

UDC 159.9:616.89-008.441.2:004.738.5
DOI <https://doi.org/10.26661/2310-4368/2025-1-19>

ON THE PROBLEM OF CONCEPTUALIZING THE PHENOMENON OF INTERNET ADDICTION IN MODERN CONDITIONS

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Key words: *Internet addiction, digital engagement; algorithmic personalization; social media influence; behavioral reinforcement.*

The article presents the results of conceptualizing the Internet addiction phenomenon in contemporary discourse. Internet addiction remains a debated behavioral issue, lacking formal recognition in DSM-5 and ICD-11. Digital interactions, once seen as excessive, are now integral to daily life, challenging traditional diagnostic criteria. Overuse, once pathological, now ensures access to work, education, and social connectivity.

The COVID-19 pandemic and Ukraine's wartime reliance on digital infrastructure highlight internet use as an adaptive mechanism rather than a pathology. Digital engagement facilitates communication, logistics, and education, making time-based addiction assessments obsolete. Algorithmic content personalization, social media reinforcement, and digital platform gamification drive compulsive use, reinforcing engagement through psychological rewards and emotional manipulation.

Algorithmic recommendation systems shape cognitive processing, fostering echo-chambers and filter-bubbles, limiting exposure to diverse viewpoints, and intensifying ideological polarization. Social media encourages social comparison, influencing self-esteem and body image through curated content, while personalized marketing reinforces behavioral patterns, shaping consumption habits.

Despite concerns, digital platforms enable social connectivity, crisis response, and cognitive engagement. Addressing internet addiction requires understanding algorithmic influence, behavioral reinforcement, and digital literacy. Future research should focus on ethical algorithmic frameworks that prioritize user autonomy and psychological well-being, recognizing the dual nature of internet use as both adaptive and potentially compulsive.

ДО ПРОБЛЕМИ КОНЦЕПТУАЛІЗАЦІЇ ФЕНОМЕНУ ІНТЕРНЕТ-ЗАЛЕЖНОСТІ В СУЧАСНИХ УМОВАХ

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Ключові слова: інтернет-залежність, цифрова взаємодія, алгоритмічна персоналізація, вплив соціальних мереж, поведінкове підкріплення.

У статті представлено результати концептуалізації феномену інтернет-залежності в сучасному дискурсі. Інтернет-залежність залишається дискусійним поведінковим явищем, яке не має офіційного визнання у DSM-5 та ICD-11. Цифрові взаємодії, які раніше розглядалися як надмірні, нині стали невід'ємною частиною повсякденного життя, що ускладнює використання традиційних діагностичних критеріїв. Надмірне використання, яке раніше вважалося патологічним, нині забезпечує доступ до роботи, освіти та соціальних зв'язків.

Пандемія COVID-19 та залежність України від цифрової інфраструктури в умовах війни підкреслюють інтернет як адаптивний механізм, а не патологію. Цифрова взаємодія сприяє комунікації, логістиці та освіті, що робить оцінку інтернет-залежності на основі часу використання застарілою. Алгоритмічна персоналізація контенту, підкріплення через соціальні мережі та гейміфікація цифрових платформ сприяють компульсивному використанню, посилюючи залученість через психологічні винагороди та емоційну маніпуляцію.

Алгоритмічні системи рекомендацій формують когнітивне оброблення інформації, створюючи ефект «ехо-камер» і «фільтр-бульбашок», обмежуючи доступ до різноманітних поглядів та посилюючи ідеологічну поляризацію. Соціальні мережі стимулюють соціальне порівняння, впливаючи на самооцінку та сприйняття власного тіла через спеціально відібраний контент, тоді як персоналізований маркетинг закріплює поведінкові моделі, формуючи споживчі звички.

Попри занепокоєння, цифрові платформи забезпечують соціальну взаємодію, реагування на кризові ситуації та когнітивну активність. Розв'язання проблеми інтернет-залежності вимагає розуміння впливу алгоритмів, поведінкових підкріплень і цифрової грамотності. Майбутні дослідження мають бути присвячені етичним алгоритмічним рамкам, що пріоритизують автономію користувачів та психологічне благополуччя, визнаючи подвійний характер використання інтернету як адаптивного, але потенційно компульсивного явища.

