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Digital Diseases and Digital Detox*

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Abstract: Depending on the developments in computer and internet technology, the concept of communication has become important for individuals and societies. People living in different geographical locations around the world have the opportunity to communicate with each other through computer networks. It has become possible to access information more easily and faster. In parallel with the developments in technology, new types of diseases have emerged and these diseases are defined as digital diseases. The inability to control the time spent in digital environments and the negative situations caused by excessive and unconscious use of technology cause some psychological problems. Digital addiction, nomophobia, netlessphobia, fomo, plagomania, digital obesity, online narcissism, selfitis, photolurking and cyberchondria are referred to as digital diseases. At this point, digital detox can be considered as a solution to avoid the negative effects of the internet. Digital detox is defined as a process in which an individual voluntarily chooses to stay away from digital devices. This process includes reducing social media use, going offline for certain hours or staying away from digital devices completely. Within the scope of this study, information on digital diseases and digital detox that occur due to uncontrolled technology use is included. Trainings on conscious internet and technology use can help individuals gain awareness against digital diseases and develop the right habits in digital environments.

Keywords: Digital Diseases, Digital Detox, Technology Addiction, Conscious Internet Use.

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Introduction

The rapid advancement of technology in the last century has transformed every aspect of life and radically altered individuals' lifestyles. These transformations have gained momentum especially with the widespread use of the internet and mobile technologies, bringing innovations in many areas from social interaction to entertainment, from working life to education. As access to the internet and digital devices has become easier and digitalization has accelerated, individuals have started to use these devices more intensively. However, while these innovations have facilitated human life, they have also paved the way for a series of new problems arising from excessive and uncontrolled use of digital devices and the internet. These new problems, which negatively affect human health, are called digital diseases. These diseases, whose symptoms usually emerge when deprived of the use of digital tools, affect individuals physically and mentally and cause them to experience behavioral disorders.

Digital illnesses include a range of psychological and behavioral disorders that develop due to the overuse of technology and negatively affect individuals' daily life activities. The prevalence of these disorders is increasing due to the impact of digital devices and applications that have become an integral part of modern lifestyles. Thanks to the possibilities offered by technology, individuals can make social connections, have fun and access various information quickly in the online world. However, these opportunities may lead to the development of an uncontrolled attachment in individuals and increase anxiety and restlessness in offline times. In particular, problems in accessing new media tools can lead to many psychological problems.

A culture of conscious technology use should be created to minimize the negative effects of technology while maintaining its positive effects on individuals. The implementation of digital literacy programs in educational institutions can help individuals cope with such problems. In addition, awareness-raising campaigns against the prevalence of digital diseases can contribute to a balanced relationship between individuals and technology.

In this study, digital diseases that arise due to uncontrolled technology use and digital detox practices that have significant potential to prevent these diseases are included. Due to the limited number of studies on digital illnesses in Turkey, it is thought that this study will make important contributions to the literature. Digital diseases such as digital addiction, nomophobia, netlessphobia, fomo, plagomania, digital obesity, online narcissism, selfitis, photolurking and cyberchondria are included in this study.

Digital Diseases

Digital Addiction

Digital addiction is a concept that describes the situation where individuals become overly dependent on digital devices, internet, social media, video games and other digital platforms. This type of addiction, just like substance addiction, is considered a form of behavior that negatively affects the daily life of the individual (Coşkuntürk, Kurcan, Yel & Güzel, 2023). Digital addiction occurs when individuals use digital devices and the internet in an uncontrolled and continuous manner. This addiction negatively affects individuals' time management, causes disconnections in their social relationships and disrupts the tasks they need to do in their real lives.

The main symptoms of digital addiction include the individual's constant desire to access digital devices, feeling discomfort and restlessness when not using the devices, unknowingly increasing the time spent on digital platforms, and neglecting daily responsibilities (Yengin &

Bayındır, 2019, 103). Digital addiction can cause individuals to disconnect from their social relationships, academic or work life and personal responsibilities (Topçu, 2019, 176). For example, spending most of the day playing online games while disrupting work or classes is a common example of digital addiction. Especially in young age groups, digital addiction negatively affects the development of social skills and leads to a weakening in face-to-face communication skills.

Individuals with digital addiction spend a large part of the day with digital devices and become restless when the time they spend in the digital environment decreases. These individuals may not realize that excessive use of digital devices is damaging their health and relationships. As a result, the digital environment is replacing social bonds in the real world.

