



Generalized problematic Internet use and regulation of social emotional competence: The mediating role of maladaptive cognitions arising from academic expectation stress on adolescents



Wan Har Chong*, Stefanie Chye, Vivien S. Huan, Rebecca P. Ang

Psychological Studies Academic Group, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 25 June 2014

Keywords:

Social-emotional competence
Academic stress
Generalized problematic Internet use
Maladaptive cognitions
Mediation
Suppression effect

ABSTRACT

This study explored the relationships between adolescents' perceptions of their capacity for social-emotional regulation and generalized problematic Internet use (GPIU). It further examined if maladaptive thoughts from undue academic-related stress mediated this relationship in a school-going population in Singapore where educational achievement is heavily emphasized and expected from the family and school, and the pressure to succeed and do well academically is more acutely felt than that experienced in western contexts. A total of 1437 8th and 9th graders participated in a survey questionnaire. The results showed that adolescents who perceived higher regulatory competence were more likely to use the Internet to deal with the negative consequences of Internet use in appropriate ways. Also, the study found maladaptive thoughts that came from perceived academic expectations of parents and teachers partially mediated the effects of social-emotional regulatory competence and these youngsters' ability to control their online social interactions. Of interest was the unexpected finding that the respective relationships between social-emotional regulatory competence and compulsive Internet use, and withdrawal from Internet use became salient when such maladaptive thoughts were taken into account, suggesting the possibility of suppression rather than mediational effects. Implications arising from the study will be discussed.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Research has well documented the potential negative effects that arise from excessive use of Internet on psychological well-being, addiction tendencies and psychological stress (e.g., Caplan, 2002; Eastin, 2005; Lam & Peng, 2010; Lin & Tsai, 2002). However, much of this focus in research has been with content-specific problematic Internet usage (such as online gaming) or on frequency of time spent on Internet (Caplan, 2002) and the associations with pathological and maladaptive symptoms such as depression and anxiety, and/or pre-existing interpersonal difficulties (e.g., Subramaniam, Qiu, & Winslow, 2008; Willoughby, 2008). With the extensive use of Internet in everyday life, there is a need to understand the effects of Internet use beyond those individuals who use the technology excessively or are developing problems arising from its use, and on the impact of the generalized use of this technology on typical populations. This study aims to extend our understanding on the possible contribution of other psychoso-

cial and interpersonal correlates of generalized problematic Internet use (GPIU). In particular, we are interested to find out if adolescents' perceptions of their self-regulatory capability in socio-emotional competence can be extended to help them deal with the maladaptive cognitions generated from the stress of managing academic expectations and their generalized use of the Internet. We examined this problem in an Asian context where such self-imposed and perceived stress constitute a major source in affecting adolescent mental health. We begin by providing a literature review covering the theoretical background of our study. We also provide justification for our choice of variables that are of interest in this study and conclude the section with our hypotheses. Next, we outline the method used in this study and report the findings. We conclude with a discussion of our findings, the limitations and implications arising from the study.

2. Literature review

2.1. Specific and generalized problematic Internet use

Excessive and problematic Internet use is characterized by loss of control, a preoccupation with Internet use and continued usage

* Corresponding author. Address: Psychological Studies Academic Group, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, 1 Nanyang Walk, Singapore 637616, Singapore. Tel.: +65 6790 3210; fax: +65 6896 9410.

E-mail address: wanhar.chong@nie.edu.sg (W.H. Chong).

despite negative consequences. Davis (2001) proposed a cognitive-behavioral model in which both problematic Internet use (PIU) cognitions and behaviors are seen as “consequences, rather than causes, of broader psychopathology” (Caplan, 2002, p. 557) and posited that individuals can experience psychological, social and behavioral problems as a result of Internet usage. He also drew a distinction between specific and generalized problematic Internet use and highlighted the role of maladaptive cognitions in the development of pathways to GPIU. Maladaptive cognitions describe those distortions in thoughts about the self or the world which bring about ruminations and constant thinking that relate to one’s Internet use (Davis, 2001). Specific PIU is identified as the overuse and abuse of specific Internet use (such as gaming and pornography) and is assumed to be the consequence of pre-existing psychopathology that is associated with online activity. Persistent overuse of certain online applications has been identified as ‘pathological Internet use’. Indeed, research has documented that individuals who are psychologically vulnerable are especially at risk of using the Internet in a problematic way. (Davis, 2001; Subramaniam et al., 2008; Willoughby, 2008; Yellowless & Marks, 2007). Schimmenti, Passanisi, Gervasi, Manzella, and Famà (2013), for example, found that 18–19 year old adolescents who had traumatic childhood experiences of physical and sexual abuse reported higher scores on PIU, and anxious and avoidant attachment attitudes. In an earlier study, Schimmenti, Guglielmucci, Barbasio, and Granieri (2012) had also identified this relationship to exist with Italian adult Multi-User Dungeon players. Specifically, the authors found that childhood experiences of loss, neglect and/or abuse can predispose these individuals to “broader psychological vulnerability” (p. 199) of unresolved attachment states and Internet addiction. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the authors argued that such addiction to specific Internet use may be seen as a safe and stable platform to allow the individual to express painful feelings and dissociated states of mind, and enabling one to develop a sense of relatedness, competence and mastery in working out issues with the early trauma. As such, both cognitive-behavioral and psychoanalytic perspectives similarly highlighted the role of pre-disposing factors within the individual that contribute to pathological Internet use. The difference lies with the respective focus on cognition and affect as alternate pathways to PIU.

