

Research Article

Attitudes Towards Internet Addiction and Its Impact on Mental Health Among University Students in the United Kingdom

Mudiaga Favour Akpuma, MScPH

Department of Interdisciplinary Research and Statistics, PENKUP Research Institute, Birmingham, United Kingdom.

Freedom Nwakaego Igheghe, MScPH

Department of Interdisciplinary Research and Statistics, PENKUP Research Institute, Birmingham, United Kingdom.



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 **Kennedy Oberhiri Obohewemu, PhD**

Department of Interdisciplinary Research and Statistics, PENKUP Research Institute, Birmingham, United Kingdom.

 **Gordon Mabengban Yakpir, PhD**

Faculty of Health, Wellbeing & Social Care, Oxford Brookes University, GBS Partnership, Birmingham Campus, United Kingdom; and Department of Interdisciplinary Research & Statistics, PENKUP Research Institute, Birmingham, United Kingdom.

Ibiangake Friday Ndioho, PhD

Department of Health and Care Management, Arden University, Manchester, United Kingdom; and Department of Interdisciplinary Studies & Statistics, PENKUP Research Institute, Birmingham, United Kingdom.

 **Nneka Angela Oseji, PhD**

Department of Library and Information Science, Faculty of Social Science, Federal University, Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria; and Department of Interdisciplinary Research and Statistics, PENKUP Research Institute, Birmingham, United Kingdom.

 **Obiageli Uzoamaka Onyemelukwe, FWACP**

Alras General Hospital, Alras, Al-Qassim, Saudi Arabia; and Department of Interdisciplinary Research and Statistics, PENKUP Research Institute, Birmingham, United Kingdom.

Morrison Okwudilichukwu Eze, MBBS

Cygnat Healthcare, Woking, United Kingdom; and Department of Interdisciplinary Research & Statistics, PENKUP Research Institute, Birmingham, United Kingdom.

Balaraba Ubanyero John, PhD

School of Psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Arden University, Leeds, United Kingdom; and Department of Interdisciplinary Research and Statistics, PENKUP Research Institute, Birmingham, United Kingdom.

Peace Ogochukwu Daniel-Clement, DDM (in view)

Saskatchewan Polytechnic, Regina, SK, Canada; and Department of Interdisciplinary Research and Statistics, PENKUP Research Institute, Manitoba, Canada

Corresponding Author: Dr. Kennedy Oberhiri Obohewemu, PhD, Department of Interdisciplinary Studies & Statistics, PENKUP Research Institute, Birmingham, United Kingdom. Email: Kennedy.Obohewemu@penkup.com; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5175-1179>.

Abstract

Background: Problematic internet use has become an increasing concern within higher education because of its potential implications for students' psychological wellbeing, academic engagement and behavioural functioning. Although considerable attention has been devoted to the prevalence and predictors of internet addiction, comparatively fewer studies have examined students' attitudes towards internet addiction and its associated mental health consequences within the United Kingdom.

Aim: This study investigated university students' attitudes towards internet addiction and its mental health consequences at the University of Sunderland, with particular emphasis on attitudes relating to behavioural dependence, emotional responses to internet use and the perceived role of the internet in academic and everyday life.

Methods: A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted among 250 undergraduate and postgraduate students at the University of Sunderland using a structured self-administered questionnaire. The attitude component comprised 21 Likert-scale items examining behavioural control, emotional responses, internet engagement and educational use. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, with findings presented as frequencies, percentages and mean scores.

Results: The findings demonstrated that students generally held balanced attitudes towards internet use despite reporting frequent online engagement. While many participants acknowledged being regularly preoccupied with the internet, substantially fewer reported attitudes indicative of behavioural dependence, impaired self-control or emotional withdrawal when attempting to reduce internet use. Internet use was predominantly viewed as a constructive resource for learning, research and other productive activities rather than solely as a source of recreation. The overall mean attitude score (3.34/5) suggested generally favourable attitudes towards responsible internet use while recognising the potential risks associated with excessive online engagement.