Problem statement. Internet addiction remains one of the most debated forms of behavioral addiction. Despite numerous empirical studies conducted in the early decades of the 21st century, this phenomenon has yet to attain official recognition as a diagnostic category

in major psychiatric classification systems such as the DSM-5 and ICD-11. Nevertheless, the concept of problematic Internet use and its impact on psychological well-being continues to be a subject of active scientific analysis and clinical interest [2; 4; 5; 7, 8; 11; 17].

However, recent sociocultural transformations, particularly lifestyle changes in highly developed countries, have led to the widespread adoption of behavioral patterns that were previously considered pathological. This shift gives rise to a conceptual paradox: behavioral patterns traditionally associated with addictive behavior have become normative within digital society. Moreover, the absence of such patterns in contemporary society may exert an even more pronounced negative impact on social functioning and interpersonal interactions than their presence [3; 7; 8; 13; 14; 15].

One of the most widely used instruments for assessing Internet addiction in Europe and the United States remains the Internet Addiction Test (IAT) developed by Kimberly Young in 1998. This tool evaluates various behavioral aspects, including excessive cognitive preoccupation with the Internet, the inability to independently regulate time spent online, mood changes when access to the Internet is restricted, loss of time perception while online, the impact of online activity on interpersonal relationships and professional performance, and the use of the Internet as a mechanism for emotional regulation [18].

Despite the historical significance of this questionnaire, its conceptual foundation – framing Internet use as a classical behavioral addiction – now requires critical reassessment. Given the profound transformations in the structure of digital interactions, the test may have limited validity in the contemporary context.

Existing psychodiagnostic tests used in Ukraine for diagnosing Internet addiction, according to our analysis, exhibit several limitations, including:

- Outdated conceptualizations of Internet use, failing to account for mobile technologies, social media, and contemporary digital platforms;
- Social anachronisms, disregarding transformations in social functioning, such as the expansion of remote work and digital learning;
- Introspection anachronisms, assuming that Internet use is inherently ego-dystonic behavior;
- Situational inaccuracy, lacking consideration of external factors that influence the frequency and duration of online activity;
- Translation and adaptation issues, leading to semantic distortions due to language barriers and cultural differences.

Even before the period of widespread social isolation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the behavioral patterns assessed by the IAT raised doubts regarding their psychopathological significance. Since 2020, the role of the Internet in social functioning has undergone significant transformations: online interactions are no longer perceived merely as substitutes for offline communication but have instead

acquired an independent status within the framework of social norms. Lockdowns and quarantine restrictions led to a sharp increase in the use of digital platforms for education, work, and social support [6; 9; 10; 12; 16].

Since 2022, in Ukraine, amidst a defensive war against Russian military aggression, unstable infrastructure, and security threats, the Internet has become a critically important resource for maintaining social connections, accessing information, and fulfilling basic needs [21].

Thus, the concept of “Internet overuse” is now largely contextualized as an adaptive mechanism rather than a manifestation of pathological behavior.

Given these factors, the contemporary approach to Internet addiction necessitates a conceptual revision. It can no longer be regarded solely as a form of pathological behavior; rather, in modern scientific discourse, it is increasingly understood as an instrumental form of social interaction, reflecting structural shifts in societal life [19; 20].

Future research should move beyond a purely quantitative assessment of Internet use and instead focus on a qualitative analysis of its impact on psychosocial adaptation in contemporary contexts.

The aim of the article is to present a conceptualization of the phenomenon of internet addiction in contemporary discourse and analyze its mechanisms, factors, and psychological impact.

Results. The contemporary approach should emphasize not only the quantitative parameters of Internet use but also the qualitative aspects of interaction with the digital environment. One of the key factors influencing user engagement is the structure of the information flow, particularly algorithmically driven personalization mechanisms, information bubbles, and the echo chamber effect.

A notable manifestation of the modern transformation of digital interaction is the model of passive content consumption, characterized by minimal cognitive engagement and automated behavioral patterns. This model is based on a cyclical anticipation of new digital content, which sustains high levels of engagement and establishes an automated pattern of information consumption.

