Excessive internet use by young Europeans: psychological vulnerability and digital literacy?

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## Topics

* Internet usage, practices and engagement
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* Content-related issues
* Risks and harms
* Wellbeing
* Access, inequalities and vulnerabilities

## Sample

a random sample of 18,709 Internet-using children between 11 and 16 years old was carried out in 25 European countries

## Implications For Stakeholders About

Researchers

# Abstract

This paper combines clinical-psychological and digital literacyframeworks to shed new light on explanations for excessiveInternet use (EIU). The combination of these opposing approachesleads to a more comprehensive explanation of intense use withnegative outcomes. A survey with a random sample of 18,709Internet-using children between 11 and 16 years old was carriedout in 25 European countries. The study shows that there areinteractional and indirect relationships between psychological anddigital literacy variables and EIU. Psychologically vulnerablechildren with higher levels of digital engagement have the mostnegative outcomes while the least at risk are non-vulnerablechildren with high levels of literacy (interactional relationship). Inreality, psychologically vulnerable children’s risk of negativeoutcomes is exacerbated by their tendency to spend more timeonline but countered by their lower literacy levels (contradictingdirect and indirect relationships). Among those who are notvulnerable, digital literacy is weakly related to negative outcomes.The implications of these results for future research are thatexplanations for EIU should incorporate psychological and digitalliteracy indicators. Practical implications are that clinicalpsychologists working with EIU should consider digital literacy indeveloping interventions and that digital inclusion interventionsshould consider the potential negative impact of increasedInternet use on vulnerable young people. This paper’s originalcontribution lies in showing that whether intense Internet use isrelated to negative outcomes depends on the psychologicalcharacteristics of the child.

# Outcome

"This paper shows a combination of digital literacy and psychological vulnerability frame-works is necessary to explain negative outcomes of intense use (i.e., excessive Internet use–EIU). ... The three strongest predictors of EIU fall in different categories: amongst the socio-demographic variables this is age; amongst the psychological variables this is emotional problems; and amongst the digital literacy variables this is, unsurprisingly, the time spent online though, surprisingly, skills also had this effect for vulnerable young people. It is thus not enough to see these frameworks merely as different explanations of excessive Internet use, it is in their combination and interaction that their strength comes to the fore." (Helsper Smahel, 2020, p. 1267)