Conclusion: The findings suggest that extensive internet use among university students should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of problematic internet use. Rather, attitudes reflected purposeful engagement with digital technologies alongside awareness of the potential behavioural and psychological consequences of excessive use. Universities should therefore prioritise digital wellbeing initiatives that strengthen self-regulation, promote responsible online behaviour and integrate digital wellbeing within broader student mental health strategies. Future research should employ longitudinal and multi-institutional designs to examine how students' attitudes evolve in response to rapidly changing digital learning environments.

Keywords: Internet addiction; problematic internet use; attitudes; mental health; university students; higher education; digital wellbeing; United Kingdom.

INTRODUCTION

The internet has become an indispensable component of contemporary university education, transforming how students access information, engage with learning resources, communicate with peers, and manage academic responsibilities. Digital technologies have enhanced educational flexibility and accessibility while facilitating collaboration and independent learning. Nevertheless, the increasing integration of online technologies into students' daily lives has been

accompanied by growing concern regarding excessive and maladaptive patterns of internet use. What was once viewed primarily as an educational resource has increasingly become recognised as a behavioural health concern when internet use becomes persistent, difficult to control, and sufficiently excessive to interfere with psychological wellbeing, academic functioning, and everyday life. Consequently, problematic internet use has emerged as an important public health issue, particularly within higher education, where students experience unique developmental, academic, and social pressures (Kuss & Lopez-Fernandez, 2016; Sánchez-Fernández et al., 2023).

Although the terms internet addiction, problematic internet use, pathological internet use, and compulsive internet use continue to be used interchangeably throughout the literature, there remains considerable debate regarding their conceptual boundaries and diagnostic status. Contemporary scholarship increasingly favours the broader construct of problematic internet use because it captures maladaptive online behaviours without implying formal psychiatric diagnosis. Systematic reviews have demonstrated substantial heterogeneity in terminology, assessment instruments, prevalence estimates, and diagnostic thresholds across studies, making comparisons difficult while highlighting the need for greater conceptual consistency (Kuss & Lopez-Fernandez, 2016; Sánchez-Fernández et al., 2023). Despite these inconsistencies, there is broad agreement that persistent, uncontrolled internet use can adversely affect emotional wellbeing, interpersonal relationships, sleep quality, academic engagement, and overall functioning among university students (Raj et al., 2022; Singhal et al., 2025; Ntumi et al., 2026).

University students represent one of the populations most vulnerable to problematic internet use. The transition into higher education is often accompanied by increased autonomy, reduced parental supervision, demanding academic workloads, changing social networks, and greater reliance on digital technologies for both educational and recreational purposes. Internet use within universities extends well beyond formal learning to include social networking, entertainment, online gaming, streaming services, shopping, communication, and information seeking. While these activities provide considerable educational and social benefits, excessive engagement may contribute to unhealthy behavioural patterns that are reinforced through continuous online availability and immediate digital gratification. Systematic evidence indicates that university students consistently demonstrate higher exposure to problematic internet behaviours than many other adult populations, making higher education an important setting for prevention and intervention initiatives (Anderson et al., 2017; Sánchez-Fernández et al., 2023).

Growing empirical evidence also demonstrates that problematic internet use is closely associated with adverse mental health outcomes. The most comprehensive quantitative synthesis to date, incorporating more than 498,000 students across 223 studies, reported moderate associations between problematic internet use and depressive symptoms, anxiety, loneliness, psychological distress, and reduced subjective wellbeing. These relationships remained robust across different educational settings, geographical regions, and measurement approaches, suggesting that excessive internet use represents an important correlate of student mental health rather than an isolated behavioural phenomenon (Cai et al., 2023). Although the direction of causality remains under investigation, evidence increasingly suggests a reciprocal relationship in which psychological distress may both contribute to, and be exacerbated by, problematic internet use (Hökby et al., 2016; Brown et al., 2020; Chang et al., 2022).