The algorithmic mechanisms of platforms focused on social interaction, entertainment content, and e-commerce contribute to the reinforcement of this cycle, reducing opportunities for critical reflection and fostering dependency not only on time spent online but also on the dynamic nature of the digital environment itself.

Despite the risks associated with uncontrolled engagement with digital platforms, increasing attention is being given to their adaptive potential. Online communication platforms have become primary channels for the rapid exchange of

information, particularly concerning security issues, logistics, and humanitarian aid. The use of digital channels not only ensures timely access to threat alerts but also fosters a structured model of digital interaction, enabling individuals to maintain a sense of control over their environment, even in conditions of high uncertainty.

Digital platforms have also emerged as spaces for coordinating social support, bringing together individuals into volunteer networks, mutual aid communities, and humanitarian initiatives. This form of social interaction takes on an instrumental function, serving as an adaptive mechanism that allows individuals to preserve a sense of control and social connectedness.

The widespread transition to remote learning and work has also become a key component of adaptive strategies. The use of interactive platforms helps maintain the structure of educational and professional environments, which is critically important in times of instability.

At the same time, it is crucial to consider the phenomenon of the digital divide, which manifests in unequal access to technological resources. The lack of stable connectivity or limited technical capabilities can impact cognitive efficiency, as well as the accessibility of education and employment, creating structural barriers to social integration.

The automation of public services is another essential aspect of digital adaptation. The use of electronic platforms allows citizens to obtain digital documents, register for assistance, and recover lost legal records, thereby minimizing bureaucratic procedures and enhancing the accessibility of administrative services.

By institutionalizing digital solutions, continuous interaction between citizens and government structures is ensured, even when physical access to official institutions is restricted. This contributes to the stabilization of the social environment and reduces cognitive overload associated with the need to adapt to rapidly changing conditions.

Given current trends, the issue of Internet addiction can no longer be examined solely through the lens of time spent using digital technologies. It is essential to consider the motivational aspects of interaction, the qualitative composition of content, and the influence of algorithmic mechanisms on behavioral patterns.

Modern algorithmic personalization systems have fundamentally transformed the informational environment, reshaping cognitive processing, social interaction, and user behavioral strategies. The impact of these algorithms extends beyond content optimization, fostering closed informational ecosystems that reinforce specific cognitive and behavioral patterns. These processes not only increase user engagement with digital platforms but also

contribute to cognitive biases, social isolation, and the formation of habitual behavioral patterns, which may have both positive and negative consequences.

One of the fundamental mechanisms underlying digital engagement is the echo chamber effect, which arises due to algorithmic content curation based on a user's pre-existing beliefs and interests. In such conditions, individuals are primarily exposed to information that reinforces their prior views, leading to cognitive closure – a process in which critical engagement with alternative perspectives becomes difficult or entirely absent. This phenomenon can intensify ideological polarization, radicalization of opinions, and reduce cognitive flexibility, posing particular risks in sociopolitical contexts.

Closely related to this is the phenomenon of filter bubbles, which emerge due to algorithmic ranking and filtering of information. Users within these informational constraints unconsciously lose access to alternative data, impairing their ability to engage in critical analysis and form an objective understanding of reality. For example, in the healthcare domain, this may lead to uncritical consumption of pseudoscientific information, while in the political sphere, it can foster rigid, like-minded communities that resist opposing arguments.

Another key mechanism is the gamification of the digital environment, which employs psychological reinforcement principles to stimulate repetitive user interactions with digital platforms. Social media, streaming services, and mobile applications actively incorporate elements such as reward systems (likes, reactions, status badges), competition, and variable reinforcement, mimicking behavioral patterns typical of gambling. These mechanisms create a psychological reward cycle, which can contribute to the development of compulsive behaviors and dependency on digital platforms.

A distinct role in this process is played by artificial intelligence agents, which perform personalized content selection based on large-scale data analysis of user behavior. Algorithmic systems not only predict users' future preferences but also actively shape the informational environment, influencing their cognitive processes and emotional state. For example, the recommendation systems of major video-hosting platforms do not merely reflect content preferences based on viewing history; they also shape predictable behavioral patterns, reinforcing prolonged platform engagement.

