DISRUPTION OF PERSONAL IDENTITY FORMED ON THE BASIS OF INTERNET ADDICTION AND PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC APPROACHES TO MODERN MOWGLI SYNDROME

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the psychological disruption of personal identity caused by chronic internet addiction and its correlation with the emergence of the so-called "Modern Mowgli Syndrome"—a psychosocial condition characterized by detachment from societal norms, emotional isolation, and impaired self-concept development. Drawing on interdisciplinary research in clinical psychology, neurocognition, and digital behavioral studies, the paper analyzes how persistent virtual immersion distorts identity formation processes, especially among youth, leading to developmental stagnation, dissociative tendencies, and maladaptive social behaviors. Furthermore, the study critically evaluates current psychotherapeutic approaches—including cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), schema-focused therapy, and integrative digital detox programs—aimed at restoring identity coherence and reintegrating individuals into real-world social structures. The research underlines the urgent need for preventive mental health strategies and therapeutic innovations adapted to the realities of digital-age psychopathology.

KEYWORDS

Internet addiction, personal identity disruption, Modern Mowgli Syndrome, digital psychology, psychotherapeutic intervention, cognitive-behavioral therapy, digital immersion, emotional isolation, youth psychopathology, virtual dependency.

INTRODUCTION

The onset of the digital era has catalyzed unprecedented transformations in human cognition, socialization, and identity construction, profoundly altering the ontological framework through which individuals, particularly youth, experience reality and interpret the self. As cyberspace increasingly mediates social interaction, entertainment, and knowledge acquisition, it has concurrently engendered novel psychopathological patterns that reflect the psychological costs of prolonged and unregulated digital immersion. Chief among these is internet addiction—a behavioral dependency defined by compulsive engagement with online environments to the detriment of offline functionality and psychosocial well-being. At the nexus of digital dependency and psychological disintegration emerges a clinical condition informally termed the "Modern Mowgli Syndrome," a metaphorical yet diagnostically significant construct that encapsulates the socio-emotional, cognitive, and developmental derailing of individuals estranged from traditional human relationality due to their overidentification with virtual realities. This syndrome, though not yet canonized within the DSM-5 or ICD-11 taxonomies, mirrors increasingly observable clinical phenomena wherein identity cohesion is severely

disrupted, emotional regulation is compromised, and normative psychosocial development is arrested. The theoretical underpinnings of identity formation have long been situated within the frameworks of psychoanalysis, symbolic interactionism, and developmental psychology, each emphasizing the dialogical interplay between the individual and the sociocultural environment. In the age of digitization, however, the environment itself has been reconstituted into a hybridized and, at times, hyperreal domain, wherein self-presentation, social feedback, and interpersonal validation are mediated through algorithmic infrastructures and disembodied communicative interfaces. Internet addiction, as a persistent behavioral condition, disrupts the dialectical processes of identity stabilization by encouraging disinhibited self-expression, reinforcing superficial validation loops, and fragmenting temporal continuity between digital and physical self-representations. The resultant condition is not merely one of behavioral excess but one that significantly impairs the ontogeny of selfhood and the capacity for affective reciprocity—hallmarks of healthy psychological development.

