

Conference Paper

Internet Addiction, Lifestyle or Mental Disorder? A Phenomenological Study on Social Media Addiction in Indonesia

Nuning Kurniasih

Library and Information Science Program, Department of Communication and Information Faculty of Communication Science, Universitas Padjadjaran

Abstract

This paper attempts to shed some light on how internet users, who feel they are heavy users of the internet, interpret the meaning of internet addiction. This phenomenological study is based on interviews with 9 informants who see themselves as internet addicts. A psychology expert was interviewed for triangulation. The methods used to collect data were in-depth interview, observation, and direct interaction with the informants' social media. The results of study showed that the informants spend 1 to 8 hours daily to access internet, and they feel upset, angry, bored, outcast, disconnected from the world, or feel like something is missing when they are unable to access the internet, (6) the informants have their own commitment in working. However, the informants do not consider their internet addiction as critical. Rather, they see their 'addiction' as part of their daily needs and lifestyle.

Keywords: internet addiction, internet addicts, life style, mental disorder

Corresponding Author:
Nuning Kurniasih; email: nuning.kurniasih@unpad.ac.id

Received: 09 April 2017
Accepted: 17 May 2017
Published: 12 June 2017

Publishing services provided
by Knowledge E

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Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the ICoSaPS Conference Committee.

1. Background

1.1. The Phenomenon of "Internet Addiction"

Internet has become the most part of one's life. Many people cannot live without internet, checking on the gadget since they wake up until their bedtime. Global Web Index Q4 2015 reported that Indonesian spent on average 4 hours 42 minutes using PC and 3 hours 33 minutes using mobile phone. Meanwhile, Indonesians who access social media from any devices spent an average of 2 hours 51 minutes on social media a day [13]. An internet meme to describe this phenomenon using the pyramid of needs by Abraham Maslow by replacing the basic human needs – on the bottom of the pyramid – with Wi-Fi has gone viral in social media. This implies how people need Wi-Fi more than anything in their life. People with high dependence on the internet then are considered as internet addicts.

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1.2. Internet Addiction and Mental Disorder

The term Internet Addiction (IA) was introduced by Young in 1996 [26] and then generally accepted in 2000 [21]. It is a conceptualization of people who cannot differentiate between online and offline life. A psychiatrist or a clinician needs to diagnose first in order to judge someone as an internet addict. The set of official psychiatric diagnoses is Diagnostic and Statistical Manual Work Group for the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders V (DSM-5) [23]. The American Medical Association, back in 2006, did not recommend IA in DSM-5 [8] based on the notion that IA is different from addiction to other things.

IA is considered normal where people prone to devote their time to something new and as time passed by they would eventually be able to control themselves [21]. Meanwhile, some experts argue that DSM-5 includes Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD) based on the deliberation that the compulsive-impulsive disorder spectrum of IA meet the subtypes of DSM-5, namely excessive gaming, sexual preoccupations and e-mail/text messaging [5, 18]. Jahanian and Seifury [12] suggest there is significant relationship between internet addiction and student's mental health thus they recommend to limit the internet use frequency. Strom's [12, 14] studies also addressed that internet addiction affects academic achievement, students get depressed as they feel lonely, ashamed, tired, and sleep deprived. Moreover, internet addiction also causes a person to avoid his social responsibility, isolating oneself, lose social support, work inefficiently, and perform poorly in schools [15]. Thus, IA as a mental disorder is still debatable [8, 18].

1.3. Research Question

Mental disorder, according to DSM-5, is interpreted differently by cultural norms, social and family values. Diagnostic assessment needs to regard the social cultural differences in each experience, symptoms and behavior in individual, family and social contexts [1]. Mental disorder or mental illness is a health issue affecting one's feeling, mind, behavior and interaction with the others. A person is regarded as someone with mental disorder has three symptoms, i.e. stigma, indicating particular condition categorized as mental disorder by a mental health professional and as the result of social control by employing behaviors approved socially [6]. Nevertheless, people tend to give labels based on merely what they see, what they hear, and how they feel.

In this study, some of the social media active users consider themselves as internet addicts because of their high dependency on the internet. Therefore, this research question is "How do people, who acknowledge themselves as internet addicts, not by medical diagnosis, interpret the meaning of internet addiction?" "As a phenomenon,

internet addiction can be regarded from different aspects, such as medical aspect, psychological, informatics, law, ethics, social, etc. In this study, I regard this phenomenon in the context of social sciences based on computer mediated communication perspective. This is a necessary study considering the current generation is internet generation.

