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Psychological characteristics of young men with Internet addiction: A cross-cultural study

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Abstract. Today's youth actively use the Internet, which increases the risk of developing addiction, and thus raises the issue of investigating its factors to prevent the problem promptly and provide effective psychocorrection. The purpose of this study was to investigate the psychological predictors of Internet addiction among young people. The study was based on a comparative analysis of Ukrainian and Chinese samples. The Internet Addiction Test by K. Young was used to identify the formation of Internet addiction; the Big Five Personality Inventory NEO-FFI and the Beck Depression Inventory were used to diagnose psychological characteristics; respondents were also offered a questionnaire that included questions about demographic data and current situation. It was found that in the Ukrainian sample, 36.3% of respondents have a moderate or severe degree of Internet addiction, while in the Chinese sample, this share is 31.3%. Differences in personal predictors of Internet addiction have been found: the level of Internet addiction among Ukrainian youth is positively correlated with depression, neuroticism, and the impact of war, while it is inversely related to extraversion and conscientiousness. In the group of Chinese youth, only the neuroticism scale correlates with Internet addiction. The comparison showed that the level of depression among young people with Internet addiction in both countries is significantly higher than among young people without signs of addiction. There are significant differences between respondents in Ukraine and China on the scales of neuroticism, conscientiousness, extraversion, and most notably, openness. It was found that Ukrainian youth are characterised by higher levels of neuroticism and openness and lower levels of extraversion and conscientiousness compared to Chinese youth; no differences were found in terms of Internet addiction and depression. The study established that the common factor of Internet addiction among young people in both countries is depression; cultural differences and environmental factors lead to the fact that the predictors of addiction are different personality traits of young people. The practical significance of the study is that its results provide a better insight into the goals of influence in planning the prevention and psychocorrection of youth Internet addiction

Keywords: adolescence; cultural differences; predictors of addiction; personality traits; depression; neuroticism

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INTRODUCTION

Internet technologies are developing rapidly in the modern world, with young people being the most active users, which is associated with the risk of Internet addiction. According to the statistical report on the development of the Internet, in 2008, China ranked first in the world in terms of the number of users under the age of 30, as 68.6% of the population was recorded as users; and as of June 2022, China had 1051 million netizens, accounting for 74.4% of the population, with teenagers and young adults accounting for about 30% of users (China Internet Network Information Centre, 2022); the most commonly used internet functions by Chinese youth are chatting (99.2%) and watching videos (93.7%). As for Ukrainian youth, according to a survey by the State Institute of Family and Youth Policy (Andriuchenko *et al.*, 2020), they usually use the Internet to communicate on social media (92.8%), search for information for study and work (86.2%), and correspond via email (82.2%) and messengers (82.2%). Therewith, 95% of respondents believe that the Internet has a considerable impact on their lives (Andriuchenko *et al.*, 2020). Among Ukrainian Internet users, between 2% and 6% are considered addicted to it (Bielinska, 2019). Thus, young people are active users of the Internet; therefore, young people are the most vulnerable to developing an addiction to the global network.

In recent years, researchers of the problem of Internet addiction continued discussions about its predictors and criteria (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017; Rowicka, 2018; Błachnio *et al.*, 2019), investigated the issue of family factors of addiction (Meeus *et al.*, 2018; Orben, 2021), specifically the impact of a child's early initiation into the use of gadgets on the development of addiction (Rowicka *et al.*, 2022). Considerable attention is paid to the study of psychological factors of Internet addiction among adolescents and young people (Liu *et al.*, 2017; Samaha *et al.*, 2018), which would allow for more effective psychoprophylactic and correctional interventions. At the same time, the data from different studies differ substantially in their methodology, which makes it difficult to compare them and find common and specific features for each culture and age group.

Modern research on the psychological aspects of using computers, various gadgets and the Internet is quite widespread, but it faces some problems: Internet addiction is not a clinically recognised disorder, its criteria and mechanisms are a matter of debate; personal predictors of Internet addiction are understudied; the methodology of these studies lacks sufficient substantiation (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017); there is a lack of evidence-based solutions for the prevention and correction of Internet addiction, as well as studies based on cross-cultural comparisons. Therefore, it is important to investigate the psychological predictors of youth Internet addiction based on comparative analysis, as well as to consider cultural and environmental factors in its formation, with the subsequent development of effective prevention and correctional programmes on this basis.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the psychological predictors of Internet addiction in adolescence based on a comparative analysis of Ukrainian and Chinese samples.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The theoretical methods used in the study included analysis (to investigate the available literature on the issue, which concerned the definition, causes, symptoms, criteria and consequences of the phenomenon considered in the study), synthesis (to form an understanding of the phenomenon of Internet addiction, its causes and consequences based on the sources under study) and comparison (to compare the data of this study, i.e., the results of the survey of Chinese and Ukrainian respondents, as well as to compare the data of other modern psychological studies of Internet addiction). The empirical study was based on a cross-sectional comparison that measured the psychological parameters of young people in two countries – Ukraine and China – considering the degree of their dependence on the Internet.

