Newspaper Clips

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ARE YOU A NETCASE?

If much of your life is online rather than offline, press enter for the onset of a new condition — Internet Addiction Disorder. It's a problem the world is dealing with, though India is still in sleep mode

Divya A | TNN

- Do you normally stay online longer than you had intended?
- Do you prefer the excitement of the internet to spending time with your family?
- Do you see life without the internet as dull and boring?
- Do you snap, yell or get annoyed if someone bothers you while you are online?
- Do you miss sleep due to late-night surfing?
- Do you identify more with your online persona than your real self?

Even if half your answers are in the affirmative, there's a good chance that you are becoming an internet addict. According to an estimate, 5-10% of the online population worldwide is "web dependent". They are hooked to online cyber sex, pornography, multi-user online games, e-shopping, social networking and surfing and they do so at the cost of all other activities. They don't love it, but they suffer from a new clinical condition called IAD — Internet Addiction Disorder.
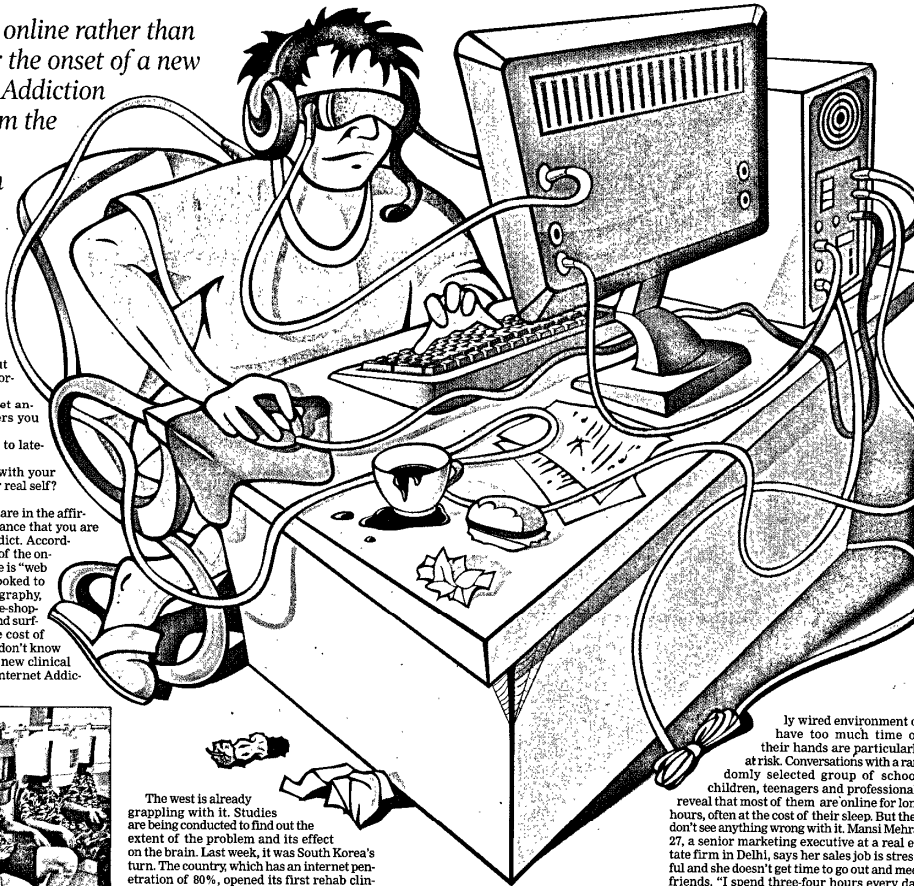
DEBUGGING OPS

HOW NET ADDICTS ARE TREATED ELSEWHERE

NEUROFEEDBACK: A technique to train the brain to regulate functions of body and mind. Sensors are placed on the scalp to measure activity, with measurements displayed using video or sound. Neurofeedback is widely available in India and is used to help children with autism and learning disabilities, adults with post-trauma and also at times for drug de-addiction

TRANSCRANIAL MAGNETIC STIMULATION: A method of stimulating the brain using magnets, redirecting its magnetic field to reduce major depression and symptoms of illnesses such as Parkinson's Disease or Alzheimer's Disease. Neuropsychiatrists at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) in Bangalore, India have begun using TMS for patients with depression as a substitute for antidepressants

The west is already grappling with it. Studies are being conducted to find out the extent of the problem and its effect on the brain. Last week, it was South Korea's turn. The country, which has an internet penetration of 80%, opened its first rehab clinic for Net addicts.