Nomophobia

Nomophobia, which is the fear of being away from a smartphone, refers to the fear and anxiety experienced by individuals when they are away from their cell phones (Yıldırım & Correia, 2015). Individuals who experience nomophobia tend to keep their cell phones with them at all times, put their phones within their immediate reach even while sleeping, feel nervous when their cell phones are low, constantly check their phones, and spend too much time with their phones. The need for phones to be constantly accessible leads to social isolation and dependency in individuals. For example, an individual who panics when his/her phone battery runs out is a typical example of nomophobia.

Nomophobia refers to the excessive and problematic use of smartphones by individuals (Gezgin, 2017). Nomophobia reflects individuals' excessive dependence on their phones and the need to be constantly online. This may be due to the desire to constantly connect in digital environments such as social media, communication, and entertainment. Nomophobia is an anxiety disorder associated with digital addiction and can negatively affect individuals' mental and social health over time.

Netlessphobia

Netlessphobia, which is the fear of being without the internet, is defined as individuals showing withdrawal symptoms caused by digital addiction when they are without the internet. Netlessphobia refers to the discomfort and fear of being without the internet beyond the duration of internet use (Öztürk, 2015). When individuals cannot access the internet, they may have a tense and aggressive mood and may have a feeling of feeling incomplete.

Individuals with netlessphobia may show symptoms such as preferring places with internet, feeling that life stops when there is no internet, and not being able to stay away from the internet even for a short time (Öztürk, 2015). While digital environments offer individuals a space of freedom on the one hand, on the other hand, they can be addictive and put individuals under captivity (Fiske, 2003, 50-70). While individuals spend more and more time in virtual environments every day, they continue to move away from real life rapidly (Şayir, 2023).

The increasing importance of the Internet in information access and communication causes individuals to feel the need to stay online constantly. Netlessphobia is an increasing problem in our age of rapid digitalization. The intense anxiety felt by individuals in situations such as internet interruption can negatively affect both their daily lives and their psychological health. Therefore, strategies to reduce digital addiction and awareness activities are critical in dealing with netlessphobia.

Fomo

Fomo disease is a combination of the first letters of the words in the English “Fear of Missing Out” phrase group (Tekayak & Akpınar, 2017). Fomo, the fear of missing out, is the desire to be aware of all developments on social media at all times. Individuals with fomo frequently follow the agenda on social networks, share posts and spend most of their time in digital environments. According to O'Connell (2020), individuals with fomo feel obliged to follow all the content shared on social media.

Individuals who spend too much time in virtual environments live without giving due importance to their real lives (Şayir, 2023). Fomo is a very common disorder in the digital age and is associated with people's desire to maintain social ties, maintain their status, and be equivalent to others. This disorder is especially common among young people and social media users.

In the fight against fomo, individuals should limit their use of social media and participate more in offline activities. Awareness-raising activities should be carried out to regulate the structure of social media algorithms that encourage addiction and to make individuals less dependent on online content.

Plagomania

Plagomania, which is the fear of being without charge, is defined as being worried about being deprived of technological devices. Individuals with this psychology pay attention to be close to the electrical socket when they enter an environment and always carry a spare charger with them due to the fear of being without charge (Ünüvar, 2020). The basis of plagomania is the anxiety of being without communication and the anxiety of staying away from the virtual environment (Doğan & Övür, 2023).

Plagomania describes the fear or anxiety that people feel when their electronic devices, especially cell phones or other digital devices, run out of charge. Not being able to go online can cause fears such as loss of connection, deprivation of social media interactions, or loss of access to work and school-related information. For these individuals, a dead device can lead to fear of being excluded from social interactions, access to information and the digital world. This can cause individuals to constantly carry their chargers with them and look for charging points in every environment. For example, when an individual goes to a restaurant, the first thing they check is whether there is an outlet and panic when their phone's charge percentage is low is a common indicator of plagomania.

In the fight against plagomania, individuals need to question their dependence on digital devices and develop habits of spending time away from digital devices. Encouraging offline activities and learning to use technology as a tool may contribute to the reduction of such addictions.

Digital Obesity

Digital obesity is defined as excessive exposure to information in the digital environment to the extent that it may impair an individual's health. In other words, digital obesity is a condition that occurs as a result of individuals' excessive and unconscious use of digital devices and the internet, leading to mental, physical and social problems. This concept refers to the overloading of the digital world with too much information, content and interaction. As a result of excessive

consumption of digital media, the individual becomes addicted and has a desire to consume more. As a result, the individual gradually becomes digitally obese. Individuals are exposed to excess data in direct proportion to the time they spend in the digital environment. The risk of digital obesity increases as individuals, who have become inseparable from technology due to excessive use of technology, continue to consume the digital content offered (Bayrak & Cihan, 2021).

Individuals who consume excessive data and remain inactive in front of digital devices for hours feel physically and mentally tired. Digital obesity can physically cause musculoskeletal pain, eye diseases and sleep disorders (Şayir, 2023). For example, the lack of physical activity and chronic fatigue of an individual who constantly consumes content on social media is an indicator of digital obesity.

