modern and advanced technology.
- **Fortnite:** A realistic representation of cities and changing events within the map through cinematic display, continuously and constantly attracting the player's attention.

These games often include text and voice chats, and many players use violent and unethical language such as insults, profanity, and defamation.

5- Information Overload Addiction:

This addiction is also known as information addiction. It is represented in:

- Compulsive behavior related to browsing search engines out of curiosity.
- Aiming to collect and organize data without the ability to stop.
- The process becomes problematic due to the “information overload” in which the individual (such as the student) navigates without realizing the passage of time. (Ahmed Zayed, 2025)

Theoretical Psychological Effects (Internal Problems):

Internet addiction leads to a variety of internal psychological problems and behaviors that significantly affect individuals' mental health.

Research has shown that deterioration of mental health and psychological stress are among the direct risks of excessive internet use.

The following are the most important internal psychological problems associated with digital addiction:

- Basic Psychological Disorders:

Electronic addiction is associated with a number of serious psychological disorders:

- **Anxiety:** Anxiety is one of the disorders individuals may suffer from as a result of feelings of loneliness.
- **Depression:** Depression is considered one of the possible consequences of internet addiction and is also linked to feelings of loneliness.
- **Isolation and Withdrawal:** Internet addiction leads to isolation, where the person withdraws from social relationships, preferring the virtual world over the real one.
- **Social Phobia:** Symptoms of social fear increase, which may arise because of feelings of loneliness.

- Resulting Internal Feelings and Emotions:

These problems lead to an internally disturbed psychological state in the addicted person, including:

- **Feelings of loneliness and boredom:** Feelings of loneliness and boredom increase, as loneliness is considered one of the common issues resulting from the gap between real relationships and the relationships preferred by the individual.
- **Psychological conflicts:** The addicted person experiences complex and contradictory emotions full of tension. They are also subjected to psychological pressure due to family complications and the effects of traditions that prevent them from satisfying their desires.

• **Negativity and sadness:** Feelings of loneliness may appear as a state of negativity and sadness in the individual.

- Withdrawal and Stopping Symptoms:

Among the most prominent signs of psychological dependence associated with internet addiction are the symptoms appearing when internet or phone connection is lost, including:

• **Fear and helplessness:** Addiction appears through discomfort when the network disconnects or the person loses their phone, leading to feelings of fear and helplessness.

• **Stress and panic:** The individual experiences panic and may feel stress and frustration, especially when losing internet connection. Studies have shown that people who search everywhere for the internet password are more likely to feel stressed when connection is lost, which indicates signs of electronic addiction.

3. Theoretical Psychological Effects (Functional Problems):

Sources indicate that “electronic addiction” directly affects a person’s ability to carry out daily and practical activities. Functional psychological problems include those difficulties that negatively affect the individual’s performance of essential roles in life (such as study, work, and social and family relationships).

The following are the most prominent functional psychological effects resulting from digital addiction, according to the sources:

- Neglect in Work and Study:

Neglect in fulfilling professional and academic tasks is considered one of the most important negative consequences of internet addiction, leading to deterioration in academic and cognitive performance.

- Professional Neglect:

Excessive internet use leads to dysfunction in study and work tasks.

- Lack of Interest in Activities:

One of the clinical diagnostic criteria for addiction is negligence in academic, social, and professional activities.

- Social and Family Disintegration:

Immersion in the virtual world causes significant deterioration in the individual’s social and family functions.

- Isolation and Withdrawal:

Feelings of loneliness increase, as do rates of isolation and social fear among youth, leading to distancing from social relationships, loss of family ties, weak communication with others, and neglect of family duties, which may cause family disintegration and difficulties between parents and children.

- Impact on Values and Behaviors:

Addiction affects the individual’s behaviors and social, family, and moral values within society.

- Problems of Time Management and Lifestyle:

Internet addiction causes disruption in managing personal life and time.

- Weak Time Control:

The addict cannot control how they use the internet and ultimately becomes unable to stay away from it.

- Poor Time Management:

Addiction causes poor time management, leading to sleeping during the day and staying awake at night, which is considered harmful to daily lifestyle.

- General Health Deterioration:

Digital addiction affects the physical and psychological health of the addict, reducing their overall effectiveness.

In brief, it can be said that internet addiction leads to complete withdrawal from practical life, where the person prefers virtual life through social media over reality and becomes preoccupied with the virtual world instead of real-world tasks.

4. Theories Explaining Internet Addiction:

- Behavioral Approach:

Internet addiction is considered an acquired behavior following the principle of stimulus and response, and this behavior can be modified.

- Psychodynamic Approach (Psychoanalysts):

Internet addiction is viewed as a means of escaping frustration and a desire to achieve substitute pleasure to satisfy needs and forget difficulties.