What about India? Some may argue that IAD is no threat here, given that internet usage stands at just above 7%. But estimates suggest that it may go up to 20% soon with the introduction of 3G services. Considering India's population, 20% (240 million) means a number far bigger than South Korea's 80% (total population 48 million). Experts warn that India may already have a fair number of IAD victims although the problem is not even recognized as a psychological ailment here.

Pune-based behaviourial psychologist Neema Khurana, who counsels students in several schools and colleges in the educational hub, says that the problem may not be widespread in our country, but there's enough reason for worry. "I have come across serious cases in which teenagers don't leave the house, don't have interpersonal relationships, and are always trying to isolate themselves from everything else to sit in front of their computer screens. I was shocked when I met a 19-year-old who would only speak in the language of the characters he played with on an online

Alarm bells are ringing in different parts of Asia, which is fast emerging as the new frontier of the internet revolution. By 2015, the continent will generate more online traffic than North America. China and South Korea already have rehab clinics for internet addiction. In the Philippines, authorities are working on ways to deal with online gaming addiction among children

game," she says. "The problem is mostly prevalent among teens and pre-teens but no institution in India has taken it seriously enough or tried to conduct any studies or estimates on internet addiction."

Psychologists say people who live in a highly wired environment or have too much time on their hands are particularly at risk. Conversations with a randomly selected group of school-children, teenagers and professionals reveal that most of them are online for long hours, often at the cost of their sleep. But they don't see anything wrong with it. Mansi Mehra, 27, a senior marketing executive at a real estate firm in Delhi, says her sales job is stressful and she doesn't get time to go out and meet friends. "I spend three-four hours every day on social networking to stay in touch with them. I also do a lot of shopping online. So in four hours online, I manage to do what I would do in 10 hours offline." Mehra admits she can't do without this routine. "I get irritated on days my internet doesn't work."

Unlike drugs or alcohol abuse, people addicted to the Net may not show any symptoms in the beginning. In many cases, their Net identity becomes their "primary identity" and the real world around them gets hazy. In South Korea, alarm bells began to ring when a 41-year-old man and his 25-year-old wife were arrested last year after they left their baby daughter to starve to death at home while they played an online game on child rearing in an internet cafe.

Alarm bells are ringing in different parts of Asia, which is fast emerging as the new frontier of the internet revolution. According to Cisco's annual Visual Networking Index, the worldwide internet traffic will quadruple and reach 80.5 exabytes per month (80 exabytes would fill 20 billion DVDs) by 2015. That year, for the first time, Asia will generate more traffic (24.1 exabytes per month) than North America (22.3 exabytes per month). In China, they already have specialist clinics for internet addicts; in the UAE, a team of researchers has asked educators and parents to ensure that youngsters develop healthy habits when using modern technological devices; and in the Philippines, authorities are now working on measures to address online gaming addiction among children.

But India is still in sleep mode. Given the highly competitive environment, many students see the internet in general and online gaming in particular as a means of improving their mental skills. Chaitanya Banerji, a Class VIII student, spends more than five hours a day online. "The teachers expect us to know everything about everything. Where else will I find all the information? So I keep looking up interesting topics and read about new things and learn new words. At the same time I can play games with my friends. Since I can play while I learn, studies don't seem boring."

NEVER SAY LOGOUT

YOU KNOW YOU ARE AN INTERNET JUNKIE IF YOU...

