Association Between Family Functioning and Online Reel Addiction and Mediated Role of Sensation Seeking Behavior and Loneliness Among University Graduates

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ABSTRACT

Online content in the form of reel watching is seen in that extant among youth that it has become an addiction. Online reel addiction is becoming a reality nowadays prevailing among youth in that extent that it is said that nation consumed by the reels and it is blurring the line between real and reel. In this rapidly changing world where personal freedom and individualistic growth is seen mostly desired factor that has changed the format of family structure and it's functioning. In India, family is considered very cohesively bonded with values, traditions, rituals, love and respect among the members and in most of the modern forms of family structure these factors can be seen in far and less extent. This study examines the associationship between family function and online reel addiction among graduates as well as the mediating effect of sensation seeking behavior and loneliness. The significance of present study might be attributed to the fact that youth spends leisure time in reel watching that most of the time exploit energy and lessen productivity. The present study examines how family functioning in India relates with online reel addiction among youth, how family functions to contribute in developing loneliness, how the loneliness and online reel addiction interrelate with each other. The fourth variable that is sensation seeking behavior influence in online reel addiction was also explored. The study follows review of the literature on above mentioned variables by systematically reviewing on the basis of key words. This study infers as associating the family function with online reel addiction that is mediated by loneliness and sensation seeking behavior. This study provides recommendations to overcome this issue and spreading awareness for healthy family functioning.

Keywords: Family functioning, reel addiction, sensation seeking behavior, loneliness.

INTRODUCTION

Two major contributions of process of globalization are technological advancement and enhanced accessibility towards information and its outcome can be seen as necessity for the young generation to become updated with the happenings around the globe and to get instant and latest information in hand. The consequence of this can be seen as the rise of internet users to 1,002.85 million in April-June 2025 in India (PIB, 2025). Excess and uncontrolled use of internet has resulted into addiction of various platforms of internet. Excessive use of the internet results into addiction of various internet media beyond the willing control of the user and it impact the work performance and give rise to psychological and social problems to deal with (Spada, 2014). In the present scenario the internet use has worsened as seen in the form of reel addiction.

This is very much prevalent in college and university going students with detrimental consequences on physical and mental health (Sharma and Sharma, 2018). Online reel addiction is a compulsive habit of watching short-form videos that form constant cycle of instant gratification. Data shows that India has the biggest consumption of reels with 385.35 million users between the age group of 18-24 years. The reels get over quickly with new reels with light-hearted contents to lead towards mindless scrolling. This addiction is a result of the interplay of an individual's innate characteristics and emotional needs. Griffiths (2005) has defined behavioral addiction by explaining six core components i.e. salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict and relapse.

Any individual indulge in any of these characteristics should be defined as addicted to particular behavior at operational level.