1.4. Research Goals

This study aims to investigate (1) the reasons behind the informants' internet addiction, (2) the habit of internet usage, (3) the time used to access internet, (4) the feeling when they access the internet, (5) the feeling when they cannot access the internet, (6) the informants' viewpoint on the correlation between their internet addiction and working performance, (7) the addictive points about internet, and (8) how to distract the informants from the internet.

2. Research Method

This is a phenomenological study of internet addiction. Phenomenology is a philosophical approach to study human experiences within the reality of their own consciousness. The main concept of phenomenology is meaning. Edmund Gustav Albecht Husserl suggested that to gain meaning, we need to transform the structure of implicit experiences into explicit ones [28]. The focus of phenomenology is the experiences of an individual's consciousness, including the goals of an act and the nature of its intention (intentionality). Intentionality is an object-oriented focused consciousness and action [25]. This study attempted to seek for the meaning of internet addiction from those who consider themselves as internet addicts.

Phenomenology perceives human experiences from the perspective of the first person, thus according to Husserl, researcher has to minimize his or her prejudice and to be opened to the research object, in order to reduce the knowledge of the object from other sources [28]. Primary data was collected by interviewing with and observing the informants' social media account, while secondary data was collected from literature review. This study was conducted from March to October 2016 with nine informants. The informants were the active users of social media who consider themselves as internet addicts. Data analysis technique based on the phenomenology analysis stages included (1) reading and reading, (2) initial noting, (3) developing emergent themes, (4) searching for connection across emergent theme, (5) moving the next cases and (6) looking for pattern across cases [25].

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Why the Informants Considered Themselves as Internet Addicts

In this study, all of the informants consider themselves as internet addicts because: they consider internet as a significant part in their life; they feel incomplete and outcast without internet; they become anxious and upset when the internet is not working properly. The internet satisfies their needs of information media and it is irreplaceable. This is relevant to the finding of Cisco Connected World, suggesting that internet is an integral part of human's life, just like air, water, foods, etc., thus people cannot live without it [20].

The finding indicates the informants' high rates of dependency on the internet. This aligns with [20] statement that internet generation is not about someone's age but about how a generation connects with the technology and the internet. In this internet era, people always connect digitally, are able to access information anywhere and anytime, believe in online social relationship, and capable of balancing their life and work. The finding shows how the informants, born in 1980s, also have high rates of needs and high interaction with the internet.

3.2. Informants' Internet Usage

The informants use internet mainly for work and business purposes. Meanwhile, the other purposes are to learn, to seek information, to gain knowledge, to communicate, to shop, entertainment, to stalk other users, and to persuade others with a particular purpose. The informants' usual internet activities include checking emails, checking social media, visiting interesting links on social media, reading online news, checking blog's statistic hits, browsing and searching for magazines, books, and other information. In term of social media usage, an informant stated that he organizes several groups in Facebook, including his study group in college, where he usually shares subject materials and tests as well as daily jokes. This finding indicates how internet raises the user's working performance. Murugan Anandarajan and Claire A. Simmers argue that internet can keep the balance of life and work as long as there is time management [3].

3.3. The Time Used to Access Internet Daily

The advance of mobile phone technology enables people to access internet anywhere and anytime. Internet users do not have to make specific time to be able to access

internet. The informants spend 1 to 8 hours daily to access internet, where the duration itself depends on their information needs and the availability of their spare time. Even the informants can spend more than 12 hours to access internet when they have time off. An informant even admitted that he cannot stop accessing internet until his bedtime at 01.00 AM every single day. However, there is also informant who only accesses the internet while working on the average of 6 hours. These informants' average time used to access internet is higher than Indonesians' average time used to access internet generally as stated by Global Web Index Q4 2015, that is 4 hours and 42 minutes using PC, 3 hours and 33 minutes using mobile phone, and 2 hours 51 minutes using other devices [13].

3.4. The Informants' Feeling while Connecting to The Internet

While connecting to the internet, some of the informants feel differently because it is a daily activity, some feel curious, some feel relaxed and contented because of the information updates and the high speed of connectivity, even sometimes lost in time because of it. An informant even describes browsing on Facebook is like a smoker having cigarette and a coffee lover having morning coffee, it is relaxing. However, this feeling sometimes distracted and turned into negative ones when they read criminal news, etc. This finding shows how the informants feel contented and comfortable when accessing internet, where their information needs is satisfied. In [17] had studied on how people get happy by using internet.

3.5. The Informants Feeling When They are Unable to Access the Internet

The informants feel upset, angry, bored, outcast, disconnected from the world, or feel like something is missing when they are unable to access the internet. These feelings originate from the compliance of their information and high-speed access needs. In [4], Azher argues that the internet overuse causing internet addiction on students and resulting in anxiety and stress.