The Internet Addiction Test (Young, 1998), developed to measure the presence and severity of Internet addiction, was used to diagnose the degree of Internet addiction in individuals. The test questions are designed to diagnose the degree of Internet addiction: mild, moderate, or severe. To investigate the psychological characteristics of the respondents, the authors of this study used the Big Five Personality Inventory NEO-FFI (McCrae & Costa, 1987), which defines personality characteristics based on five factors: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism; Beck Depression Inventory (Beck *et al.*, 1961), which is a 21-item self-assessment rating list that measures the characteristic behaviour and symptoms of depression. During statistical analysis, Cronbach- α , Student's t-test, and correlation analysis were used; statistical analysis of the data was carried out using SPSS 21.0. Respondents were also offered a questionnaire containing questions about their demographic data and current situation.

The sample of respondents included representatives of student youth from Ukraine and China. Characteristics of the Chinese sample – 86 people, including 45 boys and 41 girls, aged 17-20, with an average age of 18.6 years. The Ukrainian sample consists of 88 people, including 27 boys and 61 girls aged 16-21, with an average age of 18.8. The questionnaires for Chinese youth were distributed on an online platform (Questionnaire Star website – chat software) from March to May 2022. The survey among Ukrainian youth was conducted by distributing a questionnaire on online platforms from December 2022 to April 2023. The data was collected using the Google Forms service based on the informational consent of the subjects. The study design and psychodiagnostic instruments were reviewed and approved by the Department of Developmental Psychology of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv for their compliance with ethical standards. All procedures conducted in the study involving people did not violate the honour and dignity of respondents, considered the age characteristics of the respondents, and were carried out with the anonymity of the results obtained. All survey participants were informed about the purpose, objectives, and nature of the survey and gave their consent to the processing of their answers.

RESULTS

Theoretical framework of the study:

Factors and symptoms of Internet addiction

According to the analysis of current research, Internet Addiction Disorder is a new type of addiction phenomenon that has emerged with the development of Internet technologies, which manifests itself in excessive and inappropriate use of the Internet with obvious negative consequences for social and psychological functions.

Most modern researchers, investigating personality predictors of Internet addiction, argue that people with Internet addiction demonstrate specific personality characteristics. Thus, H. Khoshakhlagh and S. Faramarzi (2012) investigated the relationship between mental disorders and emotional intelligence and Internet addiction in young people. The study found a significant link between depression and impaired interpersonal sensitivity in young people with Internet addiction; they have a lower level of emotional intelligence in different situations, which is manifested by difficulties in expressing their emotions and understanding the thoughts and feelings of others. It was confirmed that symptoms of physical and emotional agitation, hostility, and aggressive thoughts are adverse consequences of Internet addiction and uncontrolled use of the Internet.

It was established that young people with Internet addiction are characterised by emotional instability and are more likely to show signs of anxiety, nervousness, irritability, and depression. Thus, a study by K. Niemz *et al.* (2005) found that young people with Internet addiction are typically characterised by low self-confidence, low self-esteem, and self-efficacy. Other studies demonstrate such characteristics of addicted young people as depression, shyness, and addiction as a personality trait. Depression plays a special role in the development of youth Internet addiction; it was found that the level of depression and suicidal thoughts of high school students in the group of people with Internet addiction was significantly higher (Kim *et al.*, 2006; Liu *et al.*, 2017). At the same time, young people often use various methods to regulate their emotions to control them consciously or unconsciously, one of these methods is “escapism”, which manifests itself in the fact that, escaping from the real world, they find themselves in the world of the Internet. Lack of control, social withdrawal and emotional conflict, problems with time management and concealing problematic behaviour are factors of Internet addiction among students (Samaha *et al.*, 2018).

A.M. Gervasi *et al.* (2017) found that negative affect, disinhibition, and psychotic maladaptive personality type can be predictors of Internet addiction. Furthermore, there is an elevated level of comorbidity between problematic internet use and mood/anxiety disorders, such as depression, loneliness, shyness, and self-esteem (Caplan, 2005). Excessive use of the Internet can be conceptualised as a maladaptive strategy for coping with negative emotions and negative life events. Internet use was found to be associated with traits such as poor self-control, impulsivity, and affectivity, and these traits are risk factors for problematic Internet use (Van den Eijnden *et al.*, 2008).