Another significant mechanism is the viral spread of emotionally charged content, which results from algorithmic prioritization of material that elicits strong emotional reactions. Research indicates that negatively valenced content – particularly fear, anger, and outrage – exhibits significantly higher virality compared to neutral or positive information.

This contributes to the formation of emotionally reinforced cognitive schemas, wherein users are more likely to engage with content that confirms their negative expectations about the world. Consequently, this heightens anxiety levels and fosters cognitive disorientation, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of emotional engagement and algorithmic amplification.

Retargeting and behavioral marketing represent another mechanism contributing to the creation of closed informational environments. Algorithmically collected data on users' interests, prior activity, and social connections are leveraged to design personalized advertising campaigns, which in turn limit the diversity of informational choices. This process reinforces behavioral stereotypes, where consumers continuously receive advertising and informational materials that validate their previous decisions, thereby constraining their critical evaluation of alternative options.

Of particular concern is the impact of targeted informational operations, which are actively utilized in times of war to manipulate public opinion. In such contexts, algorithms can function as tools of informational warfare, shaping highly selective narratives. This includes the strategic dissemination of fake news, the amplification of emotionally charged content, and the use of bot networks to create the illusion of widespread support for certain viewpoints. Such operations can reinforce collective cognitive biases, shift public perception, and erode trust in official sources of information.

Thus, algorithmic content personalization mechanisms not only influence how users interact with content but also shape cognitive and behavioral patterns with potential implications for personal development and social interactions. In the context of Internet addiction, these mechanisms can either exacerbate problematic digital platform use or be repurposed as tools for cognitive correction. Future research should focus on the development of digital hygiene strategies and regulatory frameworks to mitigate the risks of cognitive isolation and social polarization.

The digital environment plays a significant role in social interactions and the formation of self-perception. The impact of social media and algorithmic mechanisms on self-esteem and behavioral patterns is complex and depends on individual user characteristics, including critical thinking skills and the ability to reflect on digital content.

One of the key factors influencing self-esteem in the digital space is social comparison. Algorithmic mechanisms in social media often promote content that showcases idealized representations of appearance, social status, or lifestyle. The selective presentation of such materials can reshape users' perceptions of their own experiences, particularly when viewed in the context of comparisons with others.

Additionally, the evaluation of one's social significance can be influenced by feedback mechanisms, such as the number of reactions, comments, or audience engagement levels. Some studies suggest a potential link between the frequency of social media use and feelings of social approval or lack thereof, though these relationships may vary on an individual basis.

The advancement of digital image processing technologies and augmented reality allows users to modify their appearance through filters that smooth skin, alter facial structure, or add visual effects. While such tools can be viewed as a form of self-expression, their widespread use may sometimes impact self-perception of physical appearance, potentially reinforcing unrealistic beauty standards.

It can be assumed that the regular use of such technologies may contribute to changes in self-perception and the formation of specific beauty standards, particularly among young individuals who actively engage with social media as a tool for self-presentation. At the same time, the impact of these processes is highly individual and depends on multiple factors, including critical attitudes toward digital content and levels of self-confidence.

The digital environment provides opportunities for self-expression and personal branding, allowing individuals to curate their online representation. In this context, social media platforms may encourage users to consciously shape their public image in accordance with social expectations.

However, in some cases, a discrepancy may emerge between real life and an idealized online persona, creating additional social pressure and increasing sensitivity to audience reactions. Some users may feel compelled to maintain a specific image, requiring constant attention to reputation and social popularity, which, in turn, may contribute to elevated stress levels and heightened self-criticism.

Algorithmic systems in the digital space have the potential to influence body perception, sexual identity, and mechanisms of self-identification. However, the nature of this influence is largely dependent on individual characteristics, a person's level of critical thinking, and the context of their interaction with the digital environment.

On the one hand, digital platforms can enhance the visibility of diverse identities, support self-expression, and contribute to the reduction of stigma. On the other hand, they can also promote the unification of attractiveness standards, reinforce specific behavioral models, and intensify social comparison processes.

Personalization algorithms used in social media and video platforms frequently amplify the themes with which users interact most often. As a result, certain beauty standards, behavioral models, and body ideals may acquire dominant status, shaping uniform perceptions of bodily aesthetics.