3.6. The Informants' Viewpoints on Their Internet Addiction and Working Performance

Although the informants find their internet addiction is disturbing, they still consider it as normal condition. They have their own commitment in working. They are fully aware to substitute their working or studying time when internet disturbs either one of it. As an example, the informants chose to work in the weekend when they are

unable to finish it during the working time because of the internet. An informant even admits that internet is not disturbing his working time but his quality time with the family. Cardona, Kretschmer, and Strobel's study (2013) findings indicate ICT affects individual's productivity positively and significantly. However, other findings by CISCO also shows 44% respondents of Y generation professionals focus more on working at the office and the other 38% respondents can be productive at home and at the office [9].

3.7. The Addictive Points of Internet

The addictive points of internet include newest information updates, and the needs to keep learning and reading. An informant states that internet is a super-giant provider of infinite information and cannot be replaced by other media. Internet provides him with books that he cannot afford offline. Other informants admit the habit of reading information sources online and how it is quite difficult to shift to manual sources. According to a psychology expert, the activity of using internet has its own cycle, when someone gains something positive or enjoyable consequences of a particular behavior, there will be repetition and eventually forms a pattern [2]. This study finding indicates how the informants have high dependency on the internet because it meets their information needs. In [22], Quinn suggests the factors causing someone addicts to the internet including easily used, complete contents, privacy, vast community, freedom, cover up ashamed, sense of mastery, interactivity, ability to re-find, validation, dissociation and borderless.

3.8. How to Distract the Informants from the Internet

There are some activities that are able to distract the informants from the internet, that is sleeping, driving, involved in a conversation with others, running a busy schedule – such as studying, group studying, cleaning house, working, family gathering, friends gathering, travelling, recreation, watching TV or cinema, and having hobbies. An informant shut down his mobile phone while vacationing for three days without any interruption. An informant even suggests the opposite, instead of stopping the access people only need to use the internet properly, for example, by providing a high-speed internet connection in the library. Julian Amriwijaya, a psychology expert, states it is hard to change a pattern of repeated behavior that brings certain pleasure, it needs another thing to substitute the pleasure and a strong will within oneself [2]. In other words, when someone attempts to change a positive pattern, it needs a recondition. Reconstruction of one's cognitive and consciousness is needed to be better. When one attempts to reduce his internet use, then he needs to know the goals of it and how

strong the commitment to reach the goals, and then recondition can be agreed on. Substitution activity or compensation is needed to substitute the joy of using internet, such as go shopping, traveling, etc. In the context of interpersonal relationship and social psychology, there is Social Exchange Theory by Harold Kelley, George Homans, Richard Emerson and Peter Blau [10, 11]. This theory elaborates on how interpersonal relationship as if a trade transaction where each transaction is affected by reward, cost, and profit. In this case, someone tends to repeat the same behavior or change the behavior when the value or result is gained proportionally or even more than the investment itself.

4. Conclusion

The findings indicate that although the informants consider their internet addiction is quite an issue, they do not regard it as a mental disorder. They called their addiction as needs and lifestyle. In [5], Block suggests four significant points regarding Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD): 1) excessive use, (2) withdrawal, (3) tolerance, and (4) negative repercussions.

In accordance with these four components, the informants (1) spend 1 to 8 hours to access internet, (2) get upset, angry, bored, outcast, disconnected from the world, feel like something is missing when they are unable to access internet, (3) need high-speed internet connection, (4) but then they realize their main priorities are focus in working, to family, and social life offline. Thus, the informants still have control over themselves, they can differentiate online and offline world, and their working productivity keeps in check.

Julian Amriwijaya, a lecturer of Department of General and Experimental Psychology, Psychology Faculty, Universitas Padjadjaran, states that the term of internet addiction need to be carefully used. Julian also elaborates that IA has not acknowledged yet by DSM-5, thus cannot be categorized as mental disorder. As long as the internet user has self-control, strong ego, good reality testing over space and time, not harming him and the others, then the positive thing is the activity itself serves to widen one's knowledge and increase his productivity [2].

Based on the aforementioned, it can be concluded that high rates of internet dependency cannot be categorized as mental disorder, as shown in the findings, where the high intensity internet using by the informants is to meet their work or business needs, to learn, to seek information, to widen knowledge, to communicate, to shop, recreation, to stalk, and to persuade people for a certain purpose. In other words, the internet dependency of internet generation is a life style and needs.

5. Acknowledgements

It is an independent study with the help of the informants and expert on the field. I would like to thank to all of those involved, both the informants and Julian Amriwijaya, as the expert on the field so that this study can be concluded in time. I would also like to thank to Faculty of Communication Science Universitas Padjadjaran for the support.

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