R. Kraut *et al.* (1998) found that excessive addiction to the Internet leads to young people reducing their social interaction in real life, which results in feelings of loneliness. At the same time, it was argued that Internet dependence does not necessarily increase loneliness; on the contrary, increased feelings of loneliness in real life lead to increased online activity for some young people (Amichai-Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2003).

In general, studies identify different groups of Internet addiction factors.

Physiological factors are primarily related to the action of neurotransmitters. As a result of online activity, the nerve centres of the brain are highly excited, with the release of dopamine, which is accompanied by certain complex physiological and biochemical reactions, including an imbalance in hormone levels in the body and reduced immune function. If this type of stimulation is regular, the brain amplifies its own chemical response, which is addictive (Pfaff, 2013). A growing body of research and treatment experience demonstrates a strong neurobiological link between behavioural addictions and substance use disorders (Grant *et al.*, 2006). Compared to the general population, people with Internet addiction lack dopamine receptors or serotonin/dopamine (Beard, 2005), and therefore they have a harder time experiencing pleasure and may seek out activities that stimulate dopamine/serotonin levels. Over time, they need increasingly more stimulation, and thus are at risk of addiction.

Psychological factors. M. Lafrenière *et al.* (2009) suggested that Internet addiction may be the result of excessive compulsive addiction. A teenager with an Internet addiction may behave uncontrollably, unable to resist their desires; all this affects their daily life, leading to life conflicts. C.S. Andreessen & S. Pallesen (2014) believe that excessive attention to social media and strong social motivation are the main causes of Internet addiction.

Proponents of the Inadequate Personality Theory argue that Internet addiction is linked to certain personality traits. Studies in the United States have suggested that people with Internet addiction often have characteristics such as loneliness, sensitivity, depression, a tendency to think abstractly, alertness, and disregard for social norms (Wilson *et al.*, 2010). K. Wilson *et al.* (2010) suggest that specific personality traits may contribute to Internet addiction problems; young people with high extraversion and low sense of responsibility have a higher dependence on social media and are more likely to be addicted to the Internet. Research by Chinese psychologists on a sample of students showed a comparable result: the greater the distress, anxiety, and social anxiety of respondents, the more pronounced is the tendency for them to become addicted to the network. The explanation is that students with social anxiety lack self-confidence, and therefore they tend to avoid reality, and a virtual community can provide them with a space to socialise (Chen *et al.*, 2022; Zhao *et al.*, 2023).

Family factors. One of the predictors of adolescents' and young people's involvement in widespread use of the Internet is the nature of the child-parent relationship (Zhang *et al.*

al., 2011). According to socialisation theory, the environment, especially the family, has an important influence on the content, quality, and process of individual socialisation. Thus, Ö. Şenormancı *et al.* (2014) found that Internet addiction is associated with anxious attachment as well as significant impairments in family functioning. However, it has not been established whether family dysfunction leads to Internet addiction or whether Internet addiction interferes with family functioning. Other studies (Shin *et al.*, 2011) confirm that Internet addiction is associated not only with anxious but also with avoidant attachment.

In China, due to the existence of a test-oriented education system, most parents are deeply concerned about their children's academic performance, focusing only on their education and physical health, parents rarely care about other aspects, especially about meeting emotional needs, feelings, often ignoring the child's psychological state (Kirkpatrick & Zang, 2011). As a result, after entering college and leaving the control of their parents, young men find it difficult to find their place in society, which is a factor in their dependence on the network. Analogous trends are observed in Ukraine.

According to the principles of the current education system in China, many educators focus on building learning that is focused on student performance. If the learning outcomes are not high enough, the adolescent/young person hardly feels successful. On the contrary, heavy academic responsibilities and poor academic performance can easily lead to criticism, reproaches from parents and ridicule from classmates. This sense of failure encourages young people to turn to different ways to relieve tension, and the internet can satisfy their internal needs to some extent (Bao *et al.*, 2023).

Cultural perspective. A new perspective on the problem was provided by A. Blachnio *et al.* (2019), who analysed samples from nine countries, showed that when the indicators of human well-being, security and health in a country are low and the economy is developed, the level of dependence on the network is high. Therewith, Internet addiction is positively correlated with the country's economic

well-being, social progress, and human development. The researchers believe that not only the personal characteristics of people with Internet addiction, but also the cultural and economic characteristics of the region can be considered as factors to explain Internet addiction.