- Socio-Cultural Approach:

This approach sees internet addiction as resulting from the culture of society; therefore, society contributes to increasing this addiction.

- Cognitive Approach:

Internet addiction is considered the result of incorrect thoughts that make the internet the center of a person's life and lead them to avoid reality.

- Integrative Approach:

Internet addiction is viewed as the product of the interaction of a group of subjective, emotional, social, and environmental factors. The problem can be summarized as increased predisposition followed by focus on addiction. (Ziyad Ahmed Al-Limoun, 2021)

2. Presentation of Statistics Around the World to Clarify the Spread and Real Size of the Problem:

Model No. 01: Social Media Addiction

General Statistic: Social media addiction is considered one of the growing issues attracting the attention of researchers in the field of mental health and higher education due to its potential effects on students' academic performance and psychological balance. Scientific literature has shown variation in prevalence rates between countries and cultures. In a recent systematic review and meta-analysis that included studies from various parts of the world, Salari and colleagues found that the average prevalence rate of social media addiction among university students reached approximately 18.4%, with notable differences between geographical and cultural regions. These results indicate that the phenomenon represents a global challenge requiring further studies to understand its psychological and social determinants and to develop effective strategies to reduce its negative effects on university youth. (Salari et al., 2023)

Model No. 02: Electronic Gaming Addiction

Electronic gaming addiction is considered one of the growing behavioral phenomena that has attracted the attention of researchers and psychologists in recent years due to its potential

negative effects on the mental and social health of adolescents and young adults. Recent systematic reviews have shown that the average global prevalence rate of gaming disorder is approximately 5% of all players, with notable differences depending on measurement tools and cultural and social factors (Boz & Dinç, 2023). Another analytical review concluded that the percentage decreases to approximately 1.96% when using random representative population samples (Stevens et al., 2022).

In contrast, regional studies indicate higher prevalence rates in some Arab countries. A study conducted in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia showed that 62.1% of children and adolescents exhibited symptoms associated with electronic gaming addiction, with a clear relationship to anxiety disorders, depression, and hyperactivity (Alrahili et al., 2023).

These findings highlight the urgent need to develop preventive and awareness programs aimed at reducing excessive use of electronic games and promoting balanced use of digital technologies among youth.

Model No. 03: Visual Content Addiction

In a study conducted at a medical college in the city of Bhopal (India) among university students (April–June 2022), it was found that the prevalence rate of “OTT streaming service addiction” reached 68.37% of participants, with 43.72% classified as “borderline” cases and 24.65% as “severe” cases.

A study addressing the phenomenon of “binge-watching” among a group of youth found that participants watched on average 1.9 hours daily during the week and 3.0 hours during weekends, describing the behavior as continuous, immersive, and affecting sleep and social life. In a recent study reviewing platform use in Thailand (2024), it was shown that approximately 15.4% of users watched content 4–6 hours daily, 7.4% watched 6–8 hours daily, and 2.7% watched more than 8 hours daily — indicating a pattern of intensive viewing approaching “addictive” behavior.

Another study involving “live streaming” services and the effect of heavy television viewing during childhood/adolescence concluded that “television viewing time” during that stage is later associated with increased risks of addiction disorders (such as pathological gambling), indicating a relationship between content-viewing patterns and broader addictive behaviors.

In a descriptive study involving university students in Pakistan (n = 350), it was found that 46% reported “binge-watching” on Netflix monthly, 38% weekly, and 16% daily. There were also statistical relationships between viewing intensity and sleep problems and academic interference.

In a recent experimental study on Netflix users (n = 76) in the United States, the effect of the “autoplay” feature was tested, showing that disabling it reduced average daily viewing time and session length, indicating that platform design contributes to pushing users toward longer viewing.

Model No. (04): Browsing and Information Addiction:

According to a systematic review and meta-analysis including 113 studies from 31 countries, the pooled rate of “Generalized Internet Addiction” was about 7.02% (95% CI: 6.09–8.08%) among participants.

In a specific analysis of university students under the title “Global prevalence of internet addiction among university students”, which included 101 studies in 38 countries, the pooled rate was 41.84% (95% CI: 35.89–48.02) among university students.

In the African region, a systematic review of 28 studies in 10 countries showed that the pooled rate of internet addiction among secondary school and university students reached 34.53% (95% CI: 26.83–42.23), with statistical associations indicating that males, urban residents, and daily use of more than 4 hours were more likely to be addicted.

Psychological mechanism of addiction:

The psychological aspect of addiction is based on the fact that humans are social creatures, and when we study human psychology scientifically, we reach the conclusion that chemical substances or other addictive elements that change the psychological life of individuals produce different outcomes in each person’s life.