Recent systematic reviews further demonstrate that problematic internet use rarely occurs in isolation. Rather, it reflects a constellation of interconnected online behaviours, including problematic smartphone use, excessive social media engagement, internet gaming, and other technology-mediated activities. Negative affect, poor psychological wellbeing, fear of missing out, impulsivity, maladaptive coping strategies, poor sleep quality, and excessive time spent online have consistently emerged as significant predictors of problematic digital behaviours among university students. Conversely, protective characteristics such as conscientiousness and healthier self-regulation appear to reduce vulnerability. These findings suggest that internet addiction should not be understood solely as excessive technology use but as a multifactorial behavioural phenomenon influenced by psychological, cognitive, emotional, and environmental factors (Elhai et al., 2020; Sánchez-Fernández et al., 2023).

Contemporary theoretical developments support this multidimensional perspective. The Interaction of Person–Affect–Cognition–Execution (I-PACE) model proposes that problematic online behaviours arise through dynamic interactions between individual predispositions, affective responses, cognitive processes, executive functioning, and reinforcement

mechanisms operating within digital environments. Rather than attributing problematic internet use exclusively to technology itself, the model emphasises how personal vulnerabilities, emotional regulation, cognitive biases, and environmental influences interact to shape maladaptive online behaviour over time. Recent systematic reviews of university populations have concluded that the available empirical evidence broadly supports this theoretical framework, particularly regarding the influence of psychological variables and patterns of online engagement on behavioural outcomes (Brand et al., 2019; Sánchez-Fernández et al., 2023).

While considerable research has examined the prevalence, predictors, and mental health consequences of problematic internet use, comparatively less attention has been devoted to students' attitudes towards internet addiction and its psychological implications. Attitudes are important because they influence behavioural intentions, help shape responses to health information, and affect individuals' willingness to recognise problematic behaviours or engage with preventive interventions. Students who perceive excessive internet use as socially acceptable or harmless may be less likely to identify early warning signs or seek support when behavioural problems emerge. Conversely, greater awareness of the psychological consequences associated with problematic internet use may encourage healthier digital behaviours and facilitate earlier intervention. Understanding these attitudes therefore provides valuable insight into how students interpret internet-related risks and the extent to which educational initiatives may influence behavioural change.

This issue has become increasingly important as universities expand digital learning environments and continue integrating online technologies into virtually every aspect of higher education. Following the rapid acceleration of digital teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, internet-based learning, communication, and assessment have become firmly embedded within routine academic practice. Although these developments have delivered substantial educational benefits, they have also blurred the distinction between necessary academic engagement and excessive recreational internet use. This changing digital landscape reinforces the importance of examining not only students' online behaviours but also their perceptions and attitudes towards internet addiction and its potential consequences for mental health (Geng et al., 2021; Cai et al., 2023).

Despite the expanding international literature, evidence from UK universities remains relatively limited compared with studies conducted in Asia and other regions. Furthermore, relatively few investigations have explored students' attitudes alongside the recognised mental health implications of problematic internet use within the contemporary British higher education context. Addressing this gap is important because attitudes towards internet addiction may be influenced by cultural, educational, and institutional environments, potentially affecting the design and effectiveness of health promotion strategies (Kuss & Lopez-Fernandez, 2016).

Accordingly, the present study examines university students' attitudes towards internet addiction and its mental health consequences within a UK higher education institution. Specifically, the study explores students' perceptions of problematic internet use, their attitudes towards its psychological and academic consequences, and the implications of these attitudes for student wellbeing and institutional health promotion. By extending understanding beyond prevalence estimates and behavioural predictors, the study contributes to the growing evidence base informing university policies aimed at promoting healthier digital engagement and supporting student mental health.

METHODS

Study Design

A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was adopted to examine university students' attitudes towards internet addiction and its mental health consequences. A cross-sectional approach was considered appropriate because it permits the assessment of attitudes within a defined population at a single point in time while facilitating the identification of prevailing behavioural tendencies and associated patterns. The study formed part of a broader investigation exploring students' knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of internet addiction and mental health, with the present paper focusing exclusively on the attitudinal component of the dataset.

