

AGREEABLENESS AND NEUROTICISM AS CORRELATES OF INTERNET ADDICTION AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN UNIVERSITIES IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

BY

Iligh¹, C., Ekoja², A. A., Amali³, A. O. & Akuto⁴, G. W.

^{1, 2, 3 & 4} Department of Educational Foundations and General Studies, Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University, Makurdi

ABSTRACT

*This study examined agreeableness and neuroticism as correlates of internet addiction among undergraduates in Benue State, Nigeria. The study was guided by two specific objectives which were translated to two research questions. Two hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study adopted correlation research design. A sample of 396 respondents was drawn from the population of 42,624 undergraduates of the three conventional Universities in Benue State. Sampling for the study was done using simple random sampling techniques. Two instruments were adapted and used for data collection which are: Internet Addiction Test (AIT) by Young (1998) consisting of 20 items, Beck and Big Five-Factor Personality Inventory (BFFPI) by John, and Srivastava (1999). The instruments were validated by five experts and were subjected to reliability test using Cronbach Alpha method of estimating reliability. It yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.52 and 0.88 respectively for the two instruments. Data collected for the research questions were analysed using coefficient of R in Pearson Product Moment Correlation, while the research hypotheses were tested using Test of significance of coefficient in Pearson Product Moment Correlation. Findings of the study revealed that; there is a positive and significant relationship between agreeableness and internet addiction among undergraduate students in Benue State ($r = .036^{**}$, $p < 0.05$); there is a positive and significant relationship between neuroticism and internet addiction among undergraduate students in Benue State ($r = .062^{**}$, $p < 0.05$). Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that undergraduates characterized with traits of agreeableness and neuroticism are prone to developing internet addiction. It was recommended among others that educational institutions in Benue State should actively promote mental health awareness and provide accessible support services to their undergraduate students.*

INTRODUCTION

Addiction is a dysfunctional and repetitive habit pattern which is expressed by cognitive preoccupation and has resulted in negative, behavioural, psycho-social or physical consequences (for instance, at home, work or school, inhibiting academic performance, damaging health) (Malenka, Nestle & Hyman, 2009). It may contain aspects of impaired control, tolerance or withdrawal, but central are developed negative consequences. Addiction is generally understood to be a mental disorder involving compulsive behaviour. Thus, the combination of the two words internet and addiction forms the term internet addiction which is a habit that involves excessive use of the internet, usually to the detriment of the user. Internet addiction is also known by numerous other terms, including internet addiction disorder, pathological internet use, internet dependency, problematic internet use, internet overuse and compulsive internet use. According to Spade (2014) internet addiction is the inability to control one's internet use, leading to psychological, social, school-related and/or professional problems. American Psychiatric Association (2013) defined the internet addiction as a pattern for

using the internet which can cause dysfunction and unpleasant internal reactions during a period of two months, and has provided seven criteria for identifying persons with problematic internet use which include tolerance, withdrawal symptoms and the duration which people use the Internet is more than the time they initially planned to. Others are constant desire to control the behaviour, to spend considerable time for matters related to the internet, reduction of social, occupational and recreational activities by using the Internet and continued use despite the knowledge of negative effects.

Consequently, internet addiction is a rising phenomenon affecting students and other people with varying frequency around the world and has produced negative impacts on the academic, relationship and occupational aspects of many lives (APA, 2013). As acquisition of personal computers and smart phones among undergraduates is on the increase, it is common to see a large number of them engrossed in internet browsing for hours. According to Nielsenwire, (2010) the long hours of staying on the internet have created a health concern for many people not only in Nigeria, but all over the world. This wide usage of internet which has become a source of concern to school teachers and parents are sometimes reflected in use of ear pieces connected to the computers and smart phones by students as they eat and walk on university campuses (Nalwa & Anand, 2011). This activity is undertaken without the slight regard to health hazards or even fear of harm by a moving vehicle on campus. Unfortunately, it is a common fact that many parents and university authorities do not fully understand that most often undergraduates spend greater part of their time on the internet for gossips, Facebook, games and pornography rather than academic purposes.

