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# Rise of netholicism: A comprehensive review of internet addiction among today's youth

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## Abstract:

The rise of internet addiction among today's youth, termed "netholicism," has become a pressing concern in the digital era. The pervasive nature of internet usage among youth, driven by factors such as individual vulnerabilities, societal norms, and addictive online activities, contributes to the development of problematic internet use. Excessive internet use has profound psychological effects, including depression, anxiety, and social isolation, while also leading to physical consequences such as sedentary lifestyles and sleep disturbances. This comprehensive review explores the multifaceted aspects of internet addiction, from its psychological and physical impacts to its social and spiritual ramifications. This article uses a literature review methodology to analyze research on the pervasive nature of internet usage, termed "netholicism," among youth. It synthesizes and evaluates prior findings to understand the factors contributing to netholicism and young individuals' involvement in internet usage following the ramifications of netholicism are reflective psychological, physical, sociological, and spiritual effects in every domain on youth. The study analyzed 50 articles from reputable online databases, focusing on internet usage. Out of the 50 articles, 16 were cited, meeting inclusion criteria, including publication within 2019–2024, rigorous peerreview, and reputable database indexing. As per the findings of the research, it has been observed that netholicism (or internet addiction) represents a complex and multifaceted phenomenon with the underlying factors contributing to internet addiction and its psychological, physical, social, and spiritual impacts. Socially, internet addiction hinders real-life connections and emotional intelligence, while ethically and spiritually, it raises concerns about identity and moral relativism in the digital realm. Interventions and treatment approaches encompass psychoeducation, therapy, and digital literacy promotion. Looking ahead, the proliferation of internet addiction poses challenges exacerbated by technological advancements, requiring collaborative efforts to mitigate its adverse effects and promote a healthier relationship with technology among future generations.

## Keywords:

Compulsive internet, internet addiction, netholicism, pathological internet

## Introduction

In today's digital age, the internet has become an integral part of everyday life, especially for the younger generation.<sup>[1]</sup> However, along with the numerous benefits it offers, there is a growing concern regarding the detrimental effects of excessive internet use, often leading to addiction. This review aims to delve into the phenomenon of internet addiction among today's youth,

often referred to by the newly coined term by the author as "netholicism." The term "netholicism" is coined by the author by combining three terms (Net, Holic, and Ism) where "Net" means "Internet," "Holic" means "abnormal desire or dependency," and "Ism" is used as a suffix for "Practice."<sup>[2,3]</sup> Internet addiction has been studied extensively worldwide and shown to have adverse social, psychological, and functional consequences. It has become a global health issue, particularly among young adults. It is a common problem in

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university students and negatively affects cognitive functioning, leads to poor academic performance and engagement in hazardous activities, and may lead to anxiety and stress.<sup>[4]</sup> A recent study conducted at National University, Khartoum, Sudan, disclosed that the prevalence of internet addiction among medical students was 75.5% (n = 232) and the addiction levels were as follows: mild, 39.7% (n = 122); moderate, 33.2% (n = 102); and severe, 2.6% (n = 8).<sup>[5]</sup> By examining the multifaceted aspects of this issue, from its psychological and physical impacts to its social and spiritual ramifications, we can better understand the challenges it presents and explore potential interventions for addressing them.

### **Netholicism and its Pervasiveness**

The internet plays a central role in the lives of today's youth, offering endless opportunities for communication, entertainment, education, and socialization. With the widespread availability of smartphones, social media platforms, and online gaming,<sup>[6]</sup> youth are constantly connected, spending significant amounts of time online.<sup>[7,8]</sup> From virtual classrooms to social media interactions, the internet permeates every aspect of their daily routines, shaping their identities, relationships, and perceptions of the world. However, it is leading to over-dependency or addiction.

Internet addiction, also known as problematic internet use or pathological internet use, is characterized by excessive, compulsive internet usage that interferes with daily life activities, leading to negative consequences. Similar to other forms of addiction, it involves a loss of control, preoccupation with internet activities, withdrawal symptoms when not online, and continued use despite adverse effects. Despite ongoing debates surrounding its classification as a distinct disorder, there is growing recognition of its prevalence and impact, particularly among the youth.