Study Setting

The study was conducted at the University of Sunderland, United Kingdom. The University provides a diverse learning environment comprising students from multiple academic disciplines, educational levels, age groups, and national backgrounds. This diversity provided an appropriate setting for examining attitudes towards internet addiction within a contemporary higher education context.

Participants and Sampling

Participants were registered students enrolled at the University of Sunderland during the study period. Eligibility criteria required participants to be currently enrolled students aged 18 years or older and willing to provide informed consent before completing the questionnaire. Students who declined consent or returned substantially incomplete questionnaires were excluded from the analysis.

Participants were recruited using a convenience sampling strategy. Although probability sampling would have enhanced generalisability, convenience sampling was considered appropriate because of practical constraints associated with accessing a dispersed university population within the available study period. The approach enabled recruitment across different faculties and levels of study while ensuring adequate variation in participant characteristics.

Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire developed from the literature on internet addiction, mental health, and knowledge, attitude, and perception studies. The questionnaire consisted of four sections. The first collected socio-demographic information, including age, gender, faculty, programme of study, educational level, and internet use characteristics. The remaining sections measured knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, and factors associated with internet addiction.

The present paper reports only the attitude component of the questionnaire. Attitudes towards internet addiction and its mental health consequences were assessed using twenty-one items measured on three-point and five-point Likert-type response scales. The items explored participants' views regarding internet use behaviours, perceived risks associated with excessive internet use, attitudes towards behavioural control, and beliefs concerning the psychological and academic consequences of internet addiction. The questionnaire was designed to capture both favourable and unfavourable attitudes towards problematic internet use while maintaining consistency across items.

Data Collection Procedure

Following ethical approval, eligible students were invited to participate voluntarily. Participants received information outlining the purpose of the study, confidentiality procedures, anonymity, and their right to withdraw without consequence. Completion of the questionnaire implied informed consent. Responses were collected anonymously to minimise social desirability bias and encourage honest reporting of attitudes towards internet addiction and mental health.

Variables

The principal outcome variable was students' attitudes towards internet addiction and its mental health consequences. Socio-demographic variables, including age, gender, faculty, educational level, and selected internet use characteristics, were recorded as descriptive variables to characterise the study population.

Statistical Analysis

Data were entered, cleaned, and analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics were initially generated to summarise participant characteristics and individual questionnaire responses. Continuous variables were summarised using means and standard deviations, whereas categorical variables were presented as frequencies and percentages.

For the attitude component, mean scores were calculated for individual questionnaire items to determine the overall direction and strength of participants' attitudes towards internet addiction and its mental health consequences. Higher mean scores indicated stronger endorsement of favourable attitudes towards responsible internet use and greater

recognition of the adverse psychological consequences associated with excessive internet use. The findings are presented using descriptive tables and narrative interpretation.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the University of Sunderland Research Ethics Committee before data collection commenced. Ethical principles governing research involving human participants were observed throughout the study. Participation was entirely voluntary, informed consent was obtained before questionnaire completion, and no personally identifiable information was collected. Participants were informed that they could discontinue participation at any stage without penalty. Data were stored securely and analysed in aggregate form to preserve anonymity and confidentiality. The study was conducted in accordance with institutional ethical requirements and the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki.

RESULTS

Participant Characteristics

A total of 250 students from the University of Sunderland participated in the study. Participants represented different age groups, genders, faculties and patterns of internet use, providing a diverse sample through which attitudes towards internet addiction and its mental health consequences could be examined. The detailed demographic profile has been reported elsewhere (Akpuma et al., 2026) because the present paper focuses specifically on students' attitudes rather than participant characteristics.

Attitudes Towards Internet Addiction and Its Mental Health Consequences

Students' attitudes towards internet addiction were assessed using a 21-item Likert-scale instrument examining behavioural tendencies, emotional responses to internet use, perceived dependence, and the educational and practical uses of the internet. The complete item responses are summarised in Table 1 and Figure 1.