Agreeableness is a personality trait that holds people to be accommodating and helping them to resolve issues by creating win-win situation by their flexible attitude (Cattell & Mead, 2008). Agreeable individuals are characterized by their warmth, empathy, and cooperative nature. They value harmonious relationships and tend to be trusting and considerate. Individuals low in agreeableness may be more competitive and less concerned with others' feelings. These people are usually highly social and friendly and generous in negotiations in friendly environment to keep balance in opponents concerns (Kuss, van Rooij, Shorter, Griffiths & van de Mheen, 2014). They have a propensity to attain cooperation and social harmony. Helping others is their inbuilt feature and for that reason, they believe others are also honest and trustworthy. Students who are dominantly agreeable are less likely to be addicted to the internet. Research indicates that students' internet addicts score significantly lower on agreeableness (Huang et al., 2010). Also, Kuss, van Rooij, Shorter, Griffiths and van de Mheen (2014) found a negative relationship between agreeableness and internet addiction. Similarly, Vijay, et al. (2016) evaluated the relationship of Facebook and game addictive behaviour with personality characteristics among medical students and found that agreeableness displayed a significant association with addiction to facebook and internet game addictive behaviour.

Neuroticism represents an individual's emotional stability and resilience in the face of stress and negative emotions. Those high in neuroticism may be prone to anxiety, mood swings, and emotional reactivity, while those low in neuroticism are more emotionally steady and resilient. Frustrations, anger, depression, stress and self-blame is the personality symbol of the persons who rank high on the neuroticism trait of personality (Kuss, Griffiths & Binder, 2013). This is a fundamental personality trait which is associated with individuals who have pessimistic approach, who always over-react over mistakes and faults made by them. These people are easily trapped by stress and tend to be emotional and anxious. Moreover, most of the times, they are hopeless and frustrated when showing their feelings and exhibiting their behaviours. This personality trait holders lack emotional intelligence, are easily caught by mental disorder and depression which may have a serious impact on their physical and psychological health (Burch & Anderson, 2008). In a bid to link neuroticism and internet addiction, Kuss, Griffiths and Binder (2013), asserted that prevalence of internet addiction among university students is at higher level of neuroticism which increased the chances of being addicted to the internet. Also, Samarein, Far, Yekleh, Tahmasebi, Yaryari, Ramezani and Sandi (2013) maintained that neuroticism is positively related to internet addiction.

Statement of the Problem

The notable advantage of internet technology lies in its capacity for global connectivity, placing a wealth of information at our fingertips. While this technology has brought about significant benefits, it has also introduced certain drawbacks. This has led to the emergence of a new generation highly skilled in navigating the internet, contrasted with older adults who are less adept and find it challenging to adapt. Many of these proficient first-generation users are currently enrolled as undergraduates in universities. Devices such as smartphones, iPads, laptops, personal computers, and similar gadgets have made internet access convenient, readily available, and often affordable. While this accessibility is a positive development for academic pursuits, it is frequently misused, resulting in significant amounts of time being spent on trivial activities. This excessive usage surpasses its constructive aspects, leading to feelings of discomfort, intense cravings, and unease when access is restricted, with potentially serious repercussions. These consequences include delayed tasks, academic underachievement, social isolation, wasted time, breaches of social norms, and various negative psychosocial outcomes linked to

addictive behavior. As a result, this research aims to examine the connections between agreeableness, neuroticism, and internet addiction among undergraduate students studying in universities located in Benue State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

1. investigated the relationship between agreeableness and internet addiction among undergraduates in Benue State
2. ascertained the relationship between neuroticism and internet addiction among undergraduates in Benue State

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between agreeableness and internet addiction among undergraduates in Benue State?
2. What is the relationship between neuroticism and internet addiction among undergraduates in Benue State?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between agreeableness and internet addiction among undergraduates in Benue State.
2. There is no significant relationship between neuroticism and internet addiction among undergraduates in Benue State.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted correlation research design. A sample of 396 respondents was drawn from the population of 42,624 undergraduates of the three conventional Universities in Benue State. Sampling for the study was done using simple random sampling techniques. Two instruments were adapted and used for data collection which are: Internet Addiction Test (AIT) by Young (1998) consisting of 20 items, Beck and Big Five-Factor Personality Inventory (BFFPI) by John, and Srivastava (1999). The instruments were validated by five experts and were subjected to reliability test using Cronbach Alpha method of estimating reliability. It yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.52 and 0.88 respectively for the two instruments. Data collected for the research questions were analysed using coefficient of R in Pearson Product Moment Correlation, while the research hypotheses were tested using Test of significance of coefficient in Pearson Product Moment Correlation.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between agreeableness and internet addiction among undergraduate students in Benue State?