Adolescence is a period of very rapid change and development in a person's life. During this period, young people actively develop self-awareness, knowledge of themselves and the world around them, and their emotional sphere becomes more stable. However, the transformational processes of personality, the transition to adulthood in adolescence are not yet complete, and therefore the lability of the emotional sphere stays quite high (Gorbaniuk *et al.*, 2018). Under the current education system, young men are under quite a lot of pressure to study, their parents' expectations are also too high, and there are not enough opportunities for young people to fulfil themselves in their extracurricular activities. Opportunities for self-determination and self-identification of young men are quite limited and usually come down to the results of educational activities, which do not satisfy the need for self-identification. Therefore, young men find other resources to meet their emotional needs, to build self-esteem and self-acceptance. During this period of complex and unbalanced psychological development, it is the Internet resources that provide many of them with the opportunity to search for and learn about themselves, to reveal their feelings. Therefore, the factors of the Internet environment – virtuality and openness, as well as anonymity – provide an opportunity to fulfil the needs of young men. The Internet community provides them with opportunities to fulfil their social life; in this space, an individual can become a member of a community and satisfy the needs of emotional communication.

The results of an empirical study of youth addiction to the Internet

The data obtained from the empirical study of young people from the Chinese and Ukrainian samples were analysed in terms of reliability and validity, resulting in the following indicators (Table 1).

Table 1. Indicators of reliability and validity of empirical data

	Cronbach- α	
	Chinese sample	Ukrainian sample
Internet addiction test	0.903	0.765
"The Big Five"	0.779	0.826
Beck Depression Scale	0.948	0.948

Source: developed by the authors of this study based on the data obtained

Verifying the data obtained for the normality of distribution in both samples suggested that the absolute values of the skewness coefficient Z_s and the kurtosis coefficient Z_k corresponded to or were close to the normal distribution, and therefore parametric criteria were used. According to the K.S. Young's test, the respondents' Internet addiction scores were determined, with $T1 \geq 50$ being diagnosed as Internet addiction (moderate and severe

Internet addiction), and $T1 < 50$ being diagnosed as normal (no Internet addiction or mild Internet addiction). Accordingly, all the subjects were divided into 2 groups: a group of people with Internet addiction and a group without signs of Internet addiction (normal). Thus, in the Chinese sample, 27 people with Internet addiction were identified (31.3% of the sample), in the normal group – 59 people (68.6%); in the Ukrainian sample, 32 people were

Internet-addicted (36.3%), and 56 people (63.6% of the sample) had no signs of Internet addiction.

Next, personality differences between a group of Internet-addicted young men and a group without signs of Internet addiction were compared. The results of the Big Five Personality Inventory (NEO-FFI) survey of

young men and women in the Chinese sample suggested that the N/Neuroticism scale score in the group of people with Internet addiction was significantly higher than in the group without signs of Internet addiction ($p \leq 0.001$); there was no significant difference in other measurements (Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of personal differences between respondents with and without signs of Internet addiction (Chinese sample, $n = 86$)

Big Five scales	Respondents without signs of Internet addiction	Internet-addicted respondents	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
N/Neuroticism	33.85 ± 5.60	39.14 ± 4.12	-3.73	.001
E/Extraversion	42.33 ± 7.18	39.44 ± 9.75	1.35	.189
O/Openness	37.00 ± 3.38	35.85 ± 4.47	1.23	.230
A/Agreeableness	36.77 ± 4.79	35.14 ± 4.88	1.26	.218
C/Conscientiousness	42.40 ± 5.87	40.59 ± 6.04	1.10	.278

Notes: *t* – Student's *t*-test, *p* – statistical significance

Source: developed by the authors of this study based on the data obtained

Comparison of the degree of depression between the group of people with Internet addiction and the group of people without signs of Internet addiction showed that there is a significant difference in the degree of depression between these groups ($p \leq 0.001$), and the level of depression in the group of people with

Internet addiction (24.70 ± 12.26) is significantly higher than in the normal group (11.85 ± 9.09), as presented in Table 3.

A comparison of personality differences between individuals with and without signs of Internet addiction (Ukrainian sample) is presented in Table 4.

Table 3. Comparison of the degree of depression between the group of respondents with and without signs of Internet addiction ($X \pm S$) (Chinese sample)

	Respondents without signs of Internet addiction	Internet-addicted respondents	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Depression score	11.85 ± 9.09	24.70 ± 12.26	-5.16	0.000

Notes: *t* – Student's *t*-test, *p* – statistical significance

Source: developed by the authors of this study based on the data obtained

Table 4. Comparison of personal differences between respondents from the group of people with Internet addiction and the group without signs of addiction ($X \pm S$) (Ukrainian sample)

Big Five scales	Respondents without signs of Internet addiction	Internet-addicted respondents	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
N/Neuroticism	34.78 ± 8.73	39.84 ± 7.43	-2.75	0.007
E/Extraversion	41.25 ± 6.68	37 ± 6.61	2.88	0.005
O/Openness	42.03 ± 5.81	41.12 ± 6.95	0.65	0.513
A/Agreeableness	38.87 ± 5.88	38.37 ± 5.73	0.38	0.7
C/Conscientiousness	42.41 ± 7.13	37.62 ± 7.74	2.93	0.004

Notes: *t* – Student's *t*-test, *p* – statistical significance

Source: developed by the authors of this study based on the data obtained

As Table 4 suggests, the group of people with Internet addiction in the Ukrainian sample has significantly higher neuroticism scores than the norm group ($p \leq 0.01$). There-with, the scores of extraversion and conscientiousness ($p \leq 0.01$) are significantly lower than those of the people

without signs of addiction. Furthermore, a comparison of the degree of depression in the Ukrainian sample indicated that the level of depression in the group of people with Internet addiction is significantly higher than in the normal group ($p \leq 0.001$), as presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Comparison of the degree of depression of respondents from the group of people with Internet addiction and the group without signs of addiction ($X \pm S$) (Ukrainian sample)

	Respondents without signs of Internet addiction	Internet-addicted respondents	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Depression score	14.50 ± 9.49	21.84 ± 9.24	-3.55	0.001

Notes: *t* – Student's t-test, *p* – statistical significance

Source: developed by the authors of this study based on the data obtained

Table 6 presents the intercorrelation coefficients for the Ukrainian sample of the following indicators: Internet addiction, depression, neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and war exposure, as well as the mean and standard deviation.

As Table 6 shows, the results of the correlation analysis suggest that Internet addiction in the Ukrainian sample is associated with depression, neuroticism, extraversion, conscientiousness, and war-related traits. Internet addic-

tion has a moderate positive relationship with depression and neuroticism and the impact of war, as reported by respondents in Ukraine ($p \leq 0.01$). Therewith, Internet addiction has a moderately pronounced inverse relationship with extraversion and conscientiousness ($p \leq 0.01$); while openness and agreeableness are not related to Internet addiction. A comparison of empirical indicators obtained from the survey of young people in Ukraine and China is presented in Table 7.

Table 6. Intercorrelation matrix (Ukrainian sample, $n = 88$)

Name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Internet addiction	1									
2. Depression	.48**	1								
3. Neuroticism	.44**	.468**	1							
4. Extraversion	-.387**	-.491**	-.366**	1						
5. Openness	-0.091	-.217*	0.09	.348**	1					
6. Agreeableness	0.164	0.073	0.122	0.153	.346**	1				
7. Conscientiousness	-.416**	-.419**	-.374**	.297**	.314**	0.001	1			
8. Impact of the war	.291**	.329**	.251*	-0.126	0.111	0.094	-.237*	1		
<i>M</i>	46	17.17	36.62	39.70	41.70	38.69	40.67	3.30	4.114	1.932
<i>SD</i>	13.19	10.00	8.60	6.93	6.22	5.804	7.67	1.07	0.8635	0.855

Notes: *M* – means, *SD* – standard deviations; * $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$

Source: developed by the authors of this study based on the data obtained

Table 7. Comparison of personal predictors of Internet addiction between Ukrainian and Chinese respondents ($X \pm S$), $n = 174$

Indicator	Ukrainian sample, $n=88$	Chinese sample, $n=86$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Internet addiction	46 ± 13.19	45.48 ± 13.25	0.255	0.799
N/Neuroticism	36.62 ± 8.6	34.24 ± 6.29	2.087	0.038
E/Extraversion	39.7 ± 6.93	42.88 ± 8.46	-2.706	0.008
O/Openness	41.7 ± 6.22	36.83 ± 3.83	6.223	0.000
A/Agreeableness	38.69 ± 5.8	38.32 ± 5.63	0.424	0.672
C/Conscientiousness	40.67 ± 7.67	42.87 ± 6.22	-2.075	0.039
Depression	17.17 ± 13.25	19.48 ± 12.62	-1.34	0.182

