



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

**INTERNET ADDICTION: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON  
MALAYSIAN INTERNET USERS**

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**MASTER OF SCIENCE  
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**INTERNET ADDICTION: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON  
MALAYSIAN INTERNET USERS**

**By**

**SUKUNESAN SINNAPPAN**

**Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement  
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This thesis is directed to serve the public as an aid in their midst of technological craze.



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Abstract of the thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in  
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**INTERNET ADDICTION : AN EXPLORATORY STUDY AMONG  
MALAYSIAN INTERNET USERS**

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Internet has become a part of our daily lives. The vast scale of internet moves the whole society and culture into an entirely new dimension. With the media giving so much attention to the internet, more and more people are getting involved but some seem to be a bit too involved. It is becoming common to know someone, or have heard of someone, that has become obsessed with on-line activities to the point that they ignore important personal responsibilities. However, despite the increasing importance of internet, little attention seem to have been paid towards understanding internet dependency or addiction. This study was conducted specifically to determine 1) the existence of internet addiction, 2) which demographic factor and personality type correlates with internet addiction, 3) the characteristics of internet users and as well as possible addicts.



The study was conducted on active internet users, who get their access to internet via cybercafes in Klang Valley. A total of 136 individuals participated in the study. Data were collected through self-administered questionnaire and were analysed using statistical analyses such as frequency, percentage, correlation and Chi-square, by means of SPSS-Win computer software.

The findings show that the internet users in cybercafes are young, educated, mostly males with low income. These young users also have strong peer influence and are willing to forgo their recreational activities and personal responsibilities in order to stay on-line. Being youths internet is mainly used for entertainment, research and communication purposes. Internet is sought after by these users due to the quantity of information and its excellent networking capabilities. Affordable charges at the cybercafes has facilitated these youths to continue their net habits there. Peer company and influence, easy access to the internet and appealing facilities are the main reasons of these young users visit cybercafes.

In midst of getting exposed and familiarised with internet, some get obsessed. Internet addiction was found existing among Malaysian internet users. These addicts are aware of their extensive usage and intend to reduce. Based on the findings of this study, there is a need for recovery programs and therapy to cure these addicts. And various in depth studies should be carried out to cope with the social implications of this latest communication technological tool.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi sebahagian daripada keperluan bagi mendapatkan Ijazah Master Sains.

**KETAGIHAN INTERNET : SATU TINJAUAN TERHADAP PENGGUNA-  
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Penggunaan internet telah pun menjadi sebahagian daripada kehidupan harian kita. Internet telah mengolah seluruh masyarakat dan budaya kita ke satu dimensi yang baru. Kehebohan pihak media tentang internet, menyebabkan lebih ramai terdedah kepada penggunaan internet, tetapi ada segilintir yang keterlaluan. Adalah perkara biasa masa kini untuk mendengar atau mengenali seseorang yang terlalu terlibat dengan internet sehinggalah mereka ini megabaikan tanggungjawab mereka. Walau bagaimanapun dengan kepentingan internet yang semakin menonjol, sedikit perhatian diberikan kepada penggantungan atau ketagihan internet. Secara khususnya, kajian ini dijalankan untuk menentukan (1) kewujudan ketagihan internet, (2) faktor demografik and jenis personaliti yang berkorelasi dengan ketagihan internet, (3) ciri-ciri pengguna internet dan ketagih internet.

Kajian ini dijalankan pada pengguna-pengguna internet yang aktif, di mana mereka menggunakan internet di cybercafe-cybercafe di Lembah Kelang. Sejumlah 136 individu telah mengambil bahagian di dalam kajian ini. Data dikumpulkan melalui borang soalselidik dan dianalisis dengan menggunakan analisis statistik seperti kekerapan, peratus, korelasi dan Chi-square dengan menggunakan program SPSS-Win.

Hasil kajian menunjukkan yang pengguna internet di cybercafe adalah muda, kebanyakan terdiri daripada kaum lelaki dan keseluruhannya berpendapatan rendah. Pengguna-pengguna muda ini dipengaruhi kuat oleh rakan-rakan mereka dan sanggup mengorbankan aktiviti rekreasi dan hal-hal peribadi semata-mata untuk menggunakan internet. Corak penggunaan internet mereka tertumpu kepada hiburan, kajian dan komunikasi. Internet digemari kerana kuantiti maklumat yang banyak serta jaringannya yang unggul. Harga penggunaan yang murah membolehkan pemuda-pemuda ini meneruskan tabiat internet mereka di cybercafe. Kehadiran dan pengaruh rakan sebaya, penggunaan internet yang mudah serta kemudahan- kemudahan yang canggih adalah antara sebab-sebab utama golongan pemuda ini mengunjungi cybercafe.