When we analyze addiction from a psychological perspective, although it initially gives people pleasure, this momentary pleasure gradually leads to a mental disorder that results in loss of control of will and disruption of the mind.

This mental disorder is manifested in the form of reduced self-care and withdrawal from social life through immersion in ordinary life and behavior. By weakening the person’s ability to adapt, it leads the individual, who can no longer continue his work and academic life, to failure. Although all effects of addiction influence each other in a sequential manner leading to different outcomes in various areas of life from one person to another, in reality, due to the psychological effect of addiction, it leads people to one possible path, which is the path of failure. (2025, Dr. Nevzat Tarhan)

In addition to failure in work, study, and social life, it causes unnecessary fights by disrupting the anger control mechanism in individuals, causing social problems among addicts, anxiety, and sudden anger attacks, which leads to legal problems.

When evaluating the cause-and-effect relationships we have explained, we can see that although addiction is examined behaviorally, socially, and biologically, the “psychological” aspect of addiction is one of the aspects that affects people the most and harms them the most.

Discussion and analysis of statistics:

The impact of this addiction varies according to the type of digital platform, as each has attraction mechanisms and design features that trigger different psychological and neurological responses. Social media addicts may feel inadequacy and low self-esteem due to constant comparison, a feeling of not keeping up with others, and dissatisfaction with personal appearance, not to mention the constant fear of missing posts or events, which reinforces compulsive behavior and strengthens the addiction cycle that may lead to sleep and eating disorders.

As for those addicted to electronic games, whose system is based on stimulating dopamine secretion in the brain, this creates a continuous need to return to play each time.

Thus, the player prefers interaction within the virtual world over real relationships, which leads to a weakening of social skills. Continuous exposure to violent scenes in games may reduce the level of empathy and increase aggressive behaviors, especially in those with prior predisposition. Rapid and continuous changes in game stimuli may also create a feeling that the

real world is slow and boring, making it difficult to focus on activities that require patience (such as studying or reading). Thus, the game becomes an escape from real-life problems (academic pressures, family problems), preventing the individual from developing healthy coping mechanisms to face these problems.

Content addicts of visual media, unlike games or social networks that provide intermittent rewards, are found to receive a continuous and comfortable flow of stimulation. Neuroscientist Dr. David Eagleman states that “the human mind is a story-seeking and audiovisual-stimulus-seeking entity, and visual content fulfills this need immediately and continuously.” The absence of moments of emptiness or boredom prevents the mind from seeking other sources of pleasure, creating psychological dependence.

Many individuals also use visual content as an unhealthy mechanism to escape negative emotions or stressful situations. The study by “Rubenking et al. (2018)” found that “binge-watching was significantly associated with feelings of loneliness, depression, and lack of self-control.” Thus, video becomes an easy refuge from work pressures, social problems, or even self-confrontation.

Continuous passive consumption of news and information may also lead to a state of inertia, where the mind receives information without making effort to process or analyze it. The philosopher Marshall McLuhan says: “We become what we see; media are not just tools, they are environments.” This creates a sense of indifference toward the real world and loss of interest in hobbies and direct social interactions, as well as emotional energies that could have been directed toward productive activities or skill development. Psychologist B. J. Fogg, in his book “Indistractable” (2019), describes this behavior as “escape from internal discomfort,” leading to procrastination of important tasks, constant feelings of guilt, and low productivity.

Compulsive scrolling of negative news, known as “Doomscrolling,” stimulates the brain’s survival instinct, placing the individual in a state of constant alertness and anxiety. Cross et al. (2021) found during the pandemic that “high consumption of pandemic-related news was associated with increased levels of anxiety and stress” (Cross et al., 2021). This is not limited to psychological anxiety only, but has a physiological basis, as Soroka et al. (2017) showed that “emotionally arousing news triggers physiological responses” such as increased heart rate, linking psychological anxiety with a direct bodily response (Soroka et al., 2017).

Proposed recommendations:

- The necessity of conducting local and comparative studies

It is recommended to conduct field studies at a local level (such as Algeria and North African countries) to measure the prevalence of different patterns of digital addiction among university youth, with comparison to international data to determine the cultural and social specificity of the phenomenon.

- Development of standardized Arabic measurement tools

It is recommended to develop standardized Arabic scales to measure behavioral digital addiction patterns (gaming addiction, viewing, browsing, etc.) that take into account the psychological and cultural characteristics of Arab students, as most current studies rely on Western scales that may not fully fit the local environment.