Some studies suggest that exposure to filtered content – which often presents idealized or strategically edited images – can contribute to distorted body perception. This effect is particularly pronounced among young individuals, who are still in the process of identity formation, as well as among those who are vulnerable to social comparison.

In certain cases, increased focus on physical appearance in the digital space may correlate with lower body satisfaction, which, in turn, can affect health-related behaviors, dietary habits, and levels of physical activity. However, the degree of this impact varies among individuals and is strongly influenced by the context in which digital content is consumed.

Artificial intelligence technologies play a crucial role in the creation and dissemination of visual content, influencing the formation of body image, sexuality, and interpersonal interactions. Algorithms that determine content popularity can reinforce specific beauty and sexual behavior trends, which, on the one hand, increase the mass visibility of particular idealized representations, but on the other, reduce the diversity of appearance standards.

It can be hypothesized that the commercialization of erotic content, particularly through monetization platforms for private materials, creates incentives to conform to specific aesthetic and behavioral models, as these factors directly affect audience engagement levels. At the same time, the consumption of such content may contribute to the formation of standardized perceptions of sexuality, potentially shaping expectations in interpersonal relationships. The evolution of digital platforms has facilitated new forms of interaction with sexual content, including online communities that bring together users with shared beliefs, preferences, or experiences.

On the one hand, this shift can reduce social stigmatization, creating a safe space for self-expression, information-seeking, and discussions on topics that were previously considered taboo. On the other hand, intensive interaction with such content may influence perceptions of normativity and acceptability of specific sexual attitudes, potentially reshaping individual identity and behavior.

Thus, internet content functions not only as an information source but also as a powerful factor shaping personality traits, behavioral patterns, and self-identification. Its integration into the digital environment contributes to transformations in self-perception, social status, and personal value, while its commercial exploitation deepens engagement mechanisms, reinforcing the effects of closed informational spaces. Future research should focus on developing digital hygiene strategies to mitigate the negative impact of personalized content on mental stability and personal development.

One of the central aspects of internet addiction is compulsive use of digital platforms, accompanied by

difficulties in controlling time spent online and the need for regular interaction with digital content. This phenomenon can be explained by the action of variable reinforcement mechanisms, which are actively utilized in social media, video services, and online games. The reward system, evaluative feedback, in-game bonuses, and personalized recommendations sustain continuous engagement. The lack of clear patterns in rewards encourages users to repeat interactions, while social engagement mechanisms, such as notifications and reminders about others' activity, intensify the fear of missing out.

It can be suggested that excessive use of digital platforms may be linked to difficulties in mood regulation, where users turn to the Internet as a means of stress avoidance or instant gratification. This, in turn, can lead to a decrease in cognitive flexibility and impulsive behavior, affecting social functioning.

Changes in self-identification may become a secondary consequence of prolonged interaction with personalized digital environments. The Internet environment offers a flexible model of self-presentation, in which users can consciously or unconsciously modify their image. This is especially evident in the context of social media, where users often create an idealized version of themselves, which may not align with their real-life characteristics.

Content personalization algorithms contribute to the reinforcement of certain personality aspects that receive social approval, while social interaction mechanisms, including number of followers, comments, and reactions, can influence self-esteem and the sense of personal significance. The use of augmented reality and digital avatars may create an alternative virtual identity, which is sometimes perceived as more comfortable than the real one. As a result, some users may experience cognitive dissonance between their online persona and their real “self”, which, under certain conditions, can reduce the authenticity of self-perception and lead to increased self-criticism.

Intensive interaction with digital platforms can also lead to emotional exhaustion, which arises from information overload and a high level of emotional engagement. Researchers point out that social media algorithms and news aggregators prioritize content that elicits strong emotional reactions. This may include shocking news or materials that induce anxiety and outrage, highly emotionally intense content that spreads rapidly due to viral dissemination mechanisms, and information flows with unclear structure, complicating the processing and organization of information.

Such processes can contribute to a reduction in cognitive flexibility, manifesting in difficulties with attention shifting and comprehending information, overloading working memory, which impairs the ability to analyze and make decisions, and worsening

emotional regulation, which may present as increased irritability or rapid mood swings.