Dalam usaha untuk memahami dan mempelopori internet, segelintir menjadi ketagih. Ketagihan internet didapati wujud di kalangan pengguna-pengguna internet di Malaysia. Penagih ini sedar akan penggunaan internet mereka yang keterlaluan dan ingin mengurangkannya.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Almost all developed and developing nation have focused their efforts in promoting a knowledge-based society for national development by, creating greater awareness and appreciation for Information Technology (IT) in all levels of society. Malaysia is no exception. Move by the Malaysian government to establish the National Information Technology Council (NITC), under the chairmanship of the Honourable Prime Minister is indicative of the recognition and critical role assigned to IT as a strategic technology for long term development.

The NITC has become the focal point for national efforts in strategic planning for the IT sector, emphasising IT's role in transforming the Malaysian society into a knowledge-based society (Azzman, 1997a). The establishment of so call knowledge-based society largely depends on information as its essence for development (“Computimes,” July 1997a).



In the IT world today, the technology that could offer an affordable and quick way to get information and also distribute information effectively is the Internet (Suler, 1996a; Young, 1996j; Nikki, 1997; Holland, 1997).

The Internet, being itself a communication technology tool, differs from traditional communication technologies such as telephone, radio and paper. The difference is the level of interaction and the speed at which an individual can broadcast his/her messages. No other medium gives every participant the ability to communicate instantly with thousands and thousands of people. Information are relayed through various channels; one well known example is the electronic mail or e-mail. E-mail such as Hotmail, Rocketmail, Snailmail, Web mail and much more are provided for the Internet users without charge to manipulate information. E-mails are becoming more and more common nowadays in replacing office memos wherever and whenever possible within the corporate and government sector ("Intech," September 1997h). While academia has benefited tremendously from connections to other research centres around the world - instead of having to work for weeks to correspond, one may expect to interact within minutes. Apart from sharing information, Internet can be used also to gather information.

There are an ever growing number of valuable information resources being made available via the Internet. These include free and public databases, library catalogues, government and commercial services. Internet is full of information transactions,

information is relayed every second, from news to reports, opinions , feedback and much more. Powerful search tools , with names like Gopher, Netscape, Mosaic, Wide Area Information Service (WAIS) and others can help Internet users to retrieve and browse for information. The Internet applications are in form of hypertext pages linked to each other. These pages are developed to provide combined services such as text, audio, video, graphics and animation. With these features, Internet not only has attracted the public but also turned into an effective place to gather information, disseminate information and communication.

The Internet, one of the latest inclusions of communication technology, have been the buzz word today. Anything from 10 million to 25 million people are said to be connected to the Internet today. According to the estimation done by the Internet Society, by the year 2001 there will be over 5 billion computers interconnected. Currently, in Malaysia itself there are more than 300,000 Internet users (“Intech,” September 1998n). The vast scale of the Internet moves the whole issue of society and culture into an entirely new dimension (Nikki, 1997). Like other technology, Internet may effect the society either positively or negatively. Therefore, it becomes vital that this technology is guided in a practical way to maximise its potential benefits and minimise its possible harm.

With the media giving so much attention to the Internet, more and more people are getting involved with it (Chase, 1996; Goldsbrough, 1996; Young, 1996c), but some

seem to be a bit too excited. Some people spend too much time there. It is becoming common to know someone, or have heard of someone, that has become obsessed with on-line activity (Internet) to the point that they ignore important personal responsibilities (King, 1996; Goldsbrough, 1996; Young, 1996i). Is this yet another type of addiction that has invaded our society apart from addiction to drugs, gambling, alcohol, smoke, sex, over eating and more?

Internet addiction is the term used to denote excessive use of Internet which is not healthy or causes impairment to occupational, social, family - related, financial, psychology and physiology (Goldsbrough, 1996; Suler, 1996c; Young, 1996f; Chase, 1996). Goldsbrough, Suler, Young and Chase adds that Internet addiction is a social illness that leads to broken marriages, individuals losing jobs, failing from school, negligence of social and family responsibilities and reducing recreational activities.

Therefore this correlation study on Internet addiction aims to explore some of the possible explanations for this phenomenon - Internet addiction, particularly in Malaysian IT/Internet community. However, there are only a handful of researchers currently working on this new form of addiction. Suler (1996) one of the leading researcher, says that he is not convinced that "Internet addiction" is reliable even with valid diagnostic proof. Only recently, in July 1997, Dr. Kimberly Young from Pittsburgh University proved the existence of Internet addiction and its implications. Viktor Brenner's study in early 1996 revealed that, there is a possibility of people self-reporting as Internet addict

where actually they are currently very passionate about their on-line use. Another researcher, Chase (1996) stated that Internet addiction has been most closely compared to marijuana as it is a “psychostimulant”; which stimulates the same nerves in the brain as the Internet (Blakely, 1996). Kandell (1998) assistant director of the Counselling centre at University of Maryland – College Park notes that Internet addiction can afflict anyone who has easy access to the plethora of on-line services, but students seem especially prone to it. Meanwhile Orzack (1998) believes that the practice of recreational drug is similar to inappropriate use of computers which leads to its misuse and addiction.