Table 1: Students' Attitudes Towards Internet Addiction and Its Mental Health Consequences

Attitude towards Internet Addiction	5	4	3	2	1	Mean
I am usually preoccupied with the internet	66 (26.4%)	99 (39.6%)	52 (20.8%)	26 (10.4%)	7 (2.8%)	3.76
I do derive satisfaction only when long hours are spent on the internet	36 (14.4%)	49 (19.6%)	66 (26.4%)	53 (21.2%)	46 (18.4%)	2.90
I do experience failed attempts at cutting back, controlling, or stopping internet use	39 (15.6%)	56 (22.4%)	65 (26.0%)	42 (16.8%)	48 (19.2%)	2.98
I do have feelings of restlessness, depression and irritability when attempting to reduce time spent on the internet	27 (10.8%)	40 (16.0%)	42 (16.8%)	50 (20.0%)	91 (36.4%)	2.45
I make a lot of business dealings on the internet	52 (20.8%)	65 (26.0%)	80 (32.0%)	33 (13.2%)	20 (8.0%)	3.41
I enjoy using the internet for learning purposes	98 (39.2%)	66 (26.4%)	56 (22.4%)	24 (9.6%)	6 (2.4%)	3.90

I use the internet to stay connected with many people	112 (44.8%)	69 (27.6%)	37 (14.8%)	26 (10.4%)	6 (2.4%)	4.02
I use the internet often to learn new skills	83 (33.2%)	75 (30.0%)	61 (24.4%)	23 (9.2%)	8 (3.2%)	3.81
I do spend more time on the internet than planned	68 (27.2%)	69 (27.6%)	63 (25.2%)	31 (12.4%)	19 (7.6%)	3.54
I always envisage and am fixated with thoughts about the internet when offline.	41 (16.4%)	51 (20.4%)	50 (20.0%)	54 (21.6%)	54 (21.6%)	2.88
I often use the internet to escape feelings of guilt, depression, and other dysphoric moods	38 (15.2%)	45 (18.4%)	53 (21.2%)	51 (20.4%)	62 (24.8%)	2.77
I use the internet for research purposes	72 (28.8%)	72 (28.8%)	72 (28.8%)	20 (8.0%)	14 (5.6%)	3.63
Total Mean Value						3.34