These issues become particularly relevant in crisis situations, when the consumption of news content increases significantly, and algorithms promote the active spread of emotionally charged information. The contemporary understanding of internet addiction extends beyond traditional approaches, which focus primarily on the amount of time spent online. Researchers now highlight the behavioral mechanisms that sustain excessive use of the digital environment, as well as its impact on cognitive, emotional, and social functioning.

In response to the increasing cognitive and emotional risks associated with the use of digital platforms, concepts of internet content regulation and digital hygiene are actively evolving. However, these approaches to regulation largely rely on the same algorithmic mechanisms that have contributed to information overload and cognitive closure. This creates the risk of exacerbating the problem rather than solving it, as content control mechanisms may serve the commercial or political interests of organizations, rather than the interests of the users themselves.

Most initiatives aimed at combating the negative effects of digital technologies focus on restricting certain types of content and modifying algorithmic recommendations. However, these same algorithms have already demonstrated their ability to create information bubbles and closed environments, making it impossible to guarantee unbiased information selection. Software solutions aimed at “digital hygiene” effectively use selection mechanisms similar to those that generate the problem of cognitive isolation.

One of the main contradictions in regulation is that platforms using personalized algorithms gain even greater opportunities to control information consumption. The introduction of “ethical algorithmization” mechanisms could potentially turn into a tool for censorship, determining which ideas, concepts, and topics are deemed acceptable for public discourse. At the same time, controlled restriction of information flow may not only fail to reduce the problem but may deepen it, entrenching cognitive distortions and creating normatively sanctioned information bubbles.

Furthermore, the approach to digital hygiene often relies on assumptions of rational user behavior, ignoring the fact that social media algorithms use principles of neurobiological reinforcement, which act at the level of automated brain responses. Rather than teaching users to make mindful content choices, most digital hygiene recommendations focus on quantitative restrictions, such as limiting platform usage time or turning off notifications. However, such measures do not address the problem of cognitive dependence, as they fail to consider the motivational mechanisms behind user behavior in the digital environment.

Thus, while the concept of digital hygiene is an important area of research, it remains incomplete due to its reliance on algorithmic mechanisms, which are themselves at the core of the problem of internet addiction in its current understanding.

Conclusions. The phenomenon of internet addiction has undergone significant transformation, shifting away from the traditional view of it as a disorder based solely on excessive internet use. Modern approaches consider this phenomenon through the lens of user engagement mechanisms, algorithmically modified behavioral patterns, and digital content typology. The focus is on how the digital environment affects self-regulation processes, the formation of habits, and social interaction.

Algorithmic content personalization, the echo chamber effect, filter bubbles, commercial gamification, and behavioral marketing are key mechanisms that help retain users in the digital space and can contribute to cognitive isolation. Formats and types of content that activate social comparison, increase attention to sexualized materials, exploit emotional extremes, or utilize commercial attention retention mechanisms have a significant impact on behavioral and personality changes. Further research in this area should focus on studying the specific impact of these mechanisms on mental health and social adaptation of users.

The main risks associated with internet addiction include the development of compulsive behavior, changes in personal identity, and cognitive-emotional exhaustion. Compulsive use of digital platforms is shaped by algorithmic engagement mechanisms that stimulate cycles of repeated interaction and reinforcement. Changes in self-perception may manifest through the formation of a digital self-image, which in certain cases may conflict with real-life self-presentation, increasing social uncertainty. Continuous information stimulation and integration into the digital environment can contribute to cognitive and emotional exhaustion, expressed in reduced cognitive flexibility, increased fatigue, and the blurring of boundaries between real and virtual experiences.

Future research on the phenomenon of internet addiction should focus on a multidimensional analysis of the impact of digital technologies on the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of personality. It is necessary to further refine the mechanisms of algorithmic user engagement, their role in forming compulsive behavior, and their influence on self-identity transformation. A particularly relevant area of study is the long-term psychological effects of personalized content consumption, including the development of anxiety disorders, depression, and social isolation. An important direction remains the analysis of digital hygiene strategies that consider not only quantitative aspects of internet use but also qualitative parameters of content consumption, algorithmic recommendations, and social interactions.

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