### **Statement of Problem**

More personal computers are expected to move into the Malaysian home (Prataban, 1995b; “Intech,” May 1998f; “Intech,” September 1998m). This means the country would benefit in the long run as computers would help the nation to realise the government’s vision of an information rich society (A. Shukor and Ahmad, 1995; Azzman, 1997b). The increase of demand for personal computers has resulted in the proportionate increase in demand for on-line activities, where a steady increase of 22 per cent of Internet users per month were recorded ( Azharin, 1996).

Computers are very effective time consuming devices which forces users to allocate their time and change the way they perform their tasks (Vitalari et al., 1985, Orzack, 1998b). The effects of Internet use on live of the users have been quite extensive. Recent research shows that their personal / professional live suffers (Suler, 1996c; King, 1996; Young, 1996f; and Goldsbrough, 1996, Orzack, 1998b). These findings are supported by numerous cases of people becoming “hooked” on to on-line activities. It’s becoming common to know people who are too fond of Internet that they tend to forgo important social, occupational or recreational activities (Goldsbrough, 1996; King, 1996, Chase, 1996; Orzack, 1998b).

The constant pace of increasing Internet users in Malaysia have inspired the present study; that is to determine the potentiality of existence and the correlates of Internet addiction. As Vision 2020 drives the nation towards industrialisation, the transition from agriculture to industrial society, and from industrial to information society occurs (Kartheyeni and Azzman, 1994). Kartheyeni and Azzman adds that the significant importance of information technology and its application become increasingly dominant and the assimilation of any new technology as the Internet to the Malaysian scenario should be guided. Internet which seem to be the key to an increasingly information oriented future, would soon be everything that makes up our life (Nikki, 1996; Chase, 1996).

A point worth considering is the existence of Internet addiction and what are the effects to the society? Will the most talked about technology (Internet) bring along illness - addiction that would affect the country's economy via society in near future? Thus the present study attempts to provide a glimpse of this new communication technology, the Internet.

### **Objective of the Study**

This study is meant to provide a better understanding regarding the emerging problem - Internet addiction, which is regarded as the latest communication technological tool. This exploratory study will attempt to get information regarding Malaysian Internet users, particularly to determine the potential existence of Internet addiction and the correlating factors.

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To determine the existence of Internet addiction in Klang Valley.
2. To find out which demographic factor and personality that correlates with Internet addiction.
3. To find out the characteristics of Internet users and possible Internet addicts.

### **Significance of the Study**

Internet which ails from the word inter-networking is considered as new in Malaysia but much attention should be given to this technology that carries and uses digitised information; as it will play a major role in achieving Vision 2020. As huge amount of capital, time and effort are invested in latest technological implementation for national development. The best example is the Multimedia Super Corridor or better known as MSC which encompasses of several mega projects namely, the Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC), Putrajaya, the new national administrative capital of Malaysia , the new international airport at Sepang and the new facilities being developed at the West Port and to follow up is the development of an IT city, as a centre point for various information industries. The MSC bound by networks with high-speed computer links is expected to lead the way to transform Malaysia into a knowledge-based society (“Intech, “ July 1998h).

Information gathered from this study will provide better understanding in any future planning or problems regarding Internet. Apart from gathering general information regarding the users, information regarding Internet addiction in particular will be in great use to corporate sector (King, 1996). As they, having access to Internet risk losing valuable worker productivity if employees get hooked on to on-line activities. The important area that need to be considered about is the society, as more and more people are losing jobs, experiencing broken marriages, students failing from school,



owing big amount of on-line bills, even to the extend that some having health problems all caused by the excessive use of Internet. The findings of the study will also provide academicians with some features of social implication of a communication technology on the society that could be further explored.

### **Limitations of Study**

Despite the overwhelming awareness of information technology in Malaysia, little empirical studies have been done regarding Internet. This, unfortunately was drawback in strengthening the literature for this study. The findings of this exploratory study is based on the perceptions of Cybercafe users in Klang Valley. Review of past studies have shown the newly logged on users tend to label themselves as Internet addict due to the current interest in on-line activities ( Brenner, 1996; Thompson, 1996).

This study could not capture all the Internet users of Klang Valley as the study captures only those who access Internet via cybercafe and not all the Internet users. These other Internet users get access mainly from their colleges, working place or home. The other short fall in this study includes the “masking” of data from the respondents that cannot be cross - examined. The present study, if done as a longitudinal study would have revealed more information on Internet addiction and its implication, as the process on the whole can be captured. Unlike this study which only takes a slice of this