- See something funny and scream "LOL, LOL"
- Beg your friends to get a chat account so you can "hang out together"
- Find out divorce papers had been served on you six months ago
- Get up at 2am to go to the bathroom but turn the computer on instead

Varun Agrawal, 18, who has just completed Class XII, admits to surfing the Net till 3am every night "to find out about the right courses and colleges". He's online for 10-12 hours a day, watching movies, chatting or simply reading about cars and bikes. Varun younger brother Karan, who sleeps by his side, complains that "sometimes, Varun even dozes off in front of his PC... He doesn't get up to eat and bullies me to get his food to his desk and always makes excuses when the family wants to go out."

Varun may be a classic example. The typical Net addict goes so deep into the cyber-world that he loses touch with real people and situations around him. The Second Life becomes their real life. Khurana says an addict doesn't realize this. "When does an addict say he is an addict," she argues.

In fact, IAD itself remains a controversial diagnosis, with experts differing on whether or not it's a true addiction. Dr S K Khandelwal, senior professor of psychiatry at AIIMS, refuses to call it an ailment that needs prescription. "From time to time, parents bring their schoolgoing children who spend unusually large amount of time online and we counsel them and suggest measures to gradually reduce their time online and do other activities. It's just conselling, I never give them any drugs." But he admits he knows some psychiatrists who prescribe anti-depressants to young adults for Net addiction.

But if it's a problem that requires counselling or medication, why isn't it being taken seriously in India? Khandelwal offeres an answer: "Here we are so busy with patients suffering from serious mental ailments that we have no time and resources to deal with subsidiary psychological problems."

The irony is that both neurofeedback and transcranial magnetic stimulation—treatments being used in clinics abroad—are available in certain Indian hospitals. But no one has bothered to apply these processes for the treatment of Net addiction. This, despite the fact that there's scientific data which suggests that too much time on the internet leads to shrinking of the human brain.

With internet penetration likely to increase manifold, India may see brain drain of a different kind in the near future.

The 'human' robot

First ever robot to have muscles & bones, it also has a brain & can correct own errors

IT LOOKS like a stripped-down version of the *Star Wars* character *C-3PO*.

But this robot is a science fact, not fiction — and one of the most advanced in the world.

Ecci, as it has been named, is the first ever robot to have 'muscles' and 'tendons', as well as the 'bones' they help move. All made of a specially developed plastic.

And most advanced of all, it also has a brain which has the ability to correct its mistakes — a trait previously only seen in humans.

Developed by a team of scientists at the University of Zurich, Ecci, is short for Eccerobot. Ecce in Latin means Lo or Behold.

The robot uses a series of electric motors to move the joints which are connected together by tendons.

And the computer that is built into the brain of Ecci allows him to learn from his mistakes.

If, for example, a movement is causing him to stumble or drop something — the information is studied and analysed to avoid making the same mistake next time.

The creation also has the same vision capacity of humans, despite only having one cyclops style eye.

The scientists now hope their creation will usher in a whole new generation for robots — and could aid development of artificial limbs.
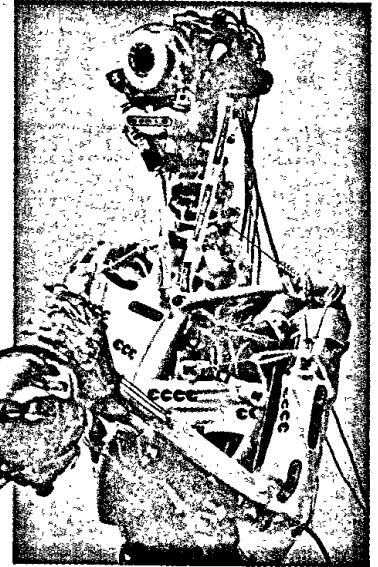
Rolf Pfeifer, who is the director of the laboratory for artificial intelligence at the University said, "It opens up a lot of possibilities but in particular it will help us to understand better how the human moving apparatus works — a complicated task.

"If we can make a robot hand operate like ours then it opens up all sorts of possibilities for artificial limbs. It would also mean a robot that moved like a person could take over some of the jobs done by people where human hands are needed."