Note: 5= always, 4= Often, 3= Occasionally, 2= Rarely, 1= Not at all

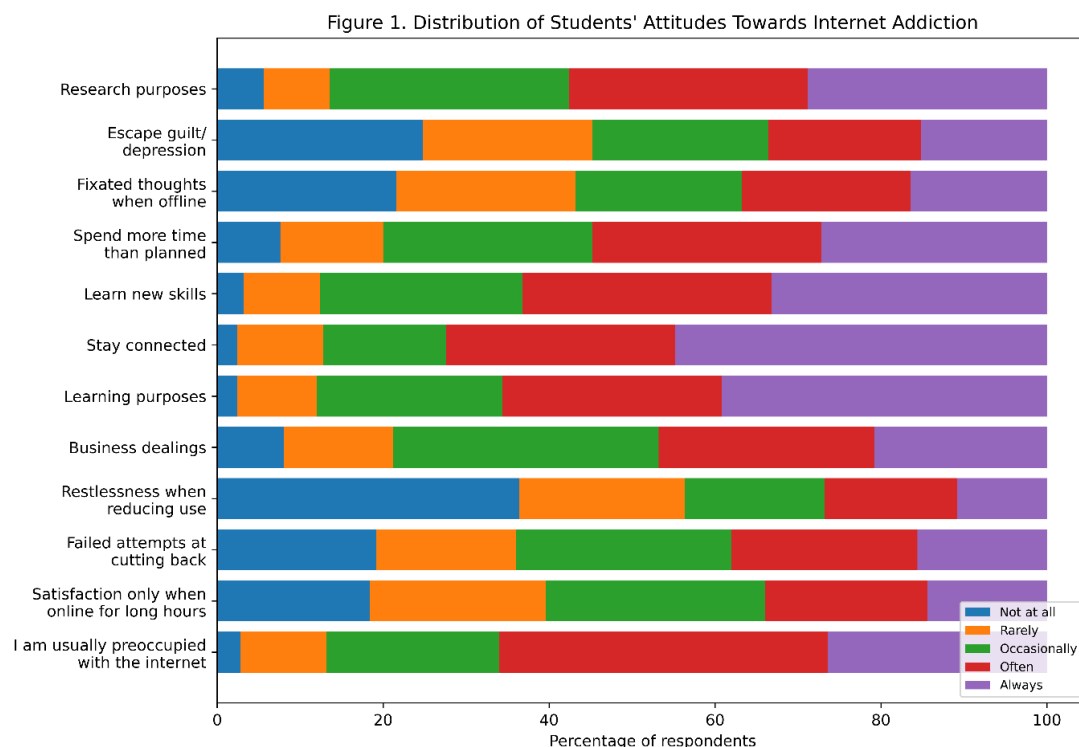


Figure 1: Distribution of Students' Attitudes Towards Internet Addiction and Its Mental Health Consequences

The findings indicate that students generally demonstrated attitudes that were inconsistent with problematic or addictive internet use. Although approximately two-thirds of respondents acknowledged being frequently preoccupied with the internet, this pattern was not consistently accompanied by behaviours typically associated with internet addiction. For example, substantially fewer participants reported persistent enjoyment derived solely from internet use, while many indicated that such experiences occurred only occasionally or rarely. These findings suggest that frequent internet

engagement did not necessarily reflect maladaptive dependence but rather the extensive integration of digital technologies into everyday academic and social activities.

Similarly, participants reported relatively limited difficulty in regulating their internet use. While a minority indicated that they always or often experienced difficulty reducing the amount of time spent online, the majority reported that such difficulties occurred only occasionally, rarely, or not at all. Likewise, emotional responses commonly associated with behavioural addiction, including feelings of restlessness, irritability, or low mood when attempting to reduce internet use, were reported infrequently by most respondents. Collectively, these findings suggest that although internet use was widespread within the student population, behavioural indicators of problematic dependence were comparatively uncommon.

An important finding was the predominance of constructive rather than maladaptive internet use. Nearly half of the respondents reported frequent use of the internet for business-related activities, indicating that online engagement extended beyond leisure and entertainment. Even more notably, almost two-thirds reported using the internet frequently for learning purposes, with only a small minority indicating limited educational use. These findings reinforce the educational significance of internet technologies within contemporary higher education and suggest that students primarily viewed the internet as a productive academic resource rather than solely a source of recreation.

The attitude findings thus indicate that University of Sunderland students generally recognised both the benefits and potential risks associated with internet use. Although internet engagement formed an integral part of students' daily lives, attitudes towards excessive internet use were generally cautious, reflecting awareness of the potential behavioural and psychological consequences associated with uncontrolled use. Rather than indicating widespread problematic internet behaviour, the results suggest that students largely adopted balanced attitudes characterised by frequent but purposeful internet use.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that university students generally held balanced attitudes towards internet use despite reporting frequent engagement with digital technologies. Although internet use was deeply embedded in students' academic and social lives, attitudes indicative of behavioural dependence were comparatively uncommon. This distinction is important because it suggests that frequent internet use should not automatically be interpreted as problematic or addictive. Contemporary higher education increasingly relies on digital platforms for teaching, communication, assessment and independent learning, meaning that extensive internet use has become a normal feature of university life rather than a direct indicator of maladaptive behaviour. These findings reinforce recent systematic evidence demonstrating that the quantity of internet use alone is a poor marker of problematic internet use without considering behavioural control, psychological functioning and the consequences of online engagement (Kuss & Lopez-Fernandez, 2016; Anderson et al., 2017; Sánchez-Fernández et al., 2023).

