Adolescents’ Involvement in Internet Games: From Therapeutic Recreation Perspectives

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I. INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of adolescents’ problem behaviors in relation to internet addiction is well documented. Internet addiction can be a significant threat to one’s health and social well-being in that it enforces antisocial behavior (Whitaker & Bushman, 2011). While relations among various adolescents’ internet addiction problems have been well established, the literature identifying relations among different antisocial behaviors and linking prosocial to antisocial behaviors is far from clear. Adolescents who are addicted to the Internet may fail to complete homework or chores because they lose track of time while on the computer. Using the computer at night can lead adolescents to oversleeping in the morning and difficulty waking for school. The addicted adolescents may spend less time with friends and instead rely on virtual friends for social support. While some teens turn to the internet because they are depressed, others may become depressed after spending long hours on the computer(Widyanto & Griffiths, 2006). A study conducted by Cao and Su(2006) found that adolescents who used the Internet pathologically increased their risk of depression by two and a half times when compared to counterparts who did not have an Internet addiction. Adolescents uncontrollably use the internet games to relieve stress, cheer up or for sexual gratification, generally preferring to make their social connections with strangers online. Adolescents feel anxious or irritable when away from the computer games and are more likely to alienate themselves from friends and family. Young (2009) argued that reducing the amount of time adolescents spends on the computer is the first step in overcoming Internet addiction. A few studies indicated an inverse relationship between adolescents’ health-risk behaviors, such as substance use and deviant behavior, and youth health-enhancing behaviors, such as sport participation and safety practices(Bocarro,
Involvement is a means of understanding an individual’s behavior and attitude (Buswell, Zabriskie, Lundberg, & Hawkins, 2012). Rothschild (1984) defined involvement as “an unobservable state of motivation, arousal or interest” (p.217). Havitz and Dimanche (1990) defined involvement as “a psychological state of motivation, arousal, or interest between an individual and recreational activities, tourist destinations, or related equipment, at one point in time, characterized by the perception of the following elements: importance, pleasure, sign value, risk probability, and risk consequences” (p.184). Recently, involvement-related research has gained interest in the leisure and sport field as researchers have tried to examine adherence of and discontinuance of participation in leisure and sport activities. One reason for the great interest of researchers in involvement construct in leisure and sport is its focus on recreationists’ motives which can be portrayed as a crucial variable in the decision making (Cheng & Tsaur, 2012).

Conceptually distinct definitions have been proposed, resulting in several methodological approaches to the study of involvement. Park, Lee, Seo, and Choi (2010) argued that one of the main criticisms of these studies is the lack of comparability of research findings because of differences in the definitions and conceptualization of involvement construct. Recent interest in the involvement concept has gone beyond conceptual and measurement discussions. Some researchers conceptualized involvement from a unidimensional aspect (e.g., Jin, Na, & Lee, 2011; McGehee, Yoon, & Cardenas, 2003). According to Zaichkowsky (1985), involvement refers to the degree to which an individual devotes him or herself to an activity or associated product, stating that “a person may be involved with advertisements, with products, or with purchase decisions” (p.341). The extent to which level of involvement change according to length of engagement in internet games is not clear.

Involvement has been viewed as a multifaceted psychological construct by contemporary researchers (Buswell et al., 2012; Kyle, Bricker, Graefe, & Wickham, 2004; Laurent & Kapferer, 1985). According to Havitz, Dimanche, and Howard (1993), involvement should not be oversimplified by categorizing into high and low involvement, suggesting that multidimensional interpretations generated stronger content and face validity. That is, adolescents who are addicted to the Internet may not be satisfactorily measured through a single dimension of involvement. However, disagreement exists as to which facets are salient in measuring involvement. Havitz and Dimanche (1990) stated “Multifaceted scales that portray the involvement construct as a profile of scores, rather than a single score, are most appropriate for measuring involvement with recreational and tourist experience” (p. 184). Similarly, Kapferer and Laurent (1985) highlighted that consumers’ involvement may not be satisfactorily measured through a single dimension of involvement, and viewing involvement as a unidimensional construct will not provide a more complete picture of a consumer’s relationship to engagement in internet game activities. Thus, multidimensionality of involvement will provide a better insight into adolescents’ reasons to continue engagement in internet games. Laurent and Kapferer (1985) suggested involvement profiles, identifying five subdimensions of involvement: 1) perceived importance, 2) self-expression, 3) pleasure, 4) risk importance, and 5) risk probability. Whereas most subdimensions have been used in a variety of contexts, those five components have been examined primarily in leisure and sport research. Park (2010) et al, contended that although involvement is often explained by only measuring a consumer’s perceived