Contemporary scholarship on internet addiction—initially proposed by Kimberly Young (1998) and later expanded through empirical validation—identifies core diagnostic criteria, including tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, unsuccessful attempts to control usage, and functional impairments across social, occupational, or academic domains. However, beyond behavioral typologies, what remains critically underexplored is the ontological rupture instigated by digital overreliance. The identity of the individual—once conceived as an evolving synthesis of narrative continuity, intersubjective reflection, and corporeal situatedness—is now increasingly constructed, performed, and, in many cases, disassociated within digital platforms. Adolescents and young adults, in particular, due to neurodevelopmental plasticity and a heightened need for peer validation, are vulnerable to the substitutive gratifications of online engagement, which mimic but do not replicate the depth of real-life social attachments. The phenomenon of the Modern Mowgli Syndrome emerges as a psychosocial analogy to feral development. The classical mythos of Mowgli, raised outside human society and deprived of normative socialization, is repurposed here to illustrate a condition whereby individuals, though physically embedded in society, are cognitively and emotionally dissociated from its interpersonal matrices[1]. In the context of internet addiction, this dissociation is not due to absence of care but rather the substitution of human connectivity with digital surrogates—avatars, online personas, and parasocial interactions. These interactions, while superficially fulfilling, lack the affective depth, ethical accountability, and reciprocal embodiment that characterize genuine human relationships, thereby impeding the development of empathy, moral reasoning, and a stable narrative identity. Neuroscientific studies further elucidate the mechanisms through which internet addiction disrupts identity formation. Functional MRI analyses have revealed that excessive internet usage—particularly gaming and social media—modulates activity within the prefrontal cortex, anterior cingulate cortex, and reward circuitry (notably the nucleus accumbens), paralleling patterns observed in substance use disorders. The dopaminergic surges triggered by digital stimuli foster an addictive feedback loop, wherein the pursuit of instant gratification overrides long-term goal-setting and reflective self-evaluation. Simultaneously, the overstimulation of reward systems can impair the maturation of executive functions, thereby compromising impulse control, emotional regulation, and the capacity for delayed gratification—all of which are integral to identity consolidation. In this regard, Modern Mowgli Syndrome reflects not just a psychosocial aberration but a neurocognitive derangement

that emerges from the chronic disjunction between digital pleasure-seeking and real-world adaptive functioning[2]. Moreover, identity in the digital age is often fragmented across multiple platforms, each demanding curated performances tailored to specific audiences—Instagram aesthetics, TikTok entertainment, Twitter opinions, and gaming avatars—leading to an incoherent and at times contradictory sense of self. The phenomenon of "context collapse," wherein boundaries between social roles and identity performances dissolve in the digital realm, further complicates identity formation. Rather than cultivating a cohesive self-narrative, individuals may develop a series of compartmentalized personas, none of which reflect the authentic or integrated self. This ontological fragmentation is particularly perilous during adolescence and early adulthood, developmental stages during which Erikson posited the psychosocial task of "identity vs. role confusion" as central. Failure to achieve integration at this stage can result in prolonged identity diffusion, existential insecurity, and susceptibility to psychopathological disturbances. It is within this framework that psychotherapeutic intervention becomes both necessary and complex[3]. Traditional psychotherapeutic models—such as psychoanalysis and person-centered therapy—presume a stable, embodied subject capable of introspective engagement and verbal articulation. However, in cases of Modern Mowgli Syndrome, the subject often lacks not only the language but the very experiential grounding necessary for such engagement. Therefore, emerging therapeutic paradigms must be adapted to address the unique psychopathologies of digitally mediated identity disruption. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), for instance, has demonstrated efficacy in treating internet addiction by restructuring maladaptive cognitions and reinforcing behavioral regulation. Yet, CBT alone may not suffice to restore narrative identity or foster emotional integration, necessitating the incorporation of schema-focused therapy, narrative therapy, and attachment-based interventions. Equally important is the role of psychoeducation in preventing the escalation of digital dependency into full-blown identity dysfunction. Educators, parents, and mental health professionals must collaborate to cultivate digital literacy, emotional intelligence, and embodied relational skills in youth[4]. Digital hygiene programs that emphasize balanced media usage, self-reflection, and offline socialization are essential components of such preventive strategies. Furthermore, institutional recognition of the Modern Mowgli construct may contribute to more targeted diagnostic tools and tailored therapeutic modalities that integrate technological awareness with psychological resilience. The sociocultural context must also be considered in analyzing and addressing this phenomenon. In highly digitized societies where online presence is equated with social capital and professional viability, the pressure to maintain constant connectivity exacerbates the risk of identity diffusion. The capitalist logic of platform economies, which monetize attention and commodify user behavior, further entrenches addictive usage patterns. In such an environment, individual agency is constantly undermined by algorithmic manipulation and the gamification of interaction, making the task of psychotherapeutic restoration both a personal and political undertaking. Importantly, the Modern Mowgli Syndrome must not be pathologized in isolation from its systemic determinants. The rise of digital dependency is not merely a matter of individual choice but a reflection of broader societal failures—alienation, hyperindividualism, weakening familial bonds, and the erosion of communal spaces[5]. Therefore, the therapeutic response must transcend the clinic and engage with public health frameworks, educational reform, and digital policy to cultivate environments conducive to healthy identity formation. Interventions