### **Materials and Methods**

This article uses a literature review methodology to critically examine and analyze the existing body of research on the pervasive nature of internet usage, termed "netholicism," among youth. It synthesizes and evaluates prior findings to understand the factors contributing to netholicism and young individuals' involvement in internet usage following the ramifications of the pervasive nature of internet usage in reflective psychological, physical, sociological, and spiritual effects in every domain on youth. The study analyzed 50 articles from reputable online databases, focusing on internet usage. Out of the 50 articles, 16 were cited, meeting inclusion criteria, including publication within 2019–2024, rigorous peerreview, and reputable database

indexing. By synthesizing and evaluating the findings from prior studies, this article aims to contribute to the understanding of the pervasive nature of internet usage among the current youth. The present study aims to offer a comprehensive analysis of the research outcomes while also highlighting any existing deficiencies in the current body of knowledge. A thorough and extensive search was undertaken to identify pertinent articles from reputable online databases, including PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar. The search terms employed encompassed various aspects of the topic, such as netholicism and its pervasiveness; factors contributing to netholicism; reflective psychological, physical, sociological, and spiritual effects in every domain on youth; interventions and treatment approaches for netholicism, and the future perspectives and challenges pertaining to netholicism. A comprehensive analysis has been conducted on a total of 16 articles that have been systematically collected and compiled for the purpose of this study. In due course, the present study successfully referenced a total of 16 scholarly articles out of the 50 articles that were collected and retrieved for analysis. The inclusion criteria for the selection of articles encompass the following specifications: the articles must have been published within the time span of 2019 to 2024, they should have undergone a rigorous peer-review process, and they must be indexed in reputable databases. Furthermore, only articles will be considered for inclusion in this study.

### **Factors contributing to netholicism**

Several factors contribute to the development of internet addiction among youth.<sup>[5,9,10]</sup> These include individual vulnerabilities such as personality traits (e.g., impulsivity and low self-esteem), psychological issues (e.g., depression and anxiety), and sociocultural influences (e.g., peer pressure and societal norms).<sup>[4,5,11]</sup> A study documented a high prevalence of internet addiction (85%, n = 466) among Wollo University students, and the factors associated with internet addiction were spending more time, having mental distress, playing online games, current khat chewing, and current alcohol use.<sup>[4]</sup> Moreover, the addictive nature of certain online activities, such as social media, online gaming, and pornography, can exacerbate compulsive internet use, leading to addiction.<sup>[12]</sup>

### **Ramifications of netholicism**

Excessive internet use can have reflective psychological, physical, sociological, and spiritual effects in every domain on youth, which could be presented through the conceptual diagram [Figure 1] for its understanding.

### **Psychological**

Excessive internet use can have profound psychological effects on youth, impacting their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral functioning.<sup>[13]</sup> Research has linked internet

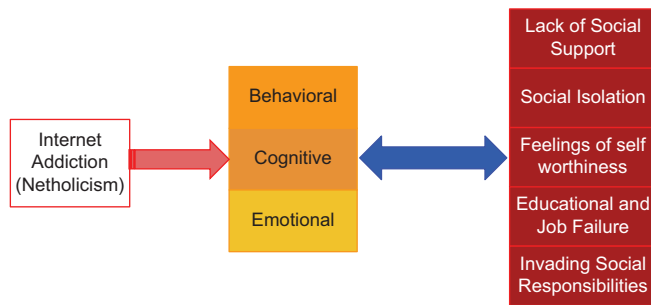


Figure 1: Impact of netholicism

addiction to various mental health disorders, including depression, anxiety, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and substance abuse disorders. The constant exposure to online stimuli, coupled with the pressure to maintain a curated online persona, can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy, loneliness, and social isolation.

### Physical

In addition to its psychological effects, internet addiction can have detrimental consequences on physical health. Prolonged screen time is associated with sedentary lifestyles, obesity, musculoskeletal problems, and sleep disturbances.<sup>[14]</sup> The blue light emitted by screens disrupts circadian rhythms, leading to poor sleep quality and insomnia. Moreover, excessive internet use can contribute to vision problems, headaches, and other physical ailments.

### Social

One of the most significant impacts of internet addiction is its effect on social relationships and interactions. Excessive internet use can lead to social withdrawal, alienation from family and friends, and difficulties in forming and maintaining real-life connections. The superficial nature of online interactions can hinder the development of empathy, communication skills, and emotional intelligence, leading to social dysfunction and loneliness.