A notable observation was that many students reported frequent preoccupation with the internet. Yet, substantially fewer endorsed attitudes reflecting loss of control, emotional distress or unsuccessful attempts to reduce internet use. This pattern supports the growing recognition that cognitive engagement with digital technologies may simply reflect the realities of contemporary university education, where academic activities, communication and social interaction increasingly occur within digital environments. Rather than representing addiction, frequent online engagement may therefore reflect adaptive responses to educational demands. Similar conclusions have been reported in recent reviews showing that problematic internet use is characterised less by time spent online than by impaired self-regulation, compulsive behavioural patterns and adverse functional consequences (Brand et al., 2019; Sánchez-Fernández et al., 2023).

The relatively low endorsement of emotional withdrawal symptoms, including restlessness, irritability and depressive feelings when attempting to reduce internet use, further suggests that severe behavioural dependence was uncommon within this cohort. Emotional dysregulation has consistently been identified as one of the defining characteristics of problematic internet use and behavioural addictions more generally (Gioia et al., 2021). The absence of widespread withdrawal-type attitudes may therefore indicate that most participants retained adequate behavioural control despite

extensive internet engagement. The updated I-PACE model proposes that addictive online behaviours emerge through interactions between personal vulnerabilities, affective responses, cognitive processes and diminished executive control rather than through technology exposure alone (Brand et al., 2019). The present findings are broadly consistent with this framework because attitudes associated with compulsive behavioural processes were considerably less prevalent than indicators of routine educational internet use.

An equally important finding concerned the predominantly constructive purposes for which students reported using the internet. Large proportions of respondents indicated frequent use for learning, research and business-related activities. These findings highlight the dual nature of digital technologies within higher education. Although excessive internet use has been associated with poorer psychological wellbeing, reduced academic performance and impaired social functioning, digital technologies simultaneously remain indispensable educational resources. Recent systematic reviews similarly conclude that problematic internet use should be understood within the broader context of specific online activities rather than as a homogeneous construct, since educational use differs substantially from maladaptive engagement with gaming, social media or other recreational behaviours (Anderson et al., 2017; Sánchez-Fernández et al., 2023).

The results also have practical implications for universities seeking to promote student wellbeing. Educational interventions that focus exclusively on reducing internet use may overlook the essential role of digital technologies in modern learning. More effective strategies are likely to emphasise responsible digital engagement, self-regulation skills and awareness of behavioural warning signs rather than encouraging simple reductions in screen time. Recent evidence indicates that psychological factors such as impulsivity, negative affect, maladaptive coping, poor sleep quality and reduced conscientiousness are more consistent predictors of problematic internet use than internet exposure itself (Koronczi et al., 2019; Hidalgo-Fuentes et al., 2024; Pino et al., 2024). Digital interventions targeting psychological wellbeing and self-regulation among university students have shown small-to-moderate positive effects, supporting the value of integrated approaches (Ferrari et al., 2022; Penachioti et al., 2026; Roy et al., 2026). Consequently, university wellbeing programmes may benefit from integrating digital wellbeing education with broader mental health promotion initiatives aimed at strengthening emotional regulation and healthy coping strategies.

Several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting these findings. The cross-sectional design precludes conclusions regarding causal relationships between attitudes and internet use behaviours. Self-reported responses may also have been influenced by recall bias or social desirability, particularly for behaviours perceived negatively. Furthermore, data were collected within a single UK university, which may limit wider generalisability to institutions with different student populations, educational practices or cultural contexts. Future research would benefit from multi-institutional studies employing longitudinal designs to examine how students' attitudes evolve alongside changing patterns of digital engagement and emerging educational technologies. Greater integration of objective behavioural indicators with self-reported attitudes may also provide a more comprehensive understanding of problematic internet use among university students (Moreno et al., 2019; Xia et al., 2021; Martínez-Murciano et al., 2026).