Notes: *t* – Student's t-test, *p* – statistical significance

Source: developed by the authors of this study based on the data obtained

As Table 7 shows, there are statistically significant differences between respondents in Ukraine and China on the scales of neuroticism ($p \leq 0.05$), conscientiousness ($p \leq 0.05$), extraversion ($p \leq 0.01$), and most notably on openness ($p \leq 0.001$). Accordingly, Ukrainian youth are characterised by higher levels of neuroticism and openness and significantly lower levels of extraversion and

conscientiousness compared to Chinese youth; no significant difference was found in terms of Internet addiction and depression. Therefore, the levels of Internet addiction and the severity of depression do not differ significantly between young people in Ukraine and China. At the same time, cultural differences, as well as the current situation, which directly affects the psycho-emotional state of young

people, may determine that the predictors of Internet addiction are different personality traits of young people in the two countries. A common feature of young people who are addicted to the Internet can be considered depression or a tendency to depression, as the level of depression among young people in both countries is higher in the group of people with Internet addiction than in the normal group.

Thus, the study revealed similarities and differences in the psychological characteristics of young people with Internet addiction in diverse cultures, as well as the impact of the war in Ukraine on the psycho-emotional state as a factor of Internet addiction. At the same time, the study offered an insight into the universality of the problem of youth Internet addiction, as psychological predictors of youth Internet addiction are comparable in different countries.

DISCUSSION

Despite a considerable amount of research, there is still ongoing scientific debate regarding the clinical definition and criteria for Internet addiction. Young (1998) does not consider Internet addiction to be a mental illness in its own right, but a manifestation of the well-known "impulse control disorder" in Internet users. R. Kraut *et al.* (1998) and their co-authors consider this type of addiction as a loss of control over impulses to behave on the Internet without the effects of addictive substances, which is manifested by an obvious impairment of social and psychological functions of individuals due to excessive use of the Internet. The APA Dictionary of Psychology (n.d.) defines Internet addiction as a behaviour pattern characterised by excessive or compulsive use of computers online and offline, which leads to suffering and deterioration of the individual's psychological state.

K.W. Beard and E.M. Wolf (2001) compared the symptoms of excessive Internet use with the criteria for diagnosing other addictions (e.g., pathological gambling) and concluded that Internet addiction should be considered as an impulsive disorder. A summary of these studies makes it possible to identify the following signs of Internet addiction:

1) obsession: a state of fascination with the Internet, when a person's thinking, emotions and behaviour are focused on online activities. Unable to access the Internet, a person feels a strong desire to do so, and once online, they completely lose control of their time;

2) a feeling of euphoria and emptiness. Access to the Internet becomes a way of avoiding problems in real life; when using the Internet, the addicted people can temporarily get rid of the anxiety of reality and gain peace of mind, escape from problems and unpleasant feelings;

3) withdrawal symptoms: when an addicted person is forced to stop surfing the Internet, they experience frustration, anxiety, tremors, fatigue and other symptoms, and may even resort to self-harm or suicide;

4) conflict with reality: due to the excessive amount of time and energy invested in online activity, a person is unable to take care of their real life, which leads to increased family misunderstandings, reduced social activity and activities, loss of personal interests, etc.

From a clinical standpoint, the following signs of Internet addiction are identified:

1) preoccupation: a strong desire for the Internet. The person is focused on previous online activities or waiting for the next online session;

2) withdrawal: expressed by irritability, anxiety, and boredom after several days of inactivity;

3) tolerance: to achieve satisfaction over time, increasingly more active and prolonged use of the Internet is required;

4) self-control difficulties: unwillingness to control, reduce, or stop using the Internet, constant desire to use the Internet and/or unsuccessful attempts to limit use;

5) ignoring harmful consequences: continuing to use the internet excessively despite persistent or recurrent physical or psychological problems caused or exacerbated by the use of the internet;

6) loss of social contacts and interest: the loss of interests, previous hobbies, and passions is a direct result of excessive use of the Internet;

7) using the Internet to overcome negative emotions (e.g., feelings of helplessness, guilt, anxiety);

8) concealing the true amount of time spent on the Internet and/or the cost of taking part in Internet activities from friends and relatives (Tao *et al.*, 2010).

K.S. Young (1998) noted that Internet addiction can cause issues in the following five areas: academic problems, interpersonal problems, financial and professional problems, and physical health problems. Thus, Internet addiction can lead to physical health problems, as people with Internet addiction, by constantly depriving themselves of sleep, can harm their immune system, thereby increasing the body's vulnerability to various diseases. Lack of physical activity can also pose a physiological risk of carpal tunnel syndrome, back pain, and eye strain (Pfaff, 2013). Studies have found a link between internet addiction and sleep disorders, including significantly shorter sleep duration in people with Internet addiction (Alimoradi *et al.*, 2019). C.S. Andreassen and S. Pallesen (2014) believe that Internet addiction affects a person's work, studies, and other activities, has a negative impact on interpersonal relationships in real life, and mental health.

The empirical study of psychological predictors of Internet addiction among young men conducted in this paper not only confirms the theoretical research of many scholars on the manifestations of Internet addiction, but also clarifies and specifies the data obtained in other studies (van den Eijnden *et al.*, 2008; Wilson *et al.*, 2010; Kuss *et al.*, 2014), most of which suggest that people with Internet addiction have specific personal characteristics.

Specifically, it was found that in the Chinese sample there was a significant difference in the neuroticism scale between a group of Internet addicted young men and a group without signs of addiction, but no significant difference in other parameters. In the Ukrainian sample, there were significant differences between the group of people with Internet addiction and the group without signs of

addiction on the scales of neuroticism, extraversion, and conscientiousness, but no significant differences on other parameters. Thus, Ukrainian young people with Internet addiction are more introverted, emotionally unstable, prone to stress, anxiety, and mood swings, and have lower impulse control and determination compared to Chinese young people with addiction. The increased level of these manifestations among Ukrainian youth is conditioned by the impact of the war, and thus increases the risk of Internet addiction. The findings are consistent with the conclusions of the study by N. van der Aa *et al.* (2009), which investigated personality traits using the Big Five. Internet use has been found to be indirectly associated with poor health, depression, lower self-esteem, and loneliness. The researchers believe that compulsive internet use has a mediating effect: introverted, aversive and emotionally unstable teenagers are more likely to fall into a vicious circle, after which they start using the network more excessively, which leads to higher levels of internet addiction and exacerbates their problems.

The findings of the present study also suggest that the level of depression among young people with Internet addiction is significantly higher than among young people without signs of addiction. This confirms the existence of a connection between Internet addiction and depression, which can manifest itself as bad mood, pessimism, slow thinking, reduced volition, etc. These findings are consistent with the results of modern research that address the significant role of depression in the development of Internet addiction (Kim *et al.*, 2006; Morrison & Gore, 2010; Khaz-aal *et al.*, 2022).

Notably, the study described in this paper identified a difference in integrity scores between the two groups of the Ukrainian sample, which is rarely mentioned in other studies. This may indicate that young people with Internet addiction act more impulsively, have poorer planning and self-control skills, and are less organised and focused in their activities (van den Eijnden *et al.*, 2008; Samaha *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, a comparison of the data from the Ukrainian and Chinese samples, as well as considering the impact of the war in Ukraine, indicates the influence of the war as a substantial environmental stressor, which shows significant positive correlations with the level of Internet addiction ($p \leq 0.01$), depression ($p \leq 0.01$), neuroticism ($p \leq 0.05$), and an inverse relationship with conscientiousness ($p \leq 0.05$) in the sample of Ukrainian youth. The adverse impact of the war on the psycho-emotional state of the population, including young people, increases the severity of negative experiences and emotional states. Therefore, Internet use can be one of the most accessible and familiar coping strategies for young people, which at the same time increases the risk of addiction.

CONCLUSIONS

The study was based on the understanding of Internet addiction as a behaviour characterised by excessive or compulsive use of computers online and offline, which leads to distress and deterioration of a person's psychological state.

Based on the analysis of scientific research, the main factors of Internet addiction were identified as follows: personal (emotional instability, anxiety, irritability, depression, shyness, low self-esteem, lack of empathy, etc.); psychological (search for approval from others, internal psychological conflict, search for sources of emotional intimacy, etc.); psychosocial or internal (loneliness, low communication skills, maladaptive self-awareness, self-doubt, low self-efficacy); external (family and peer relationships). Factors of the online environment include anonymity, invisibility, online identity, etc.

An empirical study of 86 young men and women in China using the K. Young Internet Addiction Test found that 31.3% of the respondents are people with Internet addiction (moderate to high). In the Ukrainian sample of 88 respondents, 36.3% have a moderate or high degree of Internet addiction. The results of a study in a Chinese sample suggested that the level of neuroticism of people with Internet addiction is significantly higher than that of people without signs of addiction. In the Ukrainian sample, it was found that neuroticism in the group of boys and girls with Internet addiction is significantly higher, and the indicators of extraversion and conscientiousness are significantly lower than in young people without signs of Internet addiction. Furthermore, the findings suggested that the level of depression among young people with Internet addiction in both countries is significantly higher than among young people without signs of Internet addiction.