In the fight against digital obesity, individuals need to limit their digital content consumption habits and turn to conscious content consumption. Tools that control information consumption and programs that encourage individuals to participate in offline activities can contribute to solving this problem.

Online Narcissism

Narcissism is defined as self-admiration; online narcissism is defined as the desire to constantly exist and glorify oneself in the digital environment. Narcissism is also called inflated self. Individuals with online narcissism have a desire to glorify themselves in the digital environment. They constantly try to be liked by others and to appear superior to everyone on social networks. For example, an example of online narcissism is when an individual constantly posts perfect-looking photos and attaches excessive importance to the number of likes they receive on each post. These individuals try to show themselves as competent even if they do not have enough knowledge on a subject and always act according to their own interests (Topçu, 2019).

Online narcissism is a behavior and attitude disorder shaped around the desire of individuals to constantly highlight themselves on digital platforms, to be liked and approved by others. This situation increases even more with the interaction and visibility opportunities provided by social media. Online narcissism can be considered as the reflection of the classical concept of narcissism in the digital world. Balanced use of social media and strengthening ties with real life values are important steps in combating online narcissism. Social media interactions such as likes, comments and shares directly affect the self-worth perception of the individual and can lead to disappointment when they do not receive enough likes.

Online narcissists may constantly compare themselves with other users in terms of number of followers, likes or popularity. In combating online narcissism, it is important for individuals to avoid over-focusing on their image in the digital world and prioritize their real-life relationships. Social media platforms should reorganize their algorithms that encourage such behaviors and individuals should be encouraged to present a more realistic image in the digital world.

Selfitis

It is a disorder defined as taking photos of oneself frequently and sharing these photos on social media platforms. Researchers state that individuals with selfitis like to attract attention, often lack self-confidence and have characteristics that aim to strengthen their position in society. This situation arises from the person's effort to communicate better with other individuals in society.

Selfitis is considered a disease because it causes addiction in individuals, damages relationships between people, and causes people to attach more importance to their appearance than necessary (Tekayak & Akpınar, 2017). People often take photos to show themselves to others and attract attention through social media. Likes and comments on social media posts provide emotional satisfaction and cause the person to spend more time on social media. For example, a typical example of selfitis is when an individual constantly takes selfies throughout the day and posts them on different social media platforms, expecting high ratings for each photo.

Selfitis can sometimes be considered a psychological disorder, but it is also a reflection of the way people express themselves on social media in the digital age. To combat selfitis, individuals should control their use of social media and prioritize face-to-face social interactions.

Photolurking

Photolurking, a digital disease, is defined looking at other people's photos through social media platforms for long periods of time and repeating this behavior frequently. Photolurking is referred to as the act of monitoring other people's profiles and posts on social media. Photolurking is quite a common occurrence among social media users. Various psychological reasons such as internet addiction underlie this situation (Tekayak & Akpınar, 2017).

Photolurking behavior is common among people who do not want to attract attention and are passive users on social media. In addition, monitoring other people's posts in this way can sometimes be considered disturbing in terms of social media ethics, because constantly observing people's private lives can be perceived as behavior without their consent. For example, a typical example of photolurking behavior is when an individual constantly follows the luxurious lifestyles of popular people on social media platforms and compares himself to them.

Cyberchondria

Cyberchondria is defined as a behavior that occurs as a result of anxiety and negative emotions accompanying this process while conducting research on illness in the digital environment (Sen, 2023). In other words, cyberchondria, which means the search for online information about diseases, is characterized by the fact that research conducted for the purpose of providing trust increases anxiety, uncertainty and worry (Fineberg et al., 2022).

It is defined as the individual diagnosing himself/herself and trying to treat himself/herself by taking into account the information in the digital environment about the diseases that the individual thinks exist (Tarhan et al., 2021). For example, a common example of cyberchondria is when an individual with a headache searches for signs of cancer on the internet and panics, believing that they have a serious illness.

Individuals who think that they are ill search the symptoms of the disease on the internet, thinking that they will find a solution to their illness on the internet, diagnose themselves and try to find treatment methods. These individuals try to treat the sick people around them with the same method with the idea that what they are doing is right. However, they cause worse consequences due to incorrect treatment methods (Tekayak & Akpınar, 2017). Health information on the internet may not always be accurate, and as a result, individuals may be tempted to seek medical attention unnecessarily.

In order to combat cyberchondria, training programmes to increase health literacy should be organized. In addition, regulations should be made to increase the accuracy of resources providing medical information on digital platforms.

Digital Detox

While detox is generally defined as the process of abstaining from unhealthy substances and purification (Basu, 2019), digital detox refers to a situation that occurs as a reaction to information overload through digital devices (Pathak, 2016). Digital detox is a process to stay away from digital devices for limited time (Pınarbaşı & Astam, 2020). Reducing social media usage time, going offline at certain hours or switching off digital devices for a while are important steps in digital detox. Digital detox includes methods such as reducing screen time and technology use to encourage offline activities (Newport, 2022).

In recent years, digital detox practices have become widespread as people have started to feel uncomfortable with the time they spend uncontrollably on digital media (Albayrak, 2020). Digital detox has the potential to reduce the stress and anxiety experienced by individuals due to technology addiction. It can be considered as an effective tool to prevent health problems caused by staying in front of the screen for a long time. It allows individuals to engage in social and cultural activities during the time away from digital devices.

Digital detox also allows individuals to strengthen social ties by improving their face-to-face communication skills (Biricik, 2022). Dinç (2015) emphasizes that in order to prevent technology addiction, the factors that cause technology addiction should be eliminated first. These factors are the lack of sufficient environments where individuals can show themselves, participate in social and cultural activities and socialize in society. Increasing these opportunities is one of the steps to be taken to prevent technological diseases (Dinç, 2015).

An example of a digital detox is a pepper grinder produced by a pasta sauce brand. This grinder was produced to create a space away from digital connection at the dining table by disabling the internet connection. The product aims to increase social interaction among family members by disconnecting the internet connection during the meal (Pınarbaşı & Astam, 2020). Another application example is the reminder setting for social media applications to manage time. When the time set by the user in the application expires, the program notifies the person of the time spent on social media by giving a warning. In this way, it is important for the person to determine his/her social media usage habits in detail and to make self-control (Pınarbaşı & Astam, 2020).

Digital detox practices offer important strategies that enable individuals to temporarily move away from the digital world and limit their use of technology. Excessive use of digital devices negatively affects both physical and mental health of individuals and increases the risk of digital addiction. In this context, digital detox programs stand out as structures that aim to help individuals experience mental and emotional renewal by taking a break from technology for a while. According to Syvertsen and Enli (2019), digital detox allows individuals to temporarily disconnect from the digital world and refocus on real-world interactions and activities.

Digital detox is a process in which individuals step away from digital devices and social media platforms for a certain period of time to improve their mental and physical health. This process allows individuals to restructure their relationship with technology. For example, switching off one's phone and spending time in nature over the weekend is a practical application of digital detox.

Digital detox helps individuals to combat digital addiction and develop a balanced lifestyle. Educational institutions should implement programs that promote digital detox and technology companies should offer tools that take users away from the digital world. Promoting offline activities and balancing one's relationship with technology can increase the long-term benefits of digital detox. As a result, digital detox practices do not aim to completely disconnect

individuals from technology; on the contrary, they aim to establish a healthy balance. These practices help individuals to become more controlled and conscious users in the digital world and protect them from the negative effects of technology.

Conclusion

It is a known fact that digital devices provide great convenience to people's lives. Digital tools offer great advantages to users in many areas such as communication, communication, education and entertainment. However, intense exposure to digital technologies occupies minds and distracts people from the real world. Since these devices contain addictive elements, they trigger the desire for continuous use and individuals spend most of their time with these devices. The unconscious and uncontrolled use of these devices brings along many psychological problems known as digital illnesses. Nowadays, it is not possible to completely get away from digital devices, but digital detox is considered as a viable method to prevent digital illnesses. Digital detox can be defined as a break or pause in the use of digital devices.

Digital detox offers effective strategies to help individuals re-evaluate their relationship with technology and protect themselves from the negative effects of digital addiction. In today's world, where technology is integrated into every aspect of life, digital detox practices help individuals approach the digital world from a healthy distance and contribute to protecting both their physical and mental health. In this regard, it is of great importance to reorganize the time spent using digital devices.

In addition, digital device developers and platform managers should provide features that support users to use digital devices in a balanced and informed way. For example, software such as screen time monitoring and limiting can encourage users to have a healthy relationship with technology. In other words, helping individuals to become more controlled and conscious users in the digital world is important to protect them from the negative effects of technology. Developing balanced usage habits instead of completely disconnecting from the digital world is vital for individuals to lead a healthy life.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the positive effects of conscious and balanced use of digital technologies on the physical, psychological and social health of individuals and reveals that digital detox is an effective method for the prevention of digital diseases. While benefiting from the features of digital devices that make life easier, it is necessary to develop a balanced usage habit to protect against the negative effects of digital diseases. This study is a resource that can contribute to raising awareness of individuals in the fight against digital diseases and raising awareness throughout the society.

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