Generalized PIU, on the other hand, involves excessive use of time on the Internet that are not content-specific (such as watching online videos, music, chatting and emailing) and with no clear specific or direct purpose, and locates the problem in the social context of the individual rather than within the self. Indeed, a number of research has already documented the problematic outcomes arising from lesser investigated online applications. For example, van den Eijnden, Meerkert, Vermulst, Spijkerman, and Engels (2008) found that compulsive Internet use can develop with online modes of communication, such as instant messenger use and chatting in chat rooms, even among adolescents who have no prior adjustment problems and which showed up six months from the first reporting of Internet use. The study further showed that those who reported to be high in loneliness responded differently and in unexpected ways from those who perceived to be low in loneliness in their use of emailing, chat room and instant messenger use. In another study, Lin and Tsai (2002) identified significant psychological differences among Internet-dependent and non-dependent users among Taiwanese high school adolescents. Specifically, Internet-dependent users perceived significantly more negative Internet influences on their daily routines, school performance, and parental relations.

Davis (2001) further argued generalized problematic Internet usage to be tied to the social context of the individual, postulating linkages of distal (such as predisposed vulnerability) and proximal

(such as specific maladaptive thinking) contextual factors to a more diverse range of consequences that arise from the generalized use of the Internet. In particular, he hypothesized that the lack of social support from family or significant others and/or social isolation and low psychosocial well-being to be important factors contributing to the causal pathway to generalized problematic Internet use. Individuals with this problem may use the Internet to put off responsibilities and have problems with procrastination. Such wasted time interferes with daily functioning and/or the carrying out of responsibilities, resulting in pressures.

To operationalize Davis’ theoretical construct of generalized problematic Internet use, Caplan (2002) designed the 29-item Generalized Problematic Internet Scale (GPIUS) to measure the degree to which an individual experiences the types of cognitions, behaviors and outcomes described as constituting generalized problematic Internet use and identified seven unique factors: mood alteration, perceived social benefits available online, negative outcomes associated with Internet use, compulsive Internet use, excessive amounts of time spent online, withdrawal symptoms when away from the Internet, and perceived social control available online. He further tested Davis’ model to isolate loneliness as the psychosocial correlate that made a significant contribution to generalized problematic Internet use. Using Caplan’s GPIUS scale, Ang, Chong, Chye, and Huan (2012) found that this link between loneliness and generalized problematic Internet use was moderated by perceived parental knowledge of online activities with an Asian adolescent population.

Taken together, the literature has identified a range of psychosocial indicators (such as loneliness and interpersonal skill deficit) that pre-dispose, foster or contribute to problematic Internet use that is of either a specific or generalized focus. The following literature seeks to rationalize the roles of regulatory capacity in social-emotional competence and maladaptive cognitions associated with stress about academic expectations and their relationships to generalized problematic Internet use in a typical Asian adolescent population where these psychosocial factors are known to be important to their adjustment. We seek to further explore the utility of the GPIUS in understanding these interrelationships.

2.2. Context of the study

The Internet offers “interpersonal utility” (Caplan, 2002; p. 572) as a functional alternative to face-to-face interactions for many individuals who perceived themselves to be less competent in managing interpersonal relationships. Over time, individuals can unwittingly succumb to the attractions of what such online facilities can offer to substitute for various social demands arising from face to face interactions. We reason that an individual’s ability in regulating one’s social-emotional competencies may be associated with the capability to deal with and resist excessive and/or compulsive use of the Internet or other negative effects arising from its use. In addition, we further posit that maladaptive cognitions arising from perceived stress in response to the academic expectations the individual has for oneself and as perceived of significant others (such as parents and teachers) may mediate the relationship between these cognitions and one’s ability to regulate Internet use and the negative effects arising from its use. Although stress has positive outcomes for individuals, our concern is with excessive stress which can have negative consequences on mental health and long term well-being in our cultural context. In Asia (e.g., Singapore, Hong Kong, China and South Korea) where educational achievement is heavily emphasized and expected from family and school, the pressure to succeed and do well academically is more acutely felt than that experienced in western contexts or with Asians living in these countries (Lee & Larson, 2000). In Singapore, education has been identified by many young people as the most

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/350623>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/350623>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)