Differences in the personal predictors of Internet addiction in the Ukrainian and Chinese samples are revealed. The level of Internet addiction among Ukrainian youth is positively correlated with depression, neuroticism, and the impact of war; it is inversely related to extraversion and conscientiousness. This suggests that young people with Internet addiction are characterised by the following features: a tendency to stress, impulsivity and maladaptive coping reactions, a low ability to regulate their emotions, a tendency to depression, bad mood, withdrawal, shyness, more pronounced signs of loneliness, irresponsibility, self-doubt, disorganisation. In the group of Chinese youth, only the neuroticism scale has a connection with Internet addiction.

Statistically significant differences between the respondents in Ukraine and China were recorded on the scales of neuroticism ($p \leq 0.05$), conscientiousness ($p \leq 0.05$), extraversion ($p \leq 0.01$), and most notably on openness ($p \leq 0.001$). Accordingly, Ukrainian youth are characterised by higher levels of neuroticism and openness and significantly lower levels of extraversion and conscientiousness compared to Chinese youth; no significant difference was found in terms of Internet addiction and depression. Thus, the levels of Internet addiction and the severity of depression do not differ significantly between young people in Ukraine and China. At the same time, cultural differences and environmental factors influence the fact that the predictors of Internet addiction are different personality traits of young people in the two countries. A common risk factor for Internet addiction is the level of

depression, which is higher in the group of people with Internet addiction in both countries than in the normal group. At the same time, in the Ukrainian sample, the results of the correlation analysis suggested that Internet addiction is related not only to depression and neuroticism, but also correlates with the impact of war and has a moderately pronounced inverse relationship with extraversion and conscientiousness ($p \leq 0.01$). Thus, Ukrainian youth can be characterised as emotionally rich, but with a lower level of emotional stability and a tendency to anxiety; Chinese youth are characterised by a higher level of enthusiasm, a fast pace in life and work, and a higher sense of organisation and responsibility.

The scientific originality of the study lies in the identification of differences in the psychological predictors of Internet addiction among young people in Ukraine and

China. The prospect of the study is to expand cross-cultural research in this area, as well as to develop programmes and recommendations for the prevention of Internet addiction among young people. These programmes should be based on respect for differences and diversity in personal development and build on the strengths of the individual. The focus should be on the mental health of young men and the creation of a suitable social environment for their healthy development, including the development of emotional self-regulation, social skills, and self-confidence.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors of this study declare no conflict of interest.

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Психологічні особливості юнаків з проявами інтернет-залежності: крос-культурне дослідження

Анотація. Сучасна молодь активно користується інтернетом, і це посилює ризик розвитку залежності, а отже, гостро ставить проблему вивчення її чинників, для того щоб вчасно попереджати проблему та проводити ефективну психокорекцію. Метою дослідження було вивчення психологічних предикторів інтернет-залежності юнацької молоді. Дослідження здійснювалося на основі порівняльного аналізу української та китайської вибірок. Для виявлення сформованості інтернет-залежності використано Internet Addiction Test K. Янг; для діагностики психологічних особливостей – Big Five Personality Inventory NEO-FFI та Beck Depression Inventory; також респондентам запропоновано анкету, яка включала питання щодо демографічних даних та актуальної ситуації. Виявлено, що в українській вибірці 36,3% опитаних мають середній або виражений ступінь інтернет-залежності, у китайській вибірці ця частка складає 31,3%. Встановлено відмінності щодо особистісних предикторів інтернет-залежності: рівень інтернет-залежності української молоді позитивно корелює з депресією, нейротизмом і впливом війни, водночас обернено пов'язаний з екстраверсією та сумлінністю. У групі китайської молоді з інтернет-залежністю корелює тільки шкала нейротизму. Порівняння показало, що рівень депресії молоді з інтернет-залежністю в обох країнах суттєво вищий, ніж у молоді без ознак залежності. Зафіксовано значущі відмінності між опитуваними в Україні й Китаї за шкалами нейротизму, сумлінності, екстраверсії, а найвиразніше – відкритості. З'ясовано, що українська молодь характеризується вищими показниками нейротизму та відкритості й нижчими, якщо порівнювати з китайською молоддю, проявами екстраверсії та сумлінності; щодо показників інтернет-залежності та депресії відмінностей не виявлено. Виснувано, що спільний фактор інтернет-залежності молоді обох країн – депресія; культурні відмінності й середовищні фактори спричиняють те, що предикторами залежності виступають відмінні особистісні риси молодих людей. Практичне значення дослідження зумовлене тим, що його результати допомагають краще розуміти цілі впливу в плануванні профілактики та психокорекції інтернет-залежності молоді

Ключові слова: юнацький вік; культурні відмінності; предиктори залежності; особистісні риси; депресія; нейротизм