must be informed by an integrative biopsychosocial model that accounts for neurological, psychological, and sociocultural variables. In this context, it is vital to critically evaluate the ethical dimensions of technological integration. The design of digital platforms is not neutral but imbued with values and intentions that shape user behavior. The persuasive design techniques employed by tech corporations—such as infinite scroll, variable rewards, and algorithmic filtering—exploit cognitive vulnerabilities, particularly in youth, thereby reinforcing maladaptive engagement patterns. A critical pedagogy of technology, embedded in school curricula and public discourse, is therefore essential to cultivate mindful digital citizenship and prevent the dehumanization implicit in digital overdependence. The disruption of personal identity through internet addiction and the ensuing emergence of Modern Mowgli Syndrome constitute a multi-layered psychosocial crisis that demands urgent scholarly and clinical attention. This condition epitomizes the dialectical tension between technological advancement and human psychological integrity, between virtual omnipresence and emotional absence[6]. As the boundaries between the digital and the real continue to blur, the imperative to preserve and rehabilitate the integrated self becomes not only a clinical necessity but a civilizational responsibility. The present study endeavors to contribute to this evolving discourse by delineating the psychological mechanisms underlying identity disruption, analyzing the symptomatic expressions of Modern Mowgli Syndrome, and evaluating the psychotherapeutic interventions capable of restoring psychosocial equilibrium in an era of digital dislocation.

The contemporary individual, particularly adolescents and young adults, now increasingly experience their socialization, emotional regulation, and self-understanding through algorithm-driven platforms that prioritize immediacy, visibility, and curated performativity over depth, introspection, and authenticity. This shift has led to an observable increase in psychosocial maladjustments such as identity diffusion, emotional detachment, social withdrawal, and dependency on digital validation—core features embedded within what this study defines as the "Modern Mowgli Syndrome." Unlike previously well-documented identity crises that emerged within the boundaries of familial, educational, or community structures, the modern iteration is deeply embedded in technologically mediated, non-relational frameworks that mimic human interaction while eroding its psychological substance[7]. This phenomenon is particularly dangerous because it unfolds not through sudden traumatic ruptures but through gradual desensitization and neurocognitive conditioning, rendering individuals incapable of sustaining meaningful relationships, delaying gratification, or engaging in authentic self-reflection. As digital immersion intensifies, so does the collapse of stable personal narratives, giving rise to behavioral patterns resembling those of feral socialization — wherein basic affective and interpersonal skills are underdeveloped despite physical proximity to society. The term "Modern Mowgli Syndrome" symbolically captures this paradox of digital ferality within the hyper-connected world and highlights the critical need to study the condition as an emergent form of psychological detachment. This research is especially relevant given the increasing prevalence of internet addiction reported in clinical settings across multiple countries, and the alarming statistics indicating rising rates of anxiety, depression, and identity disorders among digitally immersed youth populations[8]. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this process by normalizing remote learning, virtual relationships, and screen-mediated communication, compounding the risk of emotional

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isolation and identity disruption. Moreover, in many regions, there remains a lack of formal diagnostic criteria, therapeutic protocols, or institutional awareness of this emerging syndrome, leaving affected individuals without appropriate clinical intervention or societal support. This study, therefore, contributes to both the theoretical conceptualization and clinical articulation of a condition that, while yet to be formally codified, is increasingly shaping the psychic landscape of a generation. Furthermore, the relevance of this research is amplified by its critical implications for psychotherapeutic practice[9]. Traditional therapeutic models, many of which were developed in pre-digital contexts, may no longer suffice to address the complexities of digitally induced identity fragmentation. As such, this article not only diagnoses the psