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**A CONCEPTUAL PAPER ON LONELINESS AND INTERNET  
ADDICTION AMONG STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA**

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**Abstract**

Internet addiction is one of the main concerns among academicians and parents. Pandemic has contributed to disruption of social lives. Consequently, internet addiction has attracted many researchers especially towards children and students. However, because of the individual isolation during pandemic, loneliness has seen as of the factor effect on individual mental health and give effect towards internet addiction. Individuals who have drastic changes on their social norm always relates with loneliness. Hence, this study will be aimed to examine the effects of loneliness towards internet addiction among student in Kolej Profesional Mara in Malaysia in this post-pandemic era. The respondents will be student from a total of six Kolej Profesional Mara in Malaysia with different programme taken. This study will use a quantitative analysis method. Moreover, the instruments of the questionnaire will be adopted from UCLA Loneliness Scale and Internet Addiction Scale. All data collected will be analysed through IBM SPSS Version 24. Descriptive analysis and Pearson Correlation Analysis will be conducted once data was collected. This study will contribute to the management of college to eradicate the internet addictions among students.

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## 1. Introduction

In recent decades, internet usage has increased substantially. In Malaysia, the internet is getting easier to use and has become a crucial component of people's daily lives. Teens and young adults are the biggest internet users (Alimoradi et al., 2019). Children and adolescents today which have been called as the digital, millennial, or Y generation are significantly impacted by digital technology because teenagers and young people have been exposed to it since they were very young (Kurniasanti et al., 2019). Despite the fact that many people use the Internet to simplify and enhance their lives, there is rising worry about the harmful effects of excessive Internet use (Cheah et al., 2022). Problematic internet use, or internet addiction, is on the rise as the number of internet users does (Tateno et al., 2019). Even while the internet is a wonderful tool that has vastly improved the way we communicate with one another, its widespread adoption has led to a number of undesirable outcomes (Rosliza et al., 2018). Due to the internet addiction, a relatively recent and alarming epidemic, has emerged and is now increasingly impacting teenagers and young people (Saikia et al., 2019).

The phrase "internet addiction" has been casually and commonly used to characterize those who use the internet excessively or in a harmful way (Tateno et al., 2019). In the late 1990s, American psychologist Kimberly S. Young was the first to introduce the term "internet addiction" which causes unhealthy ways of living and is comorbid with various psychiatric disorders such as attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, and depression (Kato et al., 2020). Overuse, addiction, disorder, maladaptive, pathological, compulsive, and excessive internet use are all adjectives that have been used to describe internet dependence or dependence on the internet (Baturay & Toker, 2019). In past studies, the typical notions of internet addiction were poorly regulated obsessions, cravings, withdrawal, tolerance, or internet-related activities that significantly harmed one's health or interpersonal relationships or caused psychosocial suffering (Hsieh et al., 2019).

Furthermore, internet addiction is the inability of a person to manage their internet use, which results in functional impairment of daily activities and feelings of discomfort Busubul and Rahman (2021). This problematic internet use shows the addiction in which symptoms such as being busy with the internet, urgent use expectancy and significant deterioration in life (Zeliha, 2019). Misuse of the internet for things like academic dishonesty, gambling, and pornographic website access can also lead to addiction among undergraduates. Internet addiction is regarded as a technological addiction and this addiction have a significant impact on one's health especially in teenagers and young people (Rosliza et al., 2018).

Students in higher education settings, such as universities and colleges, have a higher risk of becoming addicted to the internet than adults do. The reason behind it because, the students are having more free time and easier access to the internet than adult. Since adult are busy with their work demands. They are occasionally even encouraged to utilize the internet because of their online coursework and tasks (Shen et al., 2020). According to Baturay and Toker (2019), young individuals who attend middle schools, high schools, and universities with readily available laptops, computers, and computer laboratories frequently experienced internet addiction. Due to changes in modern culture, where parents are busier and less time in controlling their kids, there are higher expectations for academic performance and employment and exposure to technological advancements that meet their needs this generation is more susceptible to the internet addiction (Kurniasanti et al., 2019). Young people, especially college students, are frequently

addicted to the internet because college students typically have unrestricted access to the internet, flexible schedules, and are not subject to parental supervision which make them utilise the internet for shopping, talking, pornographic video watching, social networking, gaming, and research (Hsieh et al., 2019). As a result, this condition has the potential to have an effect on the academic performance as well as the social engagement of college students. The fact that they are more addicted to the internet puts them in danger, particularly those who are enrolled in higher education (Busubul & Rahman, 2021). This addiction to the internet would have a number of negative impacts, including a waste of time and money, decreased social and educational performance, psychological impairment, and feelings of isolation (Shaikhmagadi et al., 2018). According to the findings of Turan et al. (2020), addiction to the internet is a key factor in feelings of isolation. In addition, addiction to the internet was linked to conditions such as feelings of isolation, social disengagement, emotional instability, melancholy, anxiety, low self-esteem, and engaging in other addictive behaviours (Alheneidi et al., 2021).

There are many evidences found that the increasing of loneliness since outbreak especially among young people (Dahlberg, 2021). People have been urged to work from home if at all feasible during this "lockdown" time and to stay inside their homes for necessities and students' study online while stay at home. Due to Covid-19, people have been advised to wear facemasks, stay away from crowds of people, and keep a physical distance of one meter or more from other people if going outside. For those who may have come into contact with the virus are now subject to even stricter social isolation rules and quarantine requirements, and they are recommended to entirely separate themselves for at least two weeks (Killgore et al., 2020a). They added that the protracted social isolation brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic might exacerbate loneliness, a major factor in mental health issues including despair and suicide.

According to Bu et al. (2020), loneliness is one of the primary public health issues that can lead to mental and physical sickness, cognitive decline, suicidal behaviour, and overall mortality. These issues can all be prevented by avoiding isolation. During pandemics, many individuals were experienced social isolation to prevent themselves from the disease. Loneliness can happen in anyone from the young age until older which social relationships is growing outside of the family unit such as accepted by friends, peers, which is an important element in the development of adolescent identity (Alias et al., 2021). According to earlier studies, almost one-third of American adults experienced substantial changes in their mental health as a result of the spread of COVID-19 and the public health response, both of which had a detrimental impact on people's emotional wellness (Rosenberg et al., 2020). There is a strong correlation between feelings of isolation and negative outcomes for both physical and mental health, such as depression.

Loneliness is an unpleasant emotion brought on by a difference between desired and actual degrees of social contact (Alsubheen et al., 2021). They added, there are two type of loneliness such as social loneliness, which defined by a lack of social connections or a feeling of community, and another type is emotional loneliness, which is characterized by the absence of a close, personal bond. The feeling of loneliness can range from a brief absence from close friends and family to a more protracted condition of isolation brought on by a persistent mental or physical ailment (Motta, 2021).

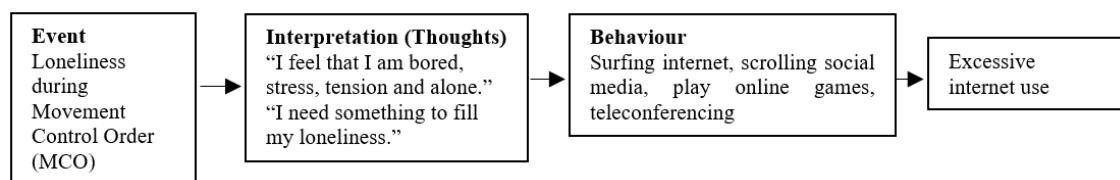
Research in this area has examined differences in personality, social skills, demographics, resources, physical mobility among others. The evidence supporting some of these factors is fairly compelling, but the data supporting the others is inconsistent. For the purpose of developing effective, well-targeted

interventions to prevent and lessen the negative impacts of loneliness, it is vital to get an understanding of the factors that can cause people to feel lonely as well as the factors that keep certain people locked in loneliness (Qualter et al., 2015). It is without a doubt essential to preserving public health that we prevent the spread of COVID-19 through responsible exclusion and efficient barrier protections. However, it is also essential for our humanity that we discover novel, unconventional, and effective ways to connect with one another until we can return to our previous modes of social interaction.

According to Killgore et al. (2020b) while most people can use technology that allows them to connect virtually, some groups may find it difficult to do so, especially the elderly and those with very limited financial resources. These groups may be less familiar with new technologies and may feel uncomfortable interacting in virtually. A serious mental health problem that has gotten worse during epidemic is loneliness. Therefore, this research is very suitable to be carry out considering this issue is still going on and needs an in-depth study to help the community regarding awareness in overcoming this internet addictions and loneliness among students.

### 1.1. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, also known simply as CBT, is a very efficient method of psychological treatment that is used by many therapists all over the world. The cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) theory proposes that our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and actions are all intertwined, and that our thoughts and actions have an effect on how we feel. CBT was developed by Albert Ellis, one of the most influential figures in the development of cognitive therapy. Blackwell and Heidenreich (2021). CBT has been shown to be a successful treatment in thousands of study trials for a wide variety of diseases, including anxiety, depression, pain, and sleeplessness and emphasized the significance of behaviours in addition to thoughts and feelings. It is beneficial for people of all ages, including younger children, teenagers, adults, and senior citizens. CBT is also adaptable, as it has been shown to be successful when delivered in a face-to-face setting, when delivered online, and when delivered in a self-help style. Internet addicts are assisted in being more aware of the thoughts and behaviours that contribute to their addiction through CBT.



**Figure 1.** Model shows the interpretation of loneliness towards internet addiction

As shown in Figure 1, the cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) model has an important insight, which is that individuals are not bothered by the events that happen to them. Instead, an individual's emotional state is determined by the way in which they make sense of the world around them, or the meaning that they ascribe to the experiences that they have. Due to Movement Control Disorder (MCO), there is an accumulation of research that suggests that individuals who are socially isolated suffer negative effects on their health and well-being (Wu, 2020). Furthermore, MCO also contributed to many individuals

became lonely and turned to the internet to make their occupied at home (Sunbiz, 2020). As a result, excessive internet usage become an addiction to individuals. Based on the model above, this research is encouraged to be done by exploring the relationship between loneliness and internet addiction.

## **1.2. Problem statement**

In early 2022 where the MCO has ended, internet usage statistics has risen to 89.6% of total population and social media users in Malaysia has increased by 2.3 million between 2021 and 2022. (Kemp, 2022). Using internet, people may quickly interact with others no matter their location which internet serves as a platform for communication and information sharing (Turan et al., 2020). Nowadays, the majority of people use virtual world connections for leisure, education, socialising, employment, and/or business objectives (Baturay & Toker, 2019). Proper internet use is advantageous but challenging and uncontrolled internet used typically related with several negative issues and may even result in internet addiction (Shen et al., 2020). This technology enables quick and simple access to get information, interpersonal contact, entertainment, and social ties that heavily used by adolescents and young adults (Marzilli et al., 2020). However, the implementation of this MCO causes individuals to be unable to socialize and isolate themselves at home. The effect is that they will feel loneliness, Cole et al. (2021) stated loneliness is an unpleasant experienced that is link to feelings of unhappiness, unloved, restlessness, and hopelessness. This feeling of loneliness causes students to spend a lot of time using the internet as a platform to interact or find information.

## **1.3. Purpose of the study**

This study aimed to analyse the relationship between internet addiction and loneliness among students. Furthermore, the purpose of this study is to examine differences between internet addictions based on gender.

# **2. Research Methods**

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between loneliness and internet addition among students in Kolej Profesional Mara in Malaysia. This study will use a quantitative analysis method where this is a method to collect and analyse numerical data. Quantitative analysis method is appropriate for a large scale of sample as this study will involve 6 colleges in Malaysia.

## **2.1. Sampling method**

The study will be conducted in six Kolej Profesional Mara in Malaysia; Kolej Profesional MARA Beranang, Kolej Profesional MARA Ayer Molek, Kolej Profesional MARA Indera Mahkota, Kolej Profesional MARA Seri Iskandar, Kolej Profesional MARA Bandar Penawar and Kolej Profesional MARA Bandar Melaka. The convenience sampling method will be used for this data collection. This form on non-probability sampling is not costly and less time consuming (Stratton, 2021). In determining sample size, the general rule of Hair et al (2018) will be used. The general rule is to have a minimum of 5 observations

per variable (5:1). For this research, there will be 40 items which it is suggested to have 200 respondents among the students in Kolej Profesional Mara in Malaysia.

## **2.2. Research instruments**

The questionnaire for this study will be divided into three sections. Section A will consist of questions related demographic profile of respondents; gender, programme of study, year of study, location, age and parents household income.

Next section will be Section B which this section will consists of 20 items of UCLA Loneliness Scale developed by Russell et al. (1978) which to measure how often a person feels disconnected from others. Respondents need to answer indication between these four scales, “I often feel this way”, “I sometimes feel this way”, “I rarely feel this way” and “I never feel this way”.

Furthermore, section C will ask questions related to Internet Addiction Test (IAT) which adopted from Young (2011). The IAT encompasses 20 items which is rated on a six-point Likert scale: ‘does not apply’ (0), ‘rarely’ (1), ‘occasionally’ (2), ‘frequently’ (3), ‘often’ (4), and ‘always’ (5). This test is to measure an individual’s involvement with internet and will be classified as mild, moderate and severe impairment.

## **3. Data Analysis**

After data collection, data will be analysed through IBM SPSS Version 24. The data will be transformed to descriptive analysis and Pearson Correlation analysis in identifying the relationship between loneliness and internet addiction.

## **4. Discussions and Conclusions**

Pandemic of Covid-19 has contributed towards the disruptions of social lives. Internet has become devote in our daily lives. Various studies on the internet addiction during pandemic. However, this study will examine the relationship between loneliness and internet addiction during post pandemic where most individuals has embraced the digital lifestyle. Sarialioğlu et al. (2022) elucidated that loneliness pushes towards excessive use of internet and vice versa. Furthermore, loneliness is one of the factor in the development of internet addiction. Loneliness has been a serious public health concern recently which effect of the pandemic where social restrictions has forced individuals to isolation and prone to have addiction on internet (Malcom, 2021).

According to Jiang (2020), in the post-pandemic era, internet has empowered many industries including education sector which vital for global economic recovery. Due to movement control order (MCO) conducted by the government of Malaysia during pandemic, excessive use of internet has contributed to student’s internet addiction (Besalti & Satici, 2022). Furthermore, pandemic has also contributed to high depression and high anxiety, which significantly contributed to relapse addictive behaviours (Chowdhury et al., 2022). A study similarly done by Alias et al. (2021) shows that loneliness has significant relationship on internet addiction especially during pandemic era.

This study will contribute to the management of college to eradicate the internet addictions among students. It is suggested for the college to look at the mental health of students that still experiencing loneliness after MCO was ended. It is also important for community to reach these individuals. It is found that, the number of persons admitted to the hospital in critical condition dropped dramatically when community groups and volunteers helped those who lived alone and were dealing with health issues (Noorazam, 2021). Parents also need to play an important role to curb the problem on internet addictions among their children in promoting the students' well-being. Moreover, government also need to identify this issue and this study will give insights in improving national social policy such as raising awareness of the health and medical impact of internet addiction and loneliness. Government can create program related to effect of internet addiction and loneliness including campaign in social media which can exposed to the public the negative impact of internet addiction and its relationship with loneliness.

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