Previous studies have utilized I-PACED model (Brand et al., 2016) for specific internet use disorder where personality, affect, reasoning and implementation are applied to understand the interplay of individual's core characteristics, different predisposing factors mediators and moderators leading to internet addiction. Personality related and environmental factors are mostly studied in determining the addictive behavior for internet, addiction of social media and social sites addiction, however the contribution of external factors and internal personality related factors simultaneously on reel addiction is not seen in the literature Among other environmental factors family plays an important role to prompt or smoothen addiction of a person (Li et al., 2014). Due to inner familial conflicts, the members of the family, whenever conflicting situation arises, members reflect and react to this in the same manner as perceived in inner conflicting situation leading to gradual addiction and storage of negative emotions. This results into loneliness that is one of the states of the mind due to the family conflict and clash among members and this result into problematical behavior. Therefore, loneliness might be playing an interceding role in the relationship between family environment factors and individual problem behavior. Personality differences have different use motives that shape motivation for specific addiction. Psychological and social factors influence individual preference for addiction for particular type (Ryan et al., 2014). The significance of present study might be attributed to the fact that youth spends leisure time in reel watching that most of the time exploit energy and lessen productivity. Moreover, this addiction causes sleep deprivation, problem in attention, focus, higher depression, loneliness, sleep problems, lower psychological well-being, poorer life satisfaction, social connectedness and other psychiatric issues (Kircaburun, 2016b; De Cock et al., 2014; Vernon et al., 2015; Satici and Uysal, 2015; Blachnio et al, 2016; Savsi & Uysal, 2015).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study has the foundation of Self-determination theory (Desi & Ryan, 1985 and 2000) that is a motivational theory based on relationship aspects. Individual behaviors are determined by the three psycho-social needs, first one is autonomy that need to identify psychological liberty in one's act, second one is competence that is need to perceive a sense of usefulness in one's action to apprehend and gain desired outcome and third one is relatedness that is the need to sense related and cared of with other people. The satisfaction of these needs results in well-being and denial of these may result into compensation in behavioral regulation. Family context provide closest environment to fulfill the basic needs and its low satisfaction may lead to the usage of internet at compensatory level and social media and ultimately increase the danger of addictive behavior (Gugliandolo et al., 2020). Miller et al (2000) proposes Family system theory that emphasizes those behavioral outcomes of members of the family that determines by structure and association of the family. Those people belong to such family having conflicts and poor family functions develop unmet needs that are not satisfied within the family tend towards addiction and compulsion behaviour (Tafa and Baiocco, 2009). Unmet family needs may develop a status of mind as develop in loneliness that is also a determining factor for the addiction (Ummet and Eksi, 2016). Emotional security theory proposed by Davies & Cummings (1994) argued that problematic behaviour results from negative emotions arises from conflict present in the family members that stimulated and enhanced when same conflicting situation arises outside the family and leads to incapability to deal with the situation. The compensatory internet use theory (CIUT) given by Kardefelt- Winther (2014) proposes that negative emotions such as loneliness is compensated and catharsizes by excessive use of internet as defense mechanism. The internal factor that is sensational seeking behavior can be explained as a genetic and individualistic trait that produces strong need for novelty, intensified actions coupled with variation laden intricate sensations that combines with the involvement and experiencing the exciting and adventurous tasks (Zuckerman, 1994). The I-PACE Model discussed earlier proposes that problematic technology use arise through the interaction among personality traits, prompting factors and personal susceptibilities (Brand et al., 2019). Thus, the examination of potential moderating effect of sensation seeking in relation to loneliness, family functioning and online reel addiction in university graduates is felt important and contributory.

Family Functions and Online Reel Addiction

Family function refers to provide ways and means to the family members to lead quality life with all sorts of well-being including spiritual one for sound mental and physical development to fulfill overall quality of family

life (Miller et al., 2000). Poor family functions include disengagement and less cohesiveness with in the family members that results into various kinds of addictive behavior such as substance use, excessive technology use, alcohol addiction, online gaming and gambling conditions and Social Media Addiction (Hosseinbor aet al., 2012; Paolini et al, 2018; Nielsen et al., 2020; Othman et al., 2022) . Study conducted by Yu and Shek (2013) and Kabasakal (2015) investigated on family functioning and its relationship with internet addiction. Results shown that family functioning and internet addiction are inversely associated with each other. Results of other empirical studies have shown that dysfunctional families are prone towards internet addiction and poor family function increases addiction likelihood. Yu and Shek (2013) and Kabasakal (2015) in their independent studies analysed the family functioning and internet addiction on students in Hongkong and found that poor family functioning significantly contribute internet addiction as potential risk factor. Oslon and colleague analysed marital and family system and proposed circumplex model that state about dimension such as level of cohesion and flexibility and poor ones such as disengagement, enmeshment, rigidity and chaos. By applying this model previous studies reported that for problematic online gambling, smartphone use and compulsive online shopping different family functioning acquired different roles such as intervening as risk or protective (Oslon, 2011; Topino et al., 2021; Jimeno et al., 2022). This model can be applied in establishing link between family functioning and online reel addiction in the current study.

Family Function, Loneliness and Online Reel Addiction

Loneliness occurs when individual's social network is imperfect either in numbers or in quality and both (Peplau and Perlman, 1982). Loneliness can be seen most commonly among the urban youth that may be linked with the development issues at the time of early adulthood. Emotional Security Theory given by Davies and Cummings (1994) proposed that family conflict results into negative emotion within the members that aggravate their views on conflict situation and lead to problematic behaviour. Therefore, in link between family environmental factors and person's problematic behavior loneliness plays an interceding role and this has empirically supported. Studies have shown that childhood ill-treatment and mobile phone addiction has the mediating role of loneliness (Ma et al., 2020). Loneliness is a major and consistent factor for addiction and in the families where parent's conflicting behavior is common occurrence the propensity of adolescents towards obsession of internet and social media sites presence is mostly seen. (He et al., 2020; Demir and Kutlu, 2016). Excessive internet presence is seen as individual's defense mechanism in combating the loneliness and other negative emotions associated with the individual as proposed by Kardefelt-Winther (2014) in his theory of Compensatory Internet Use Theory. Kim et al. (2009) established the causal association between problematic internet use and loneliness and obtained that people who exhibit with higher inclination for internet use undergo loneliness as determining factor. In the same line, a review studies on 94 researches related to 22 nations highlighted the individual's loneliness status and internet addiction are associated in modest and constant manner (Tokunaga and Rains, 2010). Maes et al (2015) and Nie et al (2020) established link between family functions such as cohesive, dependent and closed family and less loneliness experience of the family members by highlighting the degree and level of loneliness. In this line Maes et al (2015) explored the impact of poor family function as non-coherence between the family members and least communication channels and loose interpersonal dialogues that results into complete alienation and aloofness of the members and failure when interacting and establishing inter personal relationship in their communities thereby developing loneliness as a state of mind due to feeling rejected and isolated.