The answer to the question is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Relationship between agreeableness and internet addiction among undergraduates in Benue State (n = 396)

| Variable | Internet Addiction r | Agreeableness r |
|--------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| Internet Addiction | 1.000 | .036** |
| Agreeableness | .036** | 1.000 |

Table 1 shows that there is a positive relationship between agreeableness and internet addiction among undergraduate students in Benue State ($r = .036^{**}$).

The corresponding hypothesis to the above research question states that: There is no significant relationship between agreeableness and internet addiction among undergraduates in Benue State.

Table 2 provides the answer to the hypothesis.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation showing relationship between Agreeableness and Internet Addiction among Undergraduates in Benue State

| Variable | Internet Addiction r | Agreeableness r |
|--------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| Internet Addiction | 1.000 | .036** |
| Agreeableness | .036** | 1.000 |

The results in Table 2 reveal that there is a positive and significant relationship between agreeableness and internet addiction among undergraduates in Benue State ($r = .036^{**}$).

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between neuroticism and internet addiction among undergraduate students in Benue State?

The answer to the question is provided in Table 3.

Table 3: Relationship between neuroticism and internet addiction among undergraduates in Benue State (n = 396)

| Variable | Internet Addiction r | Neuroticism r |
|--------------------|----------------------|---------------|
| Internet Addiction | 1.000 | .062** |
| Neuroticism | .062** | 1.000 |

Table 3 shows that there is a positive relationship between neuroticism and internet addiction among undergraduate students in Benue State ($r = .062^{**}$).

The corresponding hypothesis to the above research question states that: There is no significant relationship between neuroticism and internet addiction among undergraduates in Benue State.

Table 4 provides the answer to the hypothesis.

Table 4: Pearson Product Moment Correlation showing relationship between neuroticism and internet addiction among undergraduates in Benue State

| Variable | Internet Addiction r | Neuroticism r |
|--------------------|----------------------|---------------|
| Internet Addiction | 1.000 | .062** |
| Neuroticism | .062** | 1.000 |

Table 4 shows that there is a positive and significant relationship between neuroticism and internet addiction among undergraduates in Benue State ($r = .062^{**}$).

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Findings from research question one and hypothesis one showed that there is a positive significant relationship between agreeableness and internet addiction among undergraduate students in Benue State. This implies that agreeable personality is likely to determine the level of undergraduates' problematic internet use. This implies that undergraduate students who are predominantly agreeable have less chances of suffering from pathological internet use. This finding is a direct reflection of the nature of agreeable individuals who apart from being generally considerate, kind, generous, trustworthy, helpful and willing to compromise are optimistic about human nature. Thus, they are flexible to new conditions and emotionally adjustable and may not necessarily over depend on or be addicted to the internet. This is in line with Kuss, van Rooij, Shorter, Griffiths and van de Mheen (2014) who studied a number of activities and personality traits associated with Internet addiction in Netherlands which the finding showed that agreeableness and resourcefulness appeared as protective factors in

high frequency online gamers. This finding also supports Kuss, Griffiths and Binder (2013) who assessed the prevalence of clinically significant levels of Internet addiction and verified the interplay between personality traits and specific Internet uses in increasing the risk for Internet addiction in Australia and revealed that frequent usage of online shopping and social online activities among individuals with low agreeableness significantly increased the chances of being addicted to the internet. In view of the supportive findings from previous studies; it is ideal to submit that undergraduates who are predominant on agreeable personality are less likely to indulge in problematic internet use.

Findings from research question two and hypothesis two showed that there is a positive significant relationship between neuroticism and internet addiction among undergraduate students in Benue State. This implies that neuroticism is likely a determinant of internet addiction among undergraduate students. This finding is very much surprising because some researchers had established that students with neurotic personality tend to lack self-confidence and emotional stability and tend to indulge in excessive internet use as way of coping with their social life. This finding is in consonance with Samarein, Far, Yekleh, Tahmasei, Yaryari, Ramezani and Sandi (2013) who assessed the relationship between the adolescents' and young adults' personality traits and Internet addiction disorder (IAD) in Kharazmi University and maintained that neuroticism is positively and significantly related to internet addiction. In the same vein, Kakulte and Shejwal (2017) in their study on internet addiction and personality differences among adolescents in India found that high internet-addicted students scored significantly higher on neuroticism and extraversion and lower on openness to experience and agreeableness than low internet-addicted adolescents.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that undergraduates characterized with traits of agreeableness and neuroticism are prone to developing internet addiction. It was recommended among others that educational institutions in Benue State should actively promote mental health awareness and provide accessible support services to their undergraduate students.

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