



Research Article

Association of Personality Traits and Risk of Internet Addiction in Adolescents



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SUMMARY

Purpose: This cross-sectional, descriptive study analyzes the association between personality traits and internet addiction in adolescents.

Methods: The study was conducted with 328 adolescents attending two high schools in the Aegean region of Turkey. The data were collected using a sociodemographic information questionnaire, the Internet Addiction Scale and the Adjective Based Personality Scale from students who gave their informed consent to participate. Data were assessed by descriptive statistics, *t* tests, and logistic regression analysis, using SPSS software.

Results: The students had an average age of 16.43 ± 1.47 years and 40.5% were female. The percentage of subjects at risk of internet addiction was 15.9% ($n = 52$), and 42.4% ($n = 22$) of them reported that the amounts of time they spent online was acceptable. We found statistically significant differences in the average subdimensional scores for extraversion ($t = 2.310$, $p < .050$) and openness to experience ($t = 3.35$, $p < .001$), and between students at risk of internet addiction ($n = 52$) and those who were not ($n = 276$).

Conclusions: Adolescents who were found to be at risk of internet addiction nevertheless reported on the survey questionnaires that the amount of time they spent online was acceptable. The study determined that participants' risk of internet addiction was associated with their levels of extraversion and openness to experience.

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Introduction

In the 21st century, also known as the information age, computers and the internet have penetrated into all aspects of life. Internet use has been increasing in Turkey, as has been the case for all around the world. The statistics for 2014 indicate that 60.2% of the population in Turkey has access to the internet [1]. They also show that computer and internet use is the most common among those aged between 16 and 24 years, while internet use starts at age 10 (Turkish Statistical Institute).

Even though the use of developing technologies makes our daily lives easier, individuals, especially children and the young, are adversely influenced by misuse or overuse of technologies, computers and the internet. Since children and the young are still psychologically immature, they constitute a potential risk group for internet addiction [2].

Internet addiction is described as inability to stop internet overuse, tendency to perceive offline time as meaningless, excessive irritation and aggression during deprivation [3], a psychiatric condition involving maladaptive ideas and pathologic behaviors. Internet overuse causes one to have difficulty at home, work or school or in his/her psychological life [4]. Internet addiction is a disorder as risky as other types of addiction. It is especially common among the young, and can accompany or pave the way for other psychiatric disorders [5].

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Although studies have identified a number of factors associated with internet addiction, personality traits stand out as one of the most important factors [6–13]. Research has shown that internet use is positively correlated with extraversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness, whereas there is a negative correlation between internet use and neuroticism and openness to experience. It is argued in these studies that extrovert individuals more often feel the need to communicate with others when compared to introverted individuals and thus they more often use the internet for interactive purposes. On the other hand, introverted individuals seem to use the internet mainly because it reduces the anxiety of being rejected or ridiculed, and it allows users to conceal their identities [6,10,14–16]. Although personality traits are linked with internet use, various studies have reported conflicting findings regarding the effects of the same personality traits on internet use (Batigun & Kilic; Engelberg & Sjoberg; Floros & Siomos; Samarein et al.; Servidio; Young & Rodgers). Furthermore, a review of the literature indicates that there are a limited number of studies regarding the subject.

Present study

The present study was motivated by conflicting findings in literature and the limited number of studies in Turkey on this subject [6]. The study was designed to examine the association between personality traits and internet addiction among adolescents.

Methods

Study design

This study used a cross-sectional, correlational design to examine the association between personality traits and internet addiction among adolescents.

Setting and sample

Power analysis was conducted to determine the size of the sample. When Type I and Type II errors were set as .05 and .20 (power 80.0%), respectively, the number of participants required for the sample was estimated to be 202. This calculated number of participants needed ($n = 202$) were based on internet usage hours reported in a study by Kuss et al [9]. Considering the number of students in the schools and the potential loss of participants, the plan was to incorporate two schools into the study. The number of high schools ($n = 25$) located in the city where the study was conducted was obtained from the Provincial Directorate for National Education. Each school was assigned a number and two schools were randomly selected using a table of random numbers.

The study sample consisted of 328 adolescents attending two senior high schools in a provincial center in Western Turkey. The students were selected by convenience sampling and volunteered to participate.

Ethical considerations

Ethics committee permission, institutional approval and parental consent were received for this study. Verbal consent was obtained from the participating students.

Measures

The survey consisted of three domains assessing study participants' sociodemographic characteristics, internet addiction level, and personality traits.

Sociodemographic Information Questionnaire

Participant background characteristics included age, gender, and grade level of the students, the age and education levels of their parents, and family financial status. It also included questions regarding internet usage, such as whether the students' homes have access to the internet, and the amount of time they spend online.

Internet Addiction Scale

The Chinese Internet Addiction Scale was developed by Chen, Weng, Su, Wu, and Yang [17]. A score of 57 or less indicates "non-risky", while a score of 58 or more indicates "risky internet usage". The scale consists of five subscales: "compulsive usage", "withdrawal", "tolerance", "time management", and "interpersonal/health problems". The subscales are based on the DSM-IV criteria for substance abuse [8,18]. The scale was adapted for the Turkish language by Kesici and Sahin in 2010 [19]. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the Turkish version of the scale was .88. Five factors explain 63.8% of the total variance, with factor loadings of 0.44–0.74 (Sahin Kesici and Ismail Sahin) [19]. Permission to use the scale was obtained from the author.

Adjective Based Personality Test (ABPT)

The ABPT was developed by Bacanli, Ilhan and Aslan [20] based on the five factor model. The ABPT consists of 40 items based on antithetical pairs of adjectives, which are rated on a 7 point Likert-like scale. Factor analysis yielded the following five factors: extraversion (e.g., "prefers to be alone/likes social get-togethers"), agreeableness (e.g., "vengeful/forgiving"), conscientiousness (e.g., "neat/disorderly"), neuroticism (e.g., "calm/agitated"), and openness to experience (e.g., "interested in art/not interested in art"). The extraversion and agreeableness subscales consist of nine items. The conscientiousness and neuroticism subscales each consists of seven items. The openness to experience subscale consists of eight items. These five factors were found to explain 52.6% of the scale's total variance. Factor loadings were 0.37–0.86 [20]. Subscale reliability coefficients are given in Table 1. Permission to use this scale was obtained from the author.

Data collection/procedure

First, written consent was obtained from the Provincial Directorate for National Education. Then, informed consent was received

Table 1 Subscale Reliability Coefficients.

Subscale	Original study ^a Cronbach's alpha	Original study ^a test-retest correlation	Current study Cronbach's alpha
Extraversion	.89	.85	.89
Agreeableness	.87	.86	.78
Conscientiousness	.88	.71	.80
Neuroticism	.73	.85	.74
Openness to Experience	.80	.80	.77

Note. ^aBacanli et al. [20].

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