Family Function, Online Reel Addiction and Sensation seeking behavior

Gratification theory implied on internet use states that numerous psychological and social factors determine the individual choice for the use of internet in frequency and duration. According to Rubin (1993) Personality types and traits along with individual motivations decides addictive behavior of the person. Sensation seeking behavior is the personality trait where risk taking quest preponderates to figure the personality to experience something that is novel, intense, mottled along with strong desire to achieve this (Zuckerman, 1994).

Chen et al (2021) in a longitudinal research explored negative association between high sensation seeking behavior and problematic use of mobile phone and school engagement and participation. Despite the significance of sensation seeking in influencing problematic technology use, little prior research has explored its moderating effect on the link between predisposing risk factors such as loneliness and bad family functioning and subsequent reel addiction. There is scarcity in the literature in investigating reel addiction and exploring the relationship

with external and internal factors. One previous study examined Instagram addiction (Ershad & Aghajani, 2017) but there was methodological limitation with this study. Reel addiction is recently get wide spread among youth in the form of youtube reels, instagram, tiktok and facebooks reels. It needs specific attention to explore this further with the personality, psychological, and social factors and their mutual interactions.

CONCLUSION

India is the largest consumer of watching reels at present and with the changing social fabric the family structure, environment and overall functioning is also evolving. Now the personal growth and individual freedom is more desirable by the most of the young population that has changed the role of a family as a facilitator one not as collective foundation as previous. Individual autonomy and personal space has created the vacuum among the youth that has occupied by the internet, reel watching, social media and game addiction. The youth should be productive and engaging in realizing her potential to channelize the negative emotions out of present demand and pressure upon the youth rather than simply slip on the reel addiction to fill the void of loneliness and sensation seeking behavior. This study has suggested some intervention needed at the family level so that youth may not distract from the easy way out to escape from the challenges of the present time.

Recommendation and Further Studies

The reticence and intermediation of online reel addiction among university students will be requiring the determinations and support of families, school and society. Parent should construct a healthy, optimistic and encouraging family environment, paying keen interest and watchful care and attention to their children's personality development and emotional conditions, and should collaborate in closely affinitive association with education institutions to handle their children's network activities. University, colleges and schools should keep informed about the students' family circumstantial background, taming their psychological counseling and recommendations, especially family counseling to upgrade students' personality development and ability to emotional management. Society should continue to invest in establishing a healthy network environment. Ancient value system for the family in Indian context should be flourished and enriched to revive for enhancing the cohesion and belongingness within the family.

Approaches should be aimed at making stratagies for promoting healthy online reeling behaviors and mitigating the risks of addiction among university students. Specifically, educational programs should be executed to raise mindful consciousness about the potential risks of Online Reel Addiction among students. These programs should provide comprehensive information on the signs and cues related to problematic technology use, its effect on academic performance and achievement, social connections and communications, and mental health, as well as the provisions of resources availability for seeking help. University and college students should be encouraged to develop sensible internet conducts by setting time limits and prioritizing other important activities, such as academic responsibilities, physical exercise, social interactions, and hobbies. Furthermore, providing training and support in building suppleness and responsiveness for effective coping skills can be stated as beneficial. Teaching and practice drilling, contacting with experts to train students how to manage feelings of loneliness, and sensation seeking in assertive and healthier ways that may reduce the reliance on online reeling as a coping mechanism for poor family functioning and loneliness. Empirical studies involving these variables with serial mediating effects and creation of model is essential with more longitudinal studies to get more clarity and depth in this area of research.

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