Scientists have worked on this multi-million pound project for three years, with funding provided partially by private enterprise alongside ₹13 crore from EU funds.

The team now plans to present a more complete version of Ecci within a span of two months.
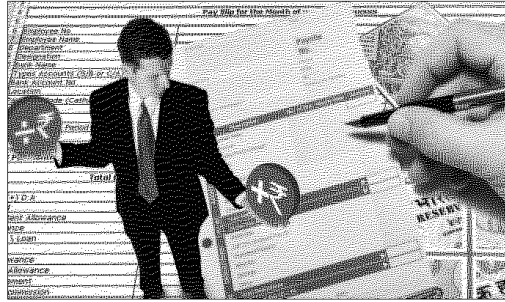
Daily Mail

Ecci is the most advanced robot.

IIM-A to convince recruiters to reveal data about salary

Is drafting all-India placements reporting standards for greater transparency and compatibility between B-schools

PARAG DAVE
AHMEDABAD

The Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (IIM-A) plans to take the lead in convincing recruiters to share data relating to the salaries they offer B-school graduates during recruitment. The details, relating mainly to the guaranteed cash component and variable pay, will be used in a pan-India placement reporting standards initiative that is being adopted by various B-schools. This will help in standardising salaries and making the process more transparent. It will also aim to bring compatibility between business schools.

B-school representatives, who met at a conference hosted by IIM-A last week, said it was not easy to get salary data from recruiters because of confidentiality reasons. To which IIM-A placements committee chairperson, Professor Saral Mukherjee, said his institute would try and convince companies, at various for a, to share the data.

IIM-A had prepared a draft for the placements reporting standards in February, and had sought online feedback from all the stakeholders, like students, recruiters, other B-schools and ranking agencies. IIM-A has already implemented the standards on its campus, informed Prof Mukherjee, adding that the institute was able to get the salary data of 210 out of 312 students. "We will talk to recruiters to get detailed data about the guaranteed cash and Maximum Earning Potential (variable portion) components," Mukherjee said. "If we prepare placements reporting standards only for IIM-A, they will provide transparency and authenticity, but not necessarily compatibility. For that, we need others to do this as well. We have spoken to other B-schools about this, and are open to suggestions from all the stakeholders for the standards."

Some stakeholders are responding positively. Deepika Pandita, assistant professor and place-ment advisor for the Symbiosis Institute of Business Management in Pune, said: "I felt that IIM-A was quite flexible. This is the first time an IIM is going ahead with transparency in the decision-making process, with the support of the other, relatively smaller B-schools."

IIM-A has been trying to bring change at various levels. Last year it replaced the day-based placements process with a 'cohorts' system, which helps reduce pressure on both students and recruiters. In October, it organised a recruiters' conclave in Mumbai, where it invited the placements heads of leading B-schools to give their views on the cohort-based placements process. There weren't that many takers for this, however. "We shared our experience with B-schools during the Mumbai conclave, and we are ready to help any institute take this up," Mukherjee said. "But no institute has contacted us for introducing the cohort-based process yet." Nevertheless, IIM-A has found that a conference or a large gathering of stakeholders is the best way to gauge reactions to a new initiative. Which is why at last week's meeting, it proposed the pan-India placements reporting standards before the participants.

After taking suggestions from the others, IIM-A has made some changes to the reporting standards draft. For instance, a number of B-schools disagreed that since internships are an academic requirement, this should be guaranteed by the institute. The draft was then modified to say that internship data would, henceforth, be segregated, based on whether it was secured through the institute or otherwise.

The conference was attended by representatives from 33 B-schools including the IIMs Bangalore and Shillong, Xavier Institute of Social Services in Ranchi, Goa Institute of Management, Great Lakes Institute of Management, Taxila Business School, SP Jain from Mumbai and others.

"It is good to see that a premier B-school is inviting all the reputed as well as the not so well-known B-schools for discussion on an important issue," said Prakash Pathak, of the Institute of Management Technology, Ghaziabad. IIM-A will also organise a two-day event on redesigning the MBA programme in July, and has already invited a number of business schools to participate in this.