



# A Comprehensive Introduction to Internet Addiction and Its Relationship with Social Anxiety and Identity Styles

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between internet addiction and social anxiety with a focus on identity styles among youth in Tabriz, Iran. Using a descriptive-correlational design, the research investigates the impact of social anxiety on internet addiction. A sample of 200 individuals aged 18 to 30 was selected through simple random sampling. Data were collected using questionnaires measuring social anxiety and internet addiction and analyzed using Pearson correlation analysis and regression analysis. The results indicate a significant positive correlation between social anxiety and internet addiction ( $r = 0.48, p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that higher levels of social anxiety are associated with greater internet addiction. Additionally, regression analysis shows that social anxiety significantly predicts internet addiction ( $\beta = 0.35, p < 0.0001$ ). The study also examines the role of identity styles and reveals that individuals with confused or diffused identity styles are more prone to internet addiction. The findings emphasize the complex interaction between social anxiety, identity styles, and internet addiction, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to address these psychological factors.

**Keywords:** Internet, addiction, social anxiety, identity style, youth

## INTRODUCTION

In today's digital world, the internet has become an essential component of daily life, playing a central role in various aspects including education, communication, entertainment, and commerce. With increasing access to the internet, especially among younger generations, its use has grown and has gradually become addictive. "Internet addiction" is a term introduced by Kimberly Young (1996) and is defined as a psychological and behavioral disorder characterized by excessive, obsessive, and uncontrollable use of the internet, leading to negative consequences in personal and social life. This phenomenon is particularly prevalent among adolescents and young adults who are in sensitive stages of personal growth and development (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

### Different Aspects of Internet Addiction

Internet addiction can manifest in various forms, including addiction to online games, social media, online pornography, and online browsing and shopping. Each of these types of internet addiction is associated with specific features and can have different impacts on an individual's psyche and behavior. For example, addiction to online games is often linked to reduced focus on daily tasks, decreased social interactions, and increased aggressive behaviors. In contrast, addiction to social media is commonly associated with decreased self-esteem, increased depression and social anxiety, and dissatisfaction with personal life (Young, 2018).

### Psychological and Social Factors Influencing Internet Addiction

Several factors can contribute to the development and exacerbation of internet addiction. These include individual variables such as personality, self-esteem, social skills, and anxiety levels, as well as social factors like social support, peer pressure, and family environment. Among these, social anxiety is a significant psychological

factor that is recognized as a strong predictor of internet addiction. Individuals with social anxiety often avoid face-to-face social situations and turn to the internet as a means of reducing their tensions and anxieties (Caplan, 2007).

### **Social Anxiety and Internet Addiction: A Complex Relationship**

Social anxiety, a common psychological disorder, is characterized by intense and irrational fear of negative evaluation by others and avoidance of social situations (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Individuals with this disorder often reduce social interactions due to fear of negative judgment and instead engage in online activities, which can lead to increased internet use and, ultimately, internet addiction. Studies have shown that individuals with high levels of social anxiety are more likely to engage in excessive internet use and dependency. For example, research by Lee et al. (2018) demonstrated that social anxiety is significantly related to excessive internet use. This relationship may be due to the need to reduce anxiety through online activities such as chatting, online games, and social media, where individuals can interact without concern for negative evaluations.

### **Identity Styles and Internet Addiction**

Identity is a fundamental aspect of psychological-social development and is a significant factor influencing individual behaviors, including online behavior. Identity styles, categorized by Marcia (2020) into three main types: achieved identity, confused or diffused identity, and moratorium identity, play a crucial role in shaping online behaviors and the likelihood of developing internet addiction. Individuals with achieved identity, who have a stable and integrated identity, typically use the internet as a tool for achieving personal and professional goals and are less prone to internet addiction. In contrast, individuals with confused or diffused identity, who suffer from a lack of stable and defined identity, are more likely to rely on the internet as a temporary solution to cope with their identity crises. This dependency can lead to decreased academic performance, reduced social interactions, and increased feelings of isolation.

### **Complex Interactions between Social Anxiety, Identity Styles, and Internet Addiction**

The interaction between social anxiety, identity styles, and internet addiction is a complex and multidimensional issue influenced by various individual, social, and cultural factors. For example, individuals with confused identity styles who also have high levels of social anxiety may be at greater risk for developing internet addiction. In this case, social anxiety may act as a trigger for excessive internet use, while the confused identity style may act as a reinforcing factor for unhealthy and irrational use. In other words, these two factors can mutually reinforce each other and lead to psychological dependency and addictive behaviors (Caplan, 2010).

### **Consequences of Internet Addiction on Psychological and Social Health**

Internet addiction can lead not only to psychological issues such as depression, anxiety, and decreased self-esteem but can also have profound negative effects on an individual's social health. Individuals addicted to the internet often withdraw from face-to-face social relationships and tend to spend more time in the virtual world. This isolation and reduction in social interactions can lead to decreased social support, increased feelings of loneliness, and reduced social skills. Studies have shown that internet addiction can negatively impact familial and social relationships and result in a decreased quality of life and life satisfaction (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This section describes the methodology of the study investigating the relationship between internet addiction and social anxiety among youth. This chapter includes details on the research design, population and sampling, measurement tools, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques.

### **Research Design**

This study employs a descriptive-correlational design to examine the relationship between two main variables: internet addiction and social anxiety. The study aims to elucidate how social anxiety, as an independent variable, affects internet addiction, as a dependent variable.

