Social Skills and Problematic Internet Use in Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a crucial developmental phase marked by significant physical, emotional, and social changes. During this period, adolescents form their identities, acquire social skills, and develop coping mechanisms for life's challenges. While the internet offers opportunities for learning and socializing, excessive use can lead to problematic internet use (PIU), impacting academic performance, emotional well-being, and social interactions. This study utilized a quantitative correlational approach to explore the relationship between social skills and PIU among adolescents. A sample of 126 adolescents aged 12-20 years was surveyed using the Social Skill Scale and the Generalized Problematic Internet Use Scale 2 (GPIUS-2). Data were collected via online forms distributed through social media platforms. Descriptive statistics and Pearson's product-moment correlation were used for data analysis, conducted with Jamovi statistical software. The results revealed a significant negative correlation ($rxy = -0.446$, $p < 0.05$) between social skills and PIU, indicating that adolescents with higher social skills tend to have lower levels of PIU. The findings suggest that effective social skills enable adolescents to interact positively and manage conflicts, thereby reducing their reliance on the internet for social interaction and support. Adolescents with high social skills are more likely to engage in offline social activities and seek support from friends and family, mitigating the risk of PIU. Enhancing social skills in adolescents can serve as a buffer against PIU by improving the quality of social interactions and reducing internet dependence. Future research should consider longitudinal designs to explore causal relationships and interventions aimed at fostering social skills to mitigate PIU among adolescents.

Keywords : adolescent, problematic internet use, social skills

Introduction

Adolescence is a crucial developmental phase characterized by significant physical, emotional, and social changes (Jaworska & MacQueen, 2015). During this period, adolescents are in the process of forming their identities, acquiring social skills, and developing coping mechanisms for life's challenges (Borca et al., 2015). These changes are often accompanied by a search for self-identity, an increased need for social interaction, and experimentation with various new behaviors.

The internet plays a significant role in contemporary adolescent development (Borca et al., 2015). Easy access to information, instant communication with peers, and a variety of entertainment platforms provide numerous opportunities for learning and socializing. The internet also offers adolescents a space to explore their interests, participate in online communities, and develop essential digital skills for their future (Haddock et al., 2022).

However, excessive or unhealthy internet use can have detrimental effects. Some adolescents may struggle with time management (Yas et al., 2021), which can impact academic performance (Javaeed et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2017) and emotional well-being (Gioia et al., 2021). Additionally, dependence on the internet can disrupt face-to-face social interactions and lead to sleep disturbances, anxiety, and other mental health issues (Zubair et al., 2023).

Problematic Internet Use (PIU) has emerged as a major concern among adolescents. PIU refers to excessive internet use that interferes with social, academic, and emotional functioning (Cai et al., 2023). PIU often reflects an imbalance between online activities and daily life, and may indicate an inability to regulate internet use in a healthy manner.

The negative impacts of PIU may include decreased academic performance, sleep disturbances, physical health problems, and adverse effects on interpersonal relationships (Paulus et al., 2022). Adolescents with PIU may also exhibit increased risk of depression, anxiety, and behavioral issues (Restrepo et al., 2020). This problematic internet use can significantly affect mental health and overall well-being (Machimbarrena et al., 2019).

PIU may be influenced by a range of internal and external factors. Internal factors may include individual characteristics such as addiction tendencies, personality traits, and psychological disorders (Dib et al., 2021). External factors might involve social environments, such as family support, peer relationship dynamics, and exposure to digital cultures that promote excessive internet use (Nannatt et al., 2022; Ramón-Arbués et al., 2021).

Social skills play a crucial role in how adolescents interact with their environment and manage stress and conflicts (Segrin, 2017). Adequate social skills can assist adolescents in adapting to life's challenges and reduce reliance on the internet as a primary means of social interaction. Conversely, poor social skills may increase the risk of PIU, as adolescents may seek escape or compensation through excessive internet use.

This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how social skills influence PIU among adolescents. By exploring this relationship, the research seeks to develop more effective intervention strategies to address PIU and enhance social skills among adolescents. The objective of this study is to examine the relationship between social skills and PIU in adolescents and to identify contributing factors to this dynamic. The study aims to provide evidence-based recommendations for intervention programs and support mechanisms to help adolescents manage their internet use healthily and improve their social skills.

Methods

This research adopts a quantitative correlational approach to investigate the associations between variables, with a particular focus on the relationship between social skills and problematic internet use among adolescents. The study utilizes two main instruments: a social skills scale and a problematic internet use scale. The social skills scale is based on the Social Skill Scale (Uslu & Genç, 2021), which has shown strong reliability with a coefficient of $\alpha = 0.87$. The problematic internet use scale employs the Generalized Problematic Internet Use

Scale 2 (GPIUS-2), developed by Caplan (2010). The GPIUS-2 assesses maladaptive thoughts and behaviors related to internet use that adversely affect social, educational, and occupational aspects of life. This scale has demonstrated good reliability in various countries, including Italy, Poland, and Japan (Balcerowska & Bereznowski, 2023; Fioravanti et al., 2013; Yoshimura et al., 2022). In Indonesia, the reliability of the GPIUS-2 was also confirmed by Adlina et al. (2022), with a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.83$.

Data were gathered through online forms designed for this study, which were distributed via social media platforms to reach a broad adolescent audience. Participants were required to be between the ages of 12 and 20 and to be active internet users. The study used convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling method where participants are selected based on their availability and ease of access (Elfil & Negida, 2017).

