

# The negative effects of Internet use

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Among the most popular questions addressed in online communication research is the extent to which Internet use leads to undesirable psychosocial outcomes such as depression and loneliness. Evidence suggests that certain motivations to communicate online can have negative consequences, as the Internet itself can, for some, serve as an object of compulsive use. Individuals' compulsive Internet use (CIU) refers to their inability to control, reduce, or stop their online behavior, while excessive Internet use (EIU) is the degree to which an individual feels that he or she spends an excessive amount of time online or even loses track of time when using the Internet. For those who are unable to limit their use, time spent online may produce negative outcomes such as depression, loneliness, and limited face-to-face contacts.

Joseph Mazer, assistant professor at Clemson University and Andrew M. Ledbetter, assistant professor at Texas Christian University published an article today in *Southern [Communication](#) Journal* that explores how specific online communication attitudes—such as individuals' tendency for online self-disclosure, online social connection, and online anxiety—predicted their compulsive and excessive Internet use and, in turn, poor well-being.

Mazer and Ledbetter found that an individual's tendency for online self disclosure and online social connection led them to use the Internet in more compulsive ways. If a person has poor face-to-face communication skills that individual will likely be more attracted to the social features of online communication, which can foster CIU. Prior research suggests that socially anxious individuals perceive online communication

environments as less threatening and, as a result, are more likely to seek out communication in those settings. The findings from Mazer and Ledbetter's study are not entirely consistent with this claim, which may suggest that researchers adjust their theoretical image of the compulsive user: Whereas previous research frames online communication as a safe activity for the socially anxious to escape their communication anxiety, Mazer and Ledbetter found that compulsive users also experience anxiety when communicating online.

To the extent that socially anxious individuals are drawn to the Internet, such anxiety seems to stimulate compulsive, but not necessarily excessive, use. Rather, excessive users seem to have a more realistic perception of online communication as convenient but sometimes limited in communicative effectiveness by a lack of social cues often available in face-to-face interactions. In other words, according to Mazer and Ledbetter's study, individuals' anxiety motivates CIU, while efficiency seems to motivate EIU.

Mazer and Ledbetter found that CIU, not EIU, led individuals' to experience poor well-being outcomes. Given their widespread proliferation and adoption, especially among younger users, social networking sites now represent an important medium for maintaining social connections. Their existence raises important questions regarding individual traits that might influence online communication frequency and how excessive participation in these sites might foster compulsive and excessive [Internet use](#).

**More information:** [www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1041794X.2012.686558](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1041794X.2012.686558)

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