



## Review

## The effect of internet use on well-being: Meta-analysis



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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this meta-analysis study was to investigate the effect of internet use on the components of well-being. Life satisfaction, well-being and self-esteem were evaluated as markers of well-being and their interaction with internet use was assessed. Publications in the literature were collated ( $N = 281$ ) by investigating articles related to the topic. In light of criteria determined by the researcher, 23 studies were included in the analysis. This study comprised a sample group of 21,054 individuals. The mean age of the sample group was calculated as 20.32 years. According to the results of the analysis using the random effect model, internet use has a significant effect on well-being at low levels ( $k = 28$ ,  $r = -0.18$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The components of well-being were used as moderator variables. Results of moderator analysis showed that the well-being components were not significant moderator variables of the effect of internet use on well-being ( $Qb = 1.34$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). According to the results of the research, internet use is an effective variable on well-being. The results are discussed in light of the literature.

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## 1. Introduction

Over the last fifteen years, internet use has increased globally and it is known that nearly half of the global population uses the

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internet (Internet World Stats, 2016). The internet provides convenience for people in a variety of ways from communication to shopping and makes access to these opportunities easier (Caplan, 2007). It appears impossible that this phenomenon has not affected our lives. The result of excess time spent on qualitatively low activities in virtual environments has caused changes in the psychosocial behavior of individuals, leading to the definition of healthy and pathological internet use. Accordingly, healthy internet use is the use of the internet within a determined time interval with a specific aim (Davis, 2001). Additionally, problematic internet use, conceptualized as pathological, problematic or compulsive internet use, is defined as a multi-dimensional syndrome negatively affecting the social, psychological and professional life of the individual (Caplan, 2005). Problems such as depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness and insomnia may accompany problematic internet use. The interaction between well-being and problematic internet use has attracted, and continues to attract, the attention of researchers. When research findings are investigated, it is easily understood that problematic internet use negatively affects the well-being of the individual (Mei, Yau, Chai, Guo, & Potenza, 2016; Zhang, 2015). However, some research results have shown that problematic internet use has a direct correlation with well-being. As a result, there is no overlap between studies (Heo, Chun, Lee, Lee, & Kim, 2015). Huang (2010), moving from this idea, brought together studies investigating the correlation between internet use and well-being in a meta-analysis study. According to the results obtained, there was a low level correlation between internet use and well-being ( $r = -0.03$ ). This study may be assessed as the next stage in a relay race. Beginning where Huang (2010) left off, a meta-analysis study was designed evaluating the studies on internet use and well-being.

### 1.1. Well-being components

The World Health Organization brings personal development and potential to the forefront in its definition of health, promoting positive psychology. Health is the full experience of wellness of the individual physically, mentally and socially, without disease or disability (WHO, 1946). Though the importance of well-being had been stated previously, studies in this area (positive psychology) began after the 1960s, (e.g., life satisfaction; Neugarten, Havighurst, & Tobin, 1961). Positive psychology focuses on how people may develop their positive competencies over their lifetime. As a result, a belief developed that people should live with a high proportion of positivity in their lives (Peterson, 2000; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

#### 1.1.1. Life satisfaction

Currently many parameters like happiness, life satisfaction, subjective well-being, psychological well-being and optimism are among the study areas of positive psychology (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2010). In this study the well-being indicators of life satisfaction, psychological well-being and self-esteem were evaluated. For the whole of history, processes adding meaning to human life and allowing satisfaction to be gained from previous experiences have been researched. Happiness is a construct that has been much focused on and continually investigated for many years (Diener, 2000). The most general form of happiness is correlated with subjective well-being. Subjective well-being is assessed under the hedonic dimension of well-being. Accordingly, subjective well-being is an assessment of their own life by the individual in terms of obtaining satisfaction (hedonic-pleasure principle) (Ryan & Deci, 2001). This assessment has both cognitive and emotional dimensions. While positive and negative emotions form the emotional dimension; life satisfaction is part of the cognitive

dimension. Life satisfaction is the perception of satisfaction toward life as a whole (Diener & Diener, 1996; Pavot & Diener, 1993). In light of these conceptual outcomes, life satisfaction may be defined as aspects in the life of an individual ensuring hedonic satisfaction. In other words, a narrow distance between what the individual wants to obtain and their hedonic gains indicates high life satisfaction.

#### 1.1.2. Psychological well-being

Psychological well-being develops on the basis of the eudaimonic dimension of well-being. Psychological well-being is related to the interaction between the meaning an individual gives to life and the route to realization of this meaning as a whole (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Ryff (1989) differentiates psychological well-being from subjective well-being. In this way, a Multi-dimensional Psychological Well-Being model was developed. This model emphasizes the optimal effort shown by an individual to use their potential and achieve perfection (Ryff, 1995). Psychological well-being deals with the potential of the individual to enter interactions with others using abilities and communication skills and the responsibilities of all these processes in terms of life aims (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

#### 1.1.3. Self-esteem

Self-esteem is the last component of well-being used in this study. Self-esteem is a comprehensive evaluation comprising cognitive and behavioral aspects of the self (Mruk, 2006). As a result of this evaluation, the individual makes positive and negative judgments about their concept of self, thus affecting self-esteem. Self-esteem is evaluated as a developmental phenomenon and is known to vary during different stages of life and in light of situations and events (Lubow, 2009). Rosenberg (1965) defined self-esteem as the positive and negative attitudes of the individual towards themselves. Self-esteem comprises all internal beliefs of the individual about themselves. In other words, self-esteem is all of the values the individual attributes to themselves (Guindon, 2010).

### 1.2. The current study

The cognitive behavioral approach may be used to explain the development of problematic internet use. According to this approach, irrational cognition related to self and the world may cause problematic internet use (Senol-Durak & Durak, 2011). In this way irrational cognition is added to dysfunctional behavior displayed by the individual and so internet use may be a way for the individual to avoid psychological problems. At the end of this process, generally problematic internet use is encountered (Caplan, 2002). This problem, rapidly expanding and affecting human lives, causes negative results in many areas (Odacı, 2013). Problematic internet use is reported to directly affect well-being (Ang, Chong, Chye, & Huan, 2012; Berber-Çelik, Odacı, & Bayraktar, 2015; Bozoglan, Demirer, & Sahin, 2013; Mitchell, Lebow, Uribe, Grathouse, & Shoger, 2011; Odacı & Çikrikci, 2014; Zhang, 2015). For example, while problematic internet use negatively affects well-being (Lachmann, Sariyska, Kannen, Cooper, & Montag, 2016; Nie, Sousa-Poza, & Nimrod, 2015); it may positively affect depression causing an increase in depressive symptoms (Lai et al., 2015; Ostovar et al., 2016).

Taking note of the research, when the correlation between problematic internet use and the components of well-being are investigated, many studies are found. These studies vary in terms of quantity and quality of the correlations between problematic internet use and well-being. The first meta-analysis study based on the correlation between internet use and well-being was completed by Huang (2010). In the last five years, the intense

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