### Spiritual and ethical

Beyond its psychological and physical effects, internet addiction also raises ethical and spiritual concerns. The relentless pursuit of online validation and gratification can detract from deeper existential questions and spiritual growth. The commodification of spirituality, morality, and identity in the digital realm can foster superficiality, materialism, and moral relativism, undermining ethical principles and spiritual values.

### Interventions and treatment approaches for netholicism

Addressing internet addiction requires a multidisciplinary approach encompassing prevention, intervention, and treatment strategies. These may include psychoeducation,

cognitive-behavioral therapy, mindfulness-based interventions, family therapy, and pharmacological treatments.<sup>[15]</sup> Moreover, promoting digital literacy, fostering resilience, and cultivating healthy coping mechanisms are essential for preventing and mitigating internet addiction among youth.

### Future perspectives and challenges

Looking ahead, the proliferation of internet addiction poses significant challenges for future generations.<sup>[16]</sup> Technological advancements, such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and artificial intelligence (AI), may exacerbate addictive behaviors and introduce new forms of digital dependency. Moreover, the evolving landscape of online platforms and content poses challenges for policymakers, educators, and mental health professionals in addressing internet addiction effectively.

### Results

In this review, our aim was to present an updated summary of the research that has been conducted on the understanding of the pervasive nature of internet usage among the current youth, including the comprehensive analysis of the research outcomes while highlighting any existing deficiencies in the current body of knowledge pertaining to internet usage. This review also emphasizes significant areas that should be taken into account for future research. Several potential areas for future research have been identified but have not yet been extensively explored. Several factors that contribute to the development of internet addiction among youth were identified.<sup>[5,9,10]</sup> These include individual vulnerabilities such as personality traits (e.g., impulsivity and low self-esteem), psychological issues (e.g., depression and anxiety), and sociocultural influences (e.g., peer pressure and societal norms).<sup>[4,5,11]</sup> A community university-based cross-sectional study on the prevalence and associated factors of internet addiction among undergraduate university students in Ethiopia documented a high prevalence of internet addiction (85%,  $n = 466$ ) among Wollo University students, and the factors associated with internet addiction were spending more time, having mental distress, playing online games, current khat chewing, and current alcohol use.<sup>[4]</sup> In addition, a recent study conducted at National University, Khartoum, Sudan, disclosed that the prevalence of internet addiction among medical students was 75.5% ( $n = 232$ ), and the addiction levels were as follows: mild, 39.7% ( $n = 122$ ); moderate, 33.2% ( $n = 102$ ); and severe, 2.6% ( $n = 8$ ).<sup>[5]</sup> Moreover, the addictive nature of certain online activities, such as social media, online gaming, and pornography, can exacerbate compulsive internet use, leading to addiction.<sup>[12]</sup> It is important

for future research to look ahead; the proliferation of internet addiction poses significant challenges for future generations as technological advancements, such as VR, AR, and AI, may exacerbate addictive behaviors and introduce new forms of digital dependency.

## Discussion

The key findings of this review suggest that excessive internet use can have reflective psychological, physical, sociological, and spiritual effects in every domain on youth. It can have profound psychological effects on youth, impacting their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral functioning.<sup>[13]</sup> Its detrimental consequences on physical health related to prolonged screen time are associated with sedentary lifestyles, obesity, musculoskeletal problems, and sleep disturbances.<sup>[14]</sup> Excessive internet use leads to social withdrawal and affects social relationships. It is revealed that internet addiction poses significant challenges for future generations as technological advancements, such as VR, AR, and AI, may exacerbate addictive behaviors and introduce new forms of digital dependency.

## Conclusion

Netholicism, or internet addiction, represents a complex and multifaceted phenomenon with far-reaching implications for the well-being of today's youth. By understanding the underlying factors contributing to internet addiction and its psychological, physical, social, and spiritual impacts, we can develop comprehensive interventions to address this growing public health concern. However, addressing internet addiction requires concerted efforts from all stakeholders, including individuals, families, communities, educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals. Only through collaborative action can we mitigate the adverse effects of internet addiction and promote a healthier relationship with technology among future generations.

This comprehensive review provides insights into the pervasive nature of internet addiction among today's youth and highlights the urgent need for preventive measures and intervention strategies to address this pressing public health issue.

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## Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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