The data analysis included descriptive statistics and Pearson's product-moment correlation test. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the basic characteristics of the data, providing an overview of its distribution. Pearson's product-moment correlation test was employed to evaluate the strength and direction of the linear relationship between the variables. Data analysis was conducted using Jamovi statistical software.

Results

The study involved 126 participants, the majority of whom were female (81%) and 20 years old (38.9%). Detailed demographic information about the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Data (N=126)

Characteristic	n	%
Sex		
Male	24	19
Female	102	81
Age		
12	1	0.8
13	0	0
14	3	2.4
15	4	3.2
16	7	5.6
17	14	11.1
18	29	23
19	19	15.1
20	49	38.9

The descriptive statistics for the study variables are presented in Table 2. For problematic internet use, which was measured on a scale with a minimum score of 21 and a maximum score of 49, the mean score was 33.75 with a standard deviation of 5.36. This indicates that the average level of problematic internet use among participants is moderate, with some variability in the responses. In terms of social skills, the scale ranged from a minimum score

of 44 to a maximum score of 93. The mean score for social skills was 74.47, with a standard deviation of 8.40. This suggests that participants generally exhibited strong social skills, with variability reflecting differences in individual social competencies.

Table 2.

Descriptive Data

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Problematic internet use	126	21	49	33.75	5.36
Social skill	126	44	93	74.47	8.40

The normality test results indicated that the Kolmogorov-Smirnov score for problematic internet use was 0.096 with a significance value ($p > 0.05$), while the score for social skills was 0.056 with a significance value ($p > 0.05$). These results suggest that both the problematic internet use and social skills variables follow a normal distribution.

The linearity test for online gaming addiction and academic anxiety yielded an F-value of 33.996 with a significance value of $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$), indicating a significant linear relationship between online gaming addiction and academic anxiety. According to the Pearson product-moment correlation analysis, the correlation coefficient between social skills and problematic internet use was $rxy = -0.446$ with a p-value of 0.001 ($p < 0.05$). This negative correlation coefficient suggests an inverse relationship between social skills and problematic internet use. Specifically, higher social skills are associated with lower levels of problematic internet use among adolescents, and conversely, lower social skills are associated with higher levels of problematic internet use.

Discussions

The results of this study indicate a negative relationship between social skills and problematic internet use. This suggests that higher social skills are associated with lower levels of problematic internet use, and conversely, lower social skills are associated with higher levels of problematic internet use.

Effective social skills enable adolescents to interact effectively and build positive relationships with those around them (Schenk et al., 2019). Adolescents with strong social skills are generally better at managing conflicts, communicating effectively, and establishing satisfying relationships. These abilities may reduce the need to seek interaction and support through the internet, thereby decreasing the risk of problematic internet use (Pontes & Macur, 2021).

Social skills also play a crucial role in stress and anxiety management (Beidel et al., 2014). Adolescents with good social skills are more likely to handle stressful situations adaptively and constructively. They may be more inclined to seek support from friends or family during difficult times rather than relying on the internet as an escape. In contrast, adolescents with

lower social skills might be more vulnerable to stress and seek comfort or escape through the internet, which can increase the risk of problematic internet use.

High social skills are often associated with greater involvement in offline social activities, such as meeting friends, participating in extracurricular activities, and engaging in face-to-face interactions (Lodder et al., 2016). These activities provide adolescents with opportunities for fulfilling social experiences that meet their needs in a more direct and healthy manner, reducing their reliance on the internet.

The quality of social relationships established through strong social skills can offer essential emotional and social support (Salavera & Usán, 2021). Adolescents who have positive and supportive relationships with friends and family may feel less need to seek support online. Conversely, adolescents with lower social skills may struggle to build satisfying relationships and may be more inclined to fill their social void through internet use.

These findings underscore the importance of social skills in managing internet use among adolescents. Strong social skills can act as a buffer against problematic internet use by improving the quality of social interactions and reducing dependence on the internet as the primary means of fulfilling social needs. Therefore, interventions aimed at enhancing social skills among adolescents have the potential to help reduce the risk of problematic internet use.

Interventions designed to enhance adolescents' social skills can serve as a preventive strategy against problematic internet use. Schools and educational institutions can integrate curricula focused on social skill development, such as effective communication, conflict resolution, and interpersonal skills. These programs can help adolescents manage stress and anxiety in a more adaptive manner, reducing their reliance on the internet.

The study utilizes a cross-sectional design, which captures data at a single point in time. This design limits the ability to infer causality between social skills and problematic internet use. Longitudinal studies would be more effective in examining the causal relationships and changes over time.

The study employed convenience sampling, where participants were selected based on their availability and accessibility through social media platforms. This sampling method may introduce selection bias and limit the generalizability of the findings to the broader adolescent population.

Conclusion

This study explores the relationship between social skills and problematic internet use among adolescents. The analysis results indicate a significant negative relationship between social skills and problematic internet use. This finding suggests that adolescents with higher social skills are likely to have lower levels of problematic internet use, whereas those with lower social skills tend to experience higher levels of problematic internet use.

These findings highlight the need for further research to explore the underlying mechanisms of the relationship between social skills and problematic internet use. Future research could identify additional factors influencing this relationship and develop more specific and effective interventions for various groups of adolescents.

Acknowledgement

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