- Focusing on sensitive age groups
Future research should target adolescents and university students as the most vulnerable groups to digital addiction, with the study of associated psychological, social, and educational factors.
- Analysis of accompanying psychological and social factors
It is important to deepen the study of the relationship between digital addiction and: anxiety, depression, weak social relationships, isolation, and sleep deprivation, in order to identify patterns of mutual influence among university students.
- Study of the role of technical design in reinforcing addictive behavior
It is recommended to analyze design features in applications and platforms (such as autoplay on Netflix or continuous notifications on social media) as factors that may stimulate excessive use.
- Proposal of preventive and therapeutic intervention programs
Future research should include field experiments to test the effectiveness of awareness and behavioral programs (such as cognitive behavioral therapy or time management training) to reduce university students' excessive dependence on digital media.
- Strengthening the role of counseling centers and psychological support centers in universities to reduce the phenomenon of digital addiction among university students

References:

- Ahmed, Bishri Ismail (2006). Internet addiction and its relationship with personality dimensions and psychological disorders among adolescents. Department of Psychology. Faculty of Arts. Zagazig University, Egypt.
- Dulaimi, Saleh. (2015). Addiction and drugs: The addiction network to drugs and the internet. Retrieval date: 12-2-2016.
- Ahmed Ben Ali Al-Zahrani (2024). The impact of digital addiction on the level of social skills among university students: Journal of Media and Communication Studies, Volume 04, Issue 02, December 2024, Ben Aknoun, Algeria.
- Solhawi Ahlam, Khizar Mariam (2022). Exam anxiety and its relationship with internet addiction among third-year secondary students: Master's thesis, specialization in counseling and guidance, Mohamed Khider University, Biskra, Algeria.
- Alaa Abdel Khaleq, Hussein Al-Mandlawi (2025). Mental health in the digital age: from disorders to therapeutic strategies. Dar Al-Sard for Printing, Publishing and Distribution, 1st ed., Baghdad, Iraq.
- Ziad Ahmed Al-Laymon (2021). Treatment of internet addiction. Official page of Tawazon Center for Psychological and Behavioral Consultations and Training, scientific article published on March 24, 2021. Link: <https://tawazone.net/category//>
- Salari, N., Zarei, H., Hosseinian-Far, A., Rasoulpoor, S., Shohaimi, S., & Mohammadi, M. (2023). The global prevalence of social media addiction among university students: A systematic review and meta-analysis. Journal of Public Health. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10389-023-02012-1>

- Boz, Ö., & Dinç, N. (2023). The epidemiology and effects of video game addiction: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Acta Psychologica*, 241, Article 104047. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2023.104047>
- Stevens, M. W. R., Dorstyn, D., Delfabbro, P. H., & King, D. L. (2022). Global prevalence of gaming disorder: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 57(6), 928. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00048674221137011>
- Alrahili, N., Alreefi, M., Alkhonain, I. M., Aldakhilallah, M., Alothaim, J., Alzahrani, A., Alshargi, A., & Baabbad, N. (2023). The prevalence of video game addiction and its relation to anxiety, depression, and ADHD in children and adolescents in Saudi Arabia. *Cureus*, 15(8), e42957. <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.42957>
- Farooka, M. S., & Hussain, S. (2025). Streaming into youth culture: Prevalence and patterns of Netflix usage in Pakistan. *Journal of Political Stability Archive*, 3(4), 50–60. <https://doi.org/10.63468/jpsa.3.4.04>
- Chang, Y.-J., & Peng, C.-Y. (2022). Exploring experiences of binge-watching and perceived addictiveness among binge-watchers: A qualitative study. *BMC Public Health*, 22, 2285. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-14789-z>
- [Authors Unknown]. (2025). Prevalence and psychological correlates of binge-watching: The digital era of entertainment. *Industrial Psychiatry Journal*, 34(2), 215–220. https://doi.org/10.4103/ipj.ipj_36_25
- Salpynov, Z., Kosherova, Z., Sarría-Santamera, A., Nurkatov, Y., Gusmanov, A., & Semenova, Y. (2024). The worldwide prevalence of internet addiction among medical students: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 21(9), 1146. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph21091146>
- Masaeli, N., & Billieux, J. (2022). Is problematic internet and smartphone use related to poorer quality of life? A systematic review of available evidence and assessment strategies. *Current Addiction Reports*, 9, 235–250. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40429-022-00415-w>
- (Arab region) Abdel-Salam, A., Alrowaili, M., Albedaiwi, W., Alessa, L., & Alfayyadh, Y. (2023). Prevalence of internet addiction in Gulf countries: A systematic review and meta-analysis. <https://doi.org/10.1556/2006.2021.00057>
<https://npistanbul.com/en/what-is-the-psychological-aspect-of-addiction>