The evidence nevertheless indicates that students generally distinguished between productive educational internet use and behaviours indicative of problematic dependence. This distinction has important implications for higher education policy because it suggests that promoting healthy digital habits should focus less on reducing internet exposure and more on fostering self-regulated, purposeful and psychologically adaptive engagement with online technologies. Such an approach aligns more closely with contemporary conceptualisations of problematic internet use as a multifactorial behavioural phenomenon shaped by individual, psychological and contextual influences rather than by internet use alone (Brand et al., 2019; Gioia et al., 2021; Sánchez-Fernández et al., 2023).

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings have several implications for higher education policy and practice.

First, digital wellbeing initiatives should move beyond encouraging reductions in screen time and instead promote healthy, purposeful and self-regulated internet use. Given the central role of digital technologies in teaching and learning, interventions should acknowledge that frequent internet use is often both necessary and beneficial.

Second, universities should incorporate education on problematic internet use within broader student wellbeing programmes. Raising awareness of behavioural warning signs, emotional dysregulation and maladaptive coping strategies may facilitate earlier recognition of unhealthy internet use and encourage timely help-seeking.

Third, institutional support services should integrate digital wellbeing with existing mental health provision. Preventive interventions focusing on emotional regulation, stress management and adaptive coping may be more effective than approaches targeting internet use alone, given the close relationship between psychological wellbeing and problematic online behaviours reported in the literature.

Finally, universities should continue to develop learning environments that encourage balanced digital engagement while maintaining opportunities for meaningful face-to-face interaction, peer support and social connectedness. Such approaches may help students maximise the educational advantages of digital technologies while minimising the potential behavioural and psychological risks associated with excessive internet use.

CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrate that university students generally exhibited balanced attitudes towards internet use despite extensive engagement with digital technologies. Although frequent internet use formed an integral part of participants' academic and social lives, attitudes indicative of behavioural dependence, emotional withdrawal and impaired behavioural control were comparatively uncommon. These findings reinforce the distinction between high levels of internet engagement and problematic internet use, suggesting that extensive online activity within higher education should not be interpreted as evidence of addiction without considering its purpose, context and functional consequences.

The predominance of educational, research and business-related internet use further highlights the increasingly indispensable role of digital technologies within contemporary universities. While problematic internet use remains an important public health concern, the findings suggest that students primarily viewed the internet as a productive academic resource rather than solely as a recreational medium. This distinction has important implications for institutional policy because interventions aimed simply at reducing internet use are unlikely to reflect the realities of modern higher education. Instead, universities should prioritise initiatives that promote responsible digital engagement, strengthen self-regulation, encourage healthy online habits and improve awareness of behaviours associated with problematic internet use.

The study also contributes to the growing body of evidence suggesting that attitudes towards internet addiction provide valuable insight into students' readiness to recognise problematic online behaviours and engage with preventive strategies. Understanding these attitudes may assist universities in designing more targeted digital wellbeing programmes that complement existing mental health services while supporting positive academic engagement.

Future research should extend this work through multi-institutional and longitudinal investigations that examine how students' attitudes evolve alongside rapidly changing digital technologies and educational practices. Greater integration of objective measures of internet use with validated psychological assessments would further strengthen understanding of the complex relationship between internet engagement, behavioural regulation and mental wellbeing. Such evidence will be essential for developing evidence-informed institutional policies that maximise the educational benefits of digital technologies while reducing the risks associated with problematic internet use.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

All authors played a substantive role in shaping this study and developing the manuscript. M.F.A. conceptualised the work and designed the overall study framework. Data analysis, theme development and validation of findings were carried out collaboratively, with each author contributing to the discussions that informed the final results. G.M.Y, I.F.N. and K.O.O. prepared the initial manuscript draft, covering the introduction, methods, results and discussion. Co-authors strengthened the analysis, offered detailed revisions and enhanced the clarity and coherence of the final document. Every author reviewed the complete manuscript, approved the final version and accepted responsibility for the integrity of the work.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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