

Theoretical Discussion on Yogic Techniques for Internet Addiction Management

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Background

Following the IT revolution in India, the use of the internet in administrative and academic affairs substituted traditional pen and paper on a massive scale. While the internet facilitated ease of work, it simultaneously created a virtual world that, for many users, began to overshadow reality. The severe problems arising from this shift became evident when internet addiction started to negatively impact the socio-physical well-being of users. To combat this addiction, yoga practices have proven to be highly effective, offering a holistic intervention without the side effects commonly associated with allopathic or alternative medicines.

The internet is arguably the greatest invention of human civilization, enabling instant communication across the globe and granting immediate access to information and e-commerce. However, a critical distinction must be made between utility and dependency. When a person uses the internet to fulfill daily needs, it is simply utility; when a person continuously uses it as a primary source of pleasure, it becomes an addiction. As regular pleasure-seeking transforms into a severe addiction, the individual becomes completely distanced from the real world. Children abandon playgrounds, and family members sit in the same room not to connect with one another, but to stare at their smartphones. In this era, people are forsaking real-life relationships for a virtual existence. When the use of platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, Adult (18+) websites, and Pinterest increases beyond a user's control, it is classified as internet addiction.

Need for Study

Regardless of the substance or behavior, all addictions affect the human nervous system. Internet addiction draws the individual into an entirely virtual existence, providing fleeting dopamine-driven pleasure. As this dependency deepens, the user often becomes mentally stressed and frustrated. The behavioral changes observed globally, particularly in countries like China and South Korea, have resulted in severe consequences, including suicide attempts linked to extreme internet use and dangerous virtual trends like the Blue Whale game.

While numerous medical methods exist to treat internet addiction, an effective, accessible, free of cost and natural alternative is the integration of yogic activities. If compound yogic practices are utilized methodically, internet addiction can be significantly reduced, if not eradicated. Yoga produces positive, healing effects across the physical, mental, and emotional levels. Because the root of addiction is the pursuit of fleeting pleasure, yoga offers a sustainable substitute by cultivating profound, sustained inner well-being. Walters (1996) defines addiction as a behavior that a person engages in repeatedly, failing to stop despite significant psychological and social consequences. By utilizing yoga, this repeated behavioral process can be intercepted and rewired.

Addiction Tendencies and the Human Body

Many areas of the brain are involved in addiction, primarily within the limbic system. Interestingly, addiction involves more than just dopamine; various systems, including the endocrine system and multiple neurotransmitters, are linked to addictive behaviors. Major brain areas implicated include the ventral tegmental area, substantia nigra, amygdala, anterior cingulate, and prefrontal cortex (Greenfield, 2021). Neurotransmitters are chemicals that allow neurons to communicate. While there are many in the central and peripheral nervous systems, the three most frequently observed in psychiatry and addiction medicine are dopamine, serotonin, and norepinephrine. Dopamine is the primary neurotransmitter driving the pleasure and reward mechanisms seen in addiction. Frequent dopamine release leads to neuroadaptation, requiring increased levels of the chemical to achieve the same pleasurable effect. Furthermore, when individuals constantly use mobile screens, the emitted blue light disrupts natural sleep cycles, while the internet content simultaneously triggers dopamine reception at the post-synaptic receptors in the nucleus accumbens. Over time, the brain manages this chronic overstimulation by down-regulating these receptors (Greenfield, 2021).

Biological Bases of Addiction

The limbic system, also known as the paleomammalian cortex, serves as the biological foundation for addiction. It initiates a cycle where the brain drives the behavior, and the behavior subsequently restructures the brain. Evolutionarily, the limbic part of the brain developed long before the neocortex to support essential survival and emotional functions. The tasks that give us pleasure are recorded here to ensure continuity. Consequently, this region is the brain's primary source of

experiencing pleasure and forms the biological root of human addiction. A person begins consuming more digital stimuli to recreate this pleasure within these brain structures, ultimately leading to addiction (Ginige, 2017).

Research into this specific phenomenon was initiated in 1996 by the American Psychological Association. In an early study observing 600 excessive internet users, the behavioral patterns were likened to pathological gambling, a disorder included in the DSM-IV. Generally, an internet addict uses the internet for 40 to 80 hours a week, often for 5 to 6 continuous hours or late into the night. This severely disrupts their sleep architecture. Chronic sleep deprivation leads to mental strain, decreased working capacity, and impaired memory and concentration. The body experiences persistent fatigue, and physical problems like headaches, acidity, and loss of appetite frequently manifest. The root of these compounding physical and mental stressors is the initial internet addiction (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2020).

Role of Yoga in Internet Addiction Management

Regarding the application of yoga in managing this condition, Hemant Bhargava, Professor in the Department of Integrative Medicine at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), notes that internet addiction is a behavioral disorder related to non-substance consumption. It can be managed effectively through non-pharmacological methods. To apply these methods, one must understand the addict's mental state. In severe internet addiction, the user's thought process becomes highly uncontrolled; they lose alertness and become physically restless. At this stage, mental relaxation exercises like *Shashankasana* and *Yoga Nidra* prove highly effective in increasing self-regulation and reducing stress.

However, due to their intense internet use, addicts condition their brains for rapid stimulation. This keeps their nervous system in a constant state of hyper-arousal, making them initially unable to sustain the physical stillness required to practice traditional slow yoga. Therefore, in the initial stages, classical but dynamic *yogic* exercises like *Surya Namaskar*, *Kapalbhati*, and *Bhastrika Pranayama* prove highly helpful. After intense physical exertion, the motivation for mental rest naturally arises.

