Internet Addiction in the Workplace

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Abstract—The article presents the results of proprietary research aimed at diagnosing the opinions of web users on the use of the Internet, based on their experiences and their own established practices. The objective of the research was to demonstrate whether – as described in the vast range of reference books and articles dedicated to the question of the risks resulting from contact with media, in particular Internet addiction – the opinions of the respondents would affirm their awareness of these risks and their negative consequences. The research was carried out among part-time students who had professional experience, were employed and were studying at different faculties in universities and schools of higher learning in Silesia.

Index Terms—Media, Internet, Internet addiction, media related threats

One of the traits of the development of civilization at the turn of the century is a new quality of life that led to the world community being named the information society. [1] This category is a logical consequence of development and should be regarded as a consequence of the escalation of the human mind which is the most dynamic and even the most hegemonic power of social space. Two perspectives are related to this, the first, on the positive side, related to improving the quality of life in societies to levels unknown before, but the second, the negative one, remaining still unknown and unpredictable, taking into account the fact that the negative consequences of the information society are still surprising both the individual as well as larger communities. It is impossible today to imagine which aspects of the Internet – along with its devices and tools – will bring humanity, as well as the still unknown eventual evil that may result from having contact with this type of medium, especially when considering the fact that this contact seems to be getting more and more intense, sometimes appropriating nearly all manifestations of human existence. [2] Therefore, the warning offered by The Club of Rome appears completely real; in 1982 these eminent thinkers had called attention to one of the most dangerous imbalances that was becoming a reality in the late twentieth century. They called it the human gap, which contends that man’s creations are derivatives of his creative thought and thus become social facts, appropriating themselves man - who though brought them to reality. [3] Therefore, in acts of human creativity there is such power, strength and expansiveness which calls into being great achievements, which their creator, man, is at times unable control. Alfred Nobel can be recalled here, who, having experienced the consequences of his own unfortunate discovery, established an award not in the aim of appeasing great spirits with material goods, but in order to attract the world’s attention to the continuous need of remembering that a creative yet unethical act can lead humanity astray. Thus, we can view the Internet as a sign of civilization in the third millennium. Far-reaching consequences are associated with the medium, connected with the quality of life in its psychosocial and cultural aspects and this change can more than once be appalling, if we juxtapose it with phenomena, which, apparently, we did not wish for, but occurred as a side effect, finally becoming a part of the human experience. We can list here effects such as: indirection and obliquity, the incidental character of human relations with the characteristic shallowing of emotions accompanying these contacts, Internet crimes such as hacking, pornography and sexual harassment, human trafficking, crimes related to infringing upon someone else’s freedom and privacy. [4] One of the most dangerous – in the sense of human interaction with a medium – is becoming Internet dependent. [5] One can talk about this phenomenon when contact with the Internet does not serve any specific constructive purpose, either creatively or professionally, but becomes an irresistible subconscious force, depriving the individual of the ever important human values of self-determination, self-control and autonomous decision-making. It is not just the situation where deeply humanistic and empathetic themes of human life are being displaced from everyday experience, but a new, hitherto unknown symptom of slavery, where an individual remains enslaved to the thing he created. This has already been diagnosed and described by clinicians and become a new psychiatric unit with far-reaching somatic and social consequences - infoholism. [6] This serious imbalance in human functioning, as a consequence of having contact with the Internet, concerns, according to some studies, different areas of one’s social, cultural, family and professional life. In the contemporary world, addiction to the Internet in the workplace is observed with more and more regularity. This problem not only threatens the individual and their psychosomatic structure, but also becomes a negative phenomenon within the professional sphere (working space), reducing the quality and effectiveness of the work performed. It should be noted that in this sense, the Internet is not used to increase professional production, but most often distracts the employee from those activities which permit him to achieve his professional tasks. A further consequence of this is the decline of workforce productivity with the continuous growth of production costs and work-related expenses.

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The intention of the research described in this article is to present, using a diagnostic test, the results of the following inquiry: considering the fact that the risks associated with Internet addiction are so widely discussed in reference books and articles, are these risks actually reflected in the consciousness of web users? Internet addiction seems particularly dangerous, because people using it are probably not aware of these dangers and do not realize to what extent their psychosocial functioning are being encroached upon by this medium. So it also seems likely that web users evaluate their interaction with the computer and the Internet in a positive way. However, this should not lower the level of concern, moreover, it should persuade psychologists, but also teachers and sociologists to raise awareness of the risks associated with the Internet and make the public more conscious of this matter. The research which has been conducted by the authors present the characteristics of environmental (community based) diagnosis and its results and conclusions are presented later in this article. The research took the form of a simple diagnosis using the authors’ survey in order to present the interaction between employees and the Internet in the professional environment, indicating a dependence on this medium. The questionnaire contains twenty disjunctive statements and the research was carried out among a population of 430 people, including 303 women and 127 men; the results obtained were subjected to qualitative analysis leading to conclusions and generalizations. The most important demographical characteristics of the surveyed population, which nevertheless is not fully representative, are the following: students aged from 20 to 40 who belong to the middle class of a highly urbanized and industrialized society and who are engaged in professional activity within the agglomeration of Upper Silesia, Poland.

Researches are exiguous and in order to present the results in a way that is representative of the socio-professional domain, they need to be broaden and based on a representative sample. The point of the departure was the research question: If and to what extent, in the minds of the respondents (employees), does contact with the Internet disorganize their psycho-social space, complicate their actual social relations and limit their functioning in the virtual world? Researcher’s convictions related to the fact that the surveyed employees mentally identify themselves with virtual reality - which makes part of their needs - led the authors to make the following hypothesis: Contact with the Internet, according to the respondents, does not disorganize their psychosocial space in their work environment and thus does not handicap their actual social relations, and does not restrict their operation to the virtual world. The hypothesis as well as its verification does not prove the safety of those using the Internet, both privately and professionally, because their actions resulting from personal needs and preferences escape their self-awareness and self-criticism of the risks connected with using the Internet. Thus, it can also be supposed that the eventual verification of the hypothesis in the context of its confirmation will only prove a narrow field of view and narrow interpretation of its own functioning by Internet users in their work environment in relation to their own needs and aspirations. Certainly, such research could be also carried out on another group of respondents, likely those who observe and study the relationship Internet users have with the Internet in a professional environment and opposite results would be obtained, therefore, the hypothesis presented above may not be verified.

Below, the following statements are presented in the form of a questionnaire, which was created to collect the opinions and evaluations of the respondents concerning their contact with the Internet in the workplace. This is reflected in the choices made by the interviewees among possible replies within the questionnaire elaborated on for the purpose of the present study.

The statements for each question are presented below, following the choices made by the interviewees. The first question concerns the feeling of discomfort experienced by the respondents when they terminated their interaction with the Internet. The results indicate that half of those surveyed do not feel bad when disconnecting from Internet, while 24% of respondents feel it occasionally. Sometimes this bad feeling is sensed by almost 22% of respondents and 3% of respondents always feel badly. The results are presented in the graph below.

Graph no 1. I feel bad when I know I have to disconnect from the Internet.

The choices made by the respondents on the second statement leads one to think that the social environment of the respondents is unlikely to have a problem with the amount of time they spend using the Internet. It does not represent any problem in the opinion of 67% respondents. Occasionally, this problem can be pointed out for about 20% of respondents, and sometimes it is perceived as such by almost 11% of respondents. Only 2% of respondents expressed the opinion that the environment does not complain about the fact that they continue their interactions with the medium. It should be noted that the replies on the present statement represent the opinions of web users about the subject and not the opinion of their social environment. If, therefore, the opinion of both web

Source: based upon authors' own research
users and their social environment would be juxtaposed in a comparative approach, the results could prove that the problem is significant. The results of this statement are presented in graph number two.

Graph no 2. My social environment complains that I spend a lot of time online.

Source: based upon authors' own research

The third statement displays the respondents’ choices as regards fatigue at night and if it is sufficient reason to stop interacting with the Internet. It turns out that 66% of respondents, feel very tired at night and naturally disconnect from this medium. Occasional trouble with disconnecting from the Internet concerns 21% of the respondents, while a little more than 9% sometimes encounter this problem. Stopping a nighttime surfing session is a problem encountered often by only 3% of respondents. Again, it seems important to consider the subjective assessment of the situation by those who responded to the survey. The results are presented in graph number 3.

Graph no 3. At night, even if I am very tired, I delay disconnecting from the network.

Source: based upon authors' own research

On the basis of statement number four, it can be deduced that the Internet does not awaken a curiosity for news and information among Internet users in an excessive way. This opinion is shared by 57% of respondents. About 27% feel this way occasionally, while nearly 14% of the interviewees sometimes perceive that their interest for the events presented on the Internet intensifies. Only 1.4% are particularly interested in the events presented on the web. The results are presented in the graph below.

Graph no 4. I am more and more interested in what will happen on the Net during my absence.

Source: based upon authors' own research

On the basis of statement number five, it can be deduced that the Internet does not supplant real social contacts. These results are displayed in graph number five.

Graph no 5. I think that “virtual” friends are better than real ones.

Source: based upon authors' own research

From the choices made in the sixth statement it can be deduced that the Internet does not limit the subjects’ external activities. This opinion is shared by 70% of
respondents. Occasional problems are encountered by only 20% of respondents, and the problem sometimes appears for 8% of respondents. Only 1.4% of respondents believe that the Internet limits their contact with the outside world. The results indicated above are presented in graph number six.

Graph no 6. I am sitting on the Internet more and more and going outside less and less.

The vast majority of respondents believe that their interaction with the Internet never interferes with their sleep, as this opinion is shared by 93% of them. Occasional interference caused by waking and wanting to turn the computer on is claimed by about 5% of interviewees, sometimes this problem occurs with 1.16% of respondents, and less than 1% of people see this as a significant problem, as shown in graph number seven.

Graph no 7. I wake up at night and I want to connect to the Net.

Among respondents, 67% are able to resist the need to use the Internet. Occasionally this represents a problem for 20% of respondents and sometimes it occurs with 8% of the interviewees. Nearly 4% of respondents cannot resist to the urge to connect to the Net, which is not a significant indicator. The results of the replies to this statement are included in graph number eight.

Graph no 8. Despite the efforts I make, I cannot resist the need to connect to the Internet.

However, respondents admit in statement number nine, that while using the Internet, they tend to loose track of time, extending their interaction considerably. Thus, only 15% of respondents did not have a problem with that and this problem occurs occasionally to 40% of interviewees, sometimes to 32% of them and often to nearly 13%. You can see from this – as it is also depicted in graph number nine – that only about 15% of respondents discipline themselves and control their time using the Internet.

Graph no 9. I am often on the Net longer than I originally intend to.

The replies to statement ten confirm the outcomes obtained in the conclusions which can be deduced from statement number five, that is, nearly 84% of respondents never prefer contact with virtual friends to a real and direct conversation. Occasionally 11% of the respondents will prefer virtual friends, it sometimes
happens with 4% of them and often to less than 1% of respondents.

Graph no 10. More and more often, I prefer to talk with friends on the Internet rather than to meet with “real” people.

Source: based upon authors’ own research

Among the respondents, 56% said they never fail in accomplishing their daily chores because of the Internet. This occurs occasionally with 30% of the respondents, and sometimes to 11% of them. 2.56% of the respondents admit neglecting their daily chores because of the Internet.

Graph no 11. It happens that I forget about my daily duties (cleaning, preparing meals, shopping ...) because of the Internet.

Source: based upon authors’ own research

A significant majority of the respondents – almost 75% of them – claimed that surfing on the web does not reduce their efficiency at work. A further 18% of them indicated that this negative effect may happen occasionally, another 6% perceived it sometimes, and less than 1% think that surfing the Internet may cause a decrease in their work efficiency. This is presented in diagram number 12.

Graph no 12. Surfing the Internet makes me less productive at work.

Source: based upon authors’ own research

As indicated in graph number 13 which displays the replies of the respondents to statement number thirteen, as much as 78% of respondents did not feel uncomfortable when not in close proximity to the Internet. 16% of the respondents occasionally felt this discomfort, and a further 5% only sometimes. This feeling of uneasiness affects less than 1% of the respondents.

Graph no.13 When I’m away from the computer, I want to find myself back in front of it as soon as possible.

Source: based upon authors’ own research

Nearly 61% of the respondents do not feel guilty about spending too much time using the Internet, occasionally this guilt is felt by 23% of respondents and 13% of them sometimes feel guilty. This actual feeling of guilt is often sensed by only about 3% of the interviewees.

Graph no 14. I feel guilty about spending too much time on the Internet.

Source: based upon authors’ own research
In the next statement, 58% of the respondents indicated that they will not turn the computer on immediately after waking up, and another nearly 24% do so occasionally. About 11% sometimes turn the computer on immediately after waking up, and almost 7% claimed to do so often.

Graph no. 15. I connect to the Net immediately after waking up.

The sixteenth statement indicates that for nearly 61% of respondents the Internet is not the main theme of conversation with another people. 32% of respondents have a tendency to discuss subjects found on the Internet, it sometimes occurs with 6% of interviewees and often to less than 0.5% of respondents.

Graph no.16. I talk mostly about the Internet with other people .

In the following statement, respondents expressed their determination related to controlling the time spent on the Internet in order to maintain so-called time accountancy. Nearly 34% of the respondents do not lose track of time, 33% encounter this problem occasionally, and 24% claim it happens to them sometimes. Only 9% of respondents lose track of time and not notice it passing while surfing the Internet.

Graph no.17. When I'm on the Net, I do not keep track of time.

As indicated in the graph number 18, nearly 35% of respondents feel the irresistible need to check their e-mail constantly. Occasionally, this need is felt by more than 36% of respondents and sometimes by nearly 22%. Only about 7% of respondents said that they feel the irresistible urge to check their e-mail often.

Graph no.18. I feel an irresistible urge to check my e-mail frequently.
Nearly 88% of the respondents claimed that they had not resigned from their daily pleasures in order to use the Internet. It happens occasionally to less than 9% of the interviewees, while less than 3% of those surveyed sometimes give up their everyday pleasures in order to use the Internet. Among all the interviewed persons, less than 1% give up their everyday enjoyments because of the time spent online.

Graph no. 19. I resign from my daily pleasures in order to spend more time on the Internet.

Among the respondents 86% said their Internet use does not disorganize their meetings with others and does not cause delays in attending such meetings. Occasionally, this problem is encountered by a little more than 9% of respondents, and sometimes by only 3% of respondents. Only 1.16% of respondents perceived the problem of being late for meetings with another person as a result of using the Internet.

Graph no. 20. I arrive late for meetings with another people because I spend too much time on the Internet.

The results of the research seems to present an optimistic vision of how employees use the Internet in both their professional and extra-professional environment. The image resulting from the survey does not confirm that the Internet clearly disorganized the psychosocial space of the respondents, handicapped their real social relations and limited their functioning to virtual reality. Such a conclusion, suggested by the results presented above, seems to be in contradiction of articles as commonly described in numerous books about the syndrome of Internet addiction, which generates serious consequences in both private and professional life of Internauts. The conclusion resulting from the research turns out to be ambiguous, and an alternative interpretation contained therein is probably dependent on the specific characteristics of the environment in which the study was carried out. It should be noted that when asking about problems associated with Internet addiction to those people who use this medium intensively, we may obtain more a wishful, notional and not-so-objective image than a real one, which may constitute the crux of the matter. Moreover, conducting such research among students of extramural studies, who are relatively young people, permits the researcher to diagnose the social environment, for which the use of the Internet turns out to be a standard for both personal and professional life. It is hard to present to Internet users an objective picture of their use of this medium. Perhaps this research could be expanded by adding the opinions of employers whose workers use the Internet, by asking questions about whether cyberactivity may have negative consequences in the professional environment. The research was not intended to be representative, so its results are not definitive. Without any doubt, the results certainly permit one to realize that the problem of Internet use is very complex and defies unequivocal opinions, which weaken the Internet's presence in the broadly defined lives of different social environments, including professional ones. The results of the research did not confirm the adopted hypothesis definitively, because the work was not intended to be representative, and the results apply.
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