Wikipedia use: Risk for developing technology addiction

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The present case highlights the addictive potential of Wikipedia usage. The users approached a technology addiction clinic for the management of excessive use of technology. A clinical interview was used to elicit information about usages. It indicates the addictive use of Wikipedia and associated dysfunction in lifestyle. It has implication for promotion of healthy use of technology.

Keywords: Addiction, lifestyle dysfunctions, Wikipedia

T
he internet has become an important mean of information, interaction, and entertainment.[1] Widespread obsession with technology can be traced to radio in the 1930s and television in the 1960s, but it has become a concern among mental health professional during the digital age.[2] The Pew Internet and American Life Project found on a survey of 1492 users that 50% of online users with a college diploma used Wikipedia to find information.[3] It was found to be useful to users based on their needs, standards, and expectations,[4] as well as its utility is also being linked to four Cs. It is being associated with – currency, coverage, comprehensibility, and convenience. It is Wikipedia’s currency to cover a range of issues that are brief and easy to understand and access that makes Wikipedia useful and distinct from so many other sources (e.g., Encyclopedia Britannica, both the online and offline versions).[5] It is convenient to cover comprehensible material using Wikipedia. Its usages are more among the well-educated people. Adults and broadband users have been among those who are earlier adopters of Wikipedia. Forty-four percent of those ages 18–29 use Wikipedia to look for information, and 29% of users aged 50 years and older consult the site. Forty-two percent of home broadband users look for information on Wikipedia while just 26% of home dial-up users do so. Several Web traffic measuring firms say that Wikipedia is one of the most heavily visited sites on the internet. comScore Media Metrix, the Web traffic measuring firm, regularly says that monthly traffic to the cluster of Wikipedia sites positions them in the top 10 global sites.[6]

The four Cs of Wikipedia (currency, coverage, comprehensibility, and convenience) also leads to manifestation of excessive use of Wikipedia. It leads to psychosocial dysfunction in the users’ lifestyle.

CASE REPORT

A user presented with the complaint of internet use to Service of Healthy Use of Technology Clinic. It is the...
India’s first clinic to manage information technology use. The user presented with the problems of excessive use of Wikipedia for the last 5 years and inability to manage anger. The usages started as a way of exploring the available biographies of scientists/philosophers, spirituality, fiction, and scientific information about the universe. He used to assess it on his mobile phone. The average use was 8–10 h a day. Due to this, he developed the complaints of neck pain, body strain, eye strain, delay in initiation of sleep (about 2 h from the scheduled time due to urge to see Wikipedia), and holding bladder for three to 4 h while doing surfing. He continued his access to Wikipedia despite having problems. Personal history also revealed the presence of interpersonal maladjustment, decreased communication with parents/not participating in family activities/decreased outdoor activities, and disturbance in self-care as well as disturbance in academic. He attributed the usages to getting the feeling of well-being/relaxation/method to structure his free time. Since he was not regular in academic, he used to spend his time in exploring various issues related to his personal problems as well as seeking solutions for the same. He was an introvert. A clinical interview also revealed the presence of craving, control, compulsion, and consequences related to online accessing of Wikipedia. He used to get irritated whenever advised to stop internet use/Wikipedia search. He had been taking muscle relaxant for neck pain due to time spent on surfing.

The user was assessed using Internet Addiction Test[5] and General Health (GH) Questionnaire.[6] He got a score of 72 indicating problematic use of internet and got above cutoff score on GH indicating psychiatric distress. He was given technology literacy in terms of score on Internet Addiction Test, psychosocial dysfunctions, and benefits of working on dysfunctions. He acknowledged the need for working on these dysfunctions. Motivation enhancement therapy along with behavioral contracting was used to promote healthy use of Wikipedia as well as daily structuring to reduce dysfunctions. Behavioral therapy sessions were held to address the anger issue. Family sessions were conducted to address their concern regarding the users’ internet use and associated dysfunctions. Follow-up sessions indicate changes in lifestyle (self-care, communication with parents and looking for academic opportunities, sleep, and eating habits) as well as decreased use of Wikipedia. It was corroborated by the parents.

CONCLUSIONS

The case report documents the presence of excessive use of Wikipedia with problematic use of the internet. The problematic internet use led to psychosocial dysfunctions. Studies have shown that Internet addiction can lead to irregular dietary habits, decrease physical activities, and sleep disturbance.[7] Internet addiction has been seen among users with psychiatric disorders, subjective distress,[8] and Axis I psychiatric disorders.[9] A recent study surveyed a small sample of communication majors (n = 134) and found more than one-third (39%) of the sample reported being frequent Wikipedia users (i.e., had used Wikipedia more than 15 times in the prior semester).[10] Students used Wikipedia for obtaining background information and checking facts even though their perceptions about information quality were not high.[11]

Internet addiction as a clinical entity is not yet addressed properly in clinical population as well as for intervention. There are no evidence-based treatments for internet addiction.[12] It has implications for educating the user of health hazards of long hours of technology use in any form. They can be educated on the use of harm-reduction techniques (relaxing, stretching exercise, frequent break, etc.) to minimize the hazards of excessive use of internet even it is for educational purpose.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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