Pranayama is particularly effective in halting the intensified thought processes fueled by addiction. The classical basis of this concept is found in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (2:2):

चले वाते चलं चित्तं निश्चले निश्चलं भवेत् ।

योगी स्थाणुत्वमाप्नोति ततो वायुं निरोधयेत् ॥

As the breath (*Prana*) moves, the mind/*karmashaya* Store (*Chitta*) remains restless; when the breath is stilled, the mind becomes motionless. Thus, to attain steadiness, the practitioner must restrain the breath.

It is understood that when the breath is stabilized, the thought process is consequently blocked. Maharishi Patanjali described the combined form of mental excitements and physical problems as *Yoga Antaraya* (obstacles), all of which manifest in internet addiction:

Avirati (Lack of detachment): Internet addicts develop an extreme attachment to the screens and people of the virtual world, remaining addicted 24/7.

Bhrantidarshan (Delusion): Considering the excessive, damaging use of the internet as mere "entertainment."

Alabdhabhumikatva (Inability to achieve a state): When an addict fails in real life, they attempt to achieve success virtually. Because this is not realistic, it leads to psychological pain.

Anavasthitatva (One attained, Inability to sustain the state): The addict cannot sustain or replicate the fleeting pleasure obtained from virtual activities.

To remove these obstacles, yogic techniques guided by Maharishi Patanjali serve as the foundation for this intervention.

Two primary kriyas were utilized in this research:

1. *Pracchardana vidharanabhyam va pranasya* (Yoga Sutras, 1/34)

Swami Shivom Tirth explains this as repeatedly expelling the breath (*prachchardana*) or holding it (*vidharana*). Fixing the action of breathing inhibits mental instincts. When the instinct is inhibited, the chaotic thought process is blocked, granting the seeker peace of mind. This practice activates the same hormonal secretions triggered by internet use. When the individual achieves this mental state naturally, their digital dependence subsides.

2. *Vishoka va jyotishmati* (Yoga Sutras, 1/36)

Scholars explain that if a seeker experiences a sorrowless, luminous instinct during practice, it stabilizes the mind. This sutra explains the process of blocking the mind's unstable nature through *Antah Tratak* or *Bahya Tratak*.

While *Pranayama* focuses on the breath, *Tratak* is a visual purification process. Swami Shivom Tirth logically explains that instinct cannot arise without vital power (*Prana*). Because the mind and breath have a special relationship, "When one stops, the other automatically starts stopping."

This mutual dependence between body and mind is also echoed in Ayurveda, expressed in the *Charaka Samhita* (4/3) as: "The body is prescribed by *Sattva* and *Sattva* is the body." Similarly, yoga expert Ranjit Singh Bhogal, (2019) notes that the thoughts of the mind influence all bodily functions. Compound Management of Internet Addiction Yoga Shakti works on multiple levels; it does not merely detoxify the body, but eradicates the root of the problem. It establishes coordination in the individual's behavior and attitude while balancing the three *doshas*.

Under this research, the effects of three specific detoxification processes—*Jalneti*, *Tratak*, and *Kapalbhati*—were studied. Swami Swatmaram defines *Tratak* in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (2/32) as:

मोचनं नेत्ररोगाणां तन्द्रादीनां कपाटकम् ।

यत्नतस्त्राटकं गोप्यं यथा हाटकपेटकम् ॥

Fixing an unwavering gaze upon a subtle flame with profound concentration, until tears begin to flow, is defined as *Trataka* by the ancient teachers.

Scholars agree that fixing the gaze on a specific object calms the mind. *Tratak* relaxes the brain fibers, expels excessive thoughts, and cures insomnia. By achieving a state of deep relaxation, the mind loses its vulnerability to addiction. Gradually, the practitioner undergoes a transformation and becomes free from dependency (Ranjit Singh Bhogal, 2019).

Objectives of the Study

To transition the individual from external digital stimulation to internal self-observation through compound yogic practices.

Significance of Study

Internet addiction is an insidious problem that begins unnoticeably but escalates until the individual cannot function without a virtual connection. The physical and psychological degradation caused by excessive screen time cannot always be cured by conventional medicine. While often viewed as a crisis of developed nations, internet addiction is rising rapidly in India. Although alternative psychological therapies exist, the utilization of active yogic methods to treat digital dependency remains limited. Because the foundational principles of cognitive regulation and Yoga are remarkably similar, this research aims to systematically apply yogic principles to provide society with a rigorous, viable cure for internet addiction.

Conclusion

This study underscores that internet addiction is a modern behavioral disorder rooted in the neurological pursuit of dopamine-driven pleasure, leading to significant socio-physical and psychological degradation. By integrating classical yogic techniques—specifically dynamic practices like Surya Namaskar to address hyper-arousal, and restorative methods like Pranayama, *Tratak*, and Yoga Nidra to stabilize the mind—individuals can effectively rewire their reward systems. The intervention demonstrates that yoga serves as a holistic, cost-effective, and sustainable alternative to conventional treatments. By neutralizing the Yoga Antaraya (obstacles) and balancing the body's internal systems, these practices transition the user from virtual dependency to a state of profound inner well-being. Ultimately, the systematic application of yoga offers a viable framework for reclaiming real-world connectivity and mental health in an increasingly digital era.

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