### **Population and Sampling**

The population of this study includes youth aged 18 to 30 in Tabriz. This group was chosen due to their extensive use of the internet and social media and because they are in a critical stage of psychological-social development. A simple random sampling method was used to select the sample. The sample size was determined based on Cochran's formula, considering a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, resulting in a sample of 200 individuals from this city.

## Data Analysis and Results

This section focuses on analyzing the data collected from the social anxiety questionnaire. The objective is to examine the descriptive characteristics of the social anxiety data, analyze the correlation of this variable with others, and provide accurate statistical results. This section includes descriptive statistics, correlation analyses, and regression analysis related to social anxiety.

### Descriptive Statistics

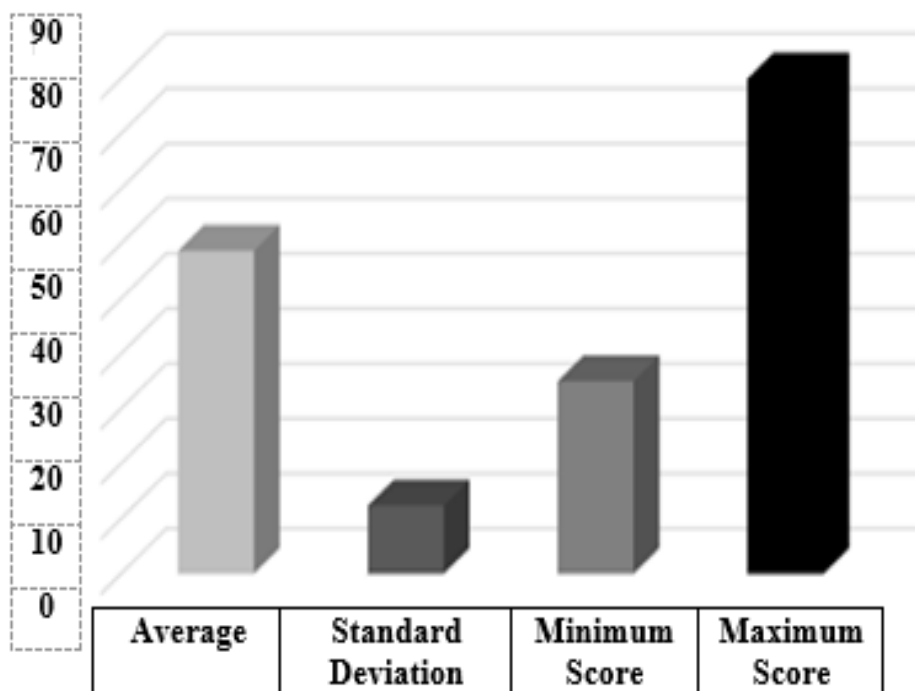
#### Description of Social Anxiety Questionnaire Data

The social anxiety questionnaire consists of 18 questions with a score range of 18 to 90. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for this questionnaire.

**Table 1:** Descriptive Statistics of Social Anxiety Questionnaire

Indicator	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum Score	Maximum Score
Total Score	45.3	10.6	25	80

Results indicate that the average social anxiety scores are at a moderate level, reflecting widespread social concerns among the participants. The standard deviation indicates relative variability in social anxiety levels.



**Figure 1:** Descriptive Data of Social Anxiety Questionnaire

#### Description of Demographic Characteristics Related to Social Anxiety

To better understand the distribution of social anxiety, data were categorized and examined based on demographic characteristics such as gender, age, and field of study. This information can help identify specific groups with higher levels of social anxiety.

#### Correlation Analysis

##### Examining the Correlation between Social Anxiety and Other Variables

Pearson correlation analysis was used to investigate the relationship between social anxiety and other

variables. Table 2 presents the results of this analysis.

**Table 2:** Pearson Correlation Results between Social Anxiety and Other Variables

Variables	Correlation Coefficient	Significance Level
Social Anxiety and Internet Addiction	0.48	0.001

Results show a significant correlation between social anxiety and internet addiction. This positive and moderate relationship means that increased social anxiety may be associated with increased internet addiction.

### Examining the Correlation between Social Anxiety and Demographic Characteristics

The correlation between social anxiety and various demographic characteristics was also examined. Results suggest that there may be significant differences in levels of social anxiety among different demographic groups.

## Regression Analysis

### Examining the Impact of Social Anxiety on Internet Addiction

Regression analysis was employed to examine the impact of social anxiety on internet addiction. Table 3 presents the results of this analysis.

**Table 3:** Regression Analysis Results for Predicting Internet Addiction Based on Social Anxiety

Independent Variable	Regression Coefficient	t-value	Significance Level
Social Anxiety	0.35	4.12	0.0001

Regression analysis results show that social anxiety is a significant predictor of internet addiction. The positive regression coefficient suggests that higher levels of social anxiety are associated with higher levels of internet addiction.

### Examining the Role of Identity Styles in Internet Addiction

In addition to social anxiety, the study also investigated the role of identity styles in internet addiction. It was found that individuals with confused or diffused identity styles are more susceptible to internet addiction.

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that there is a significant positive relationship between social anxiety and internet addiction among youth. Social anxiety contributes to higher levels of internet addiction, with confused or diffused identity styles further exacerbating this relationship. The findings highlight the need for targeted interventions to address both social anxiety and identity issues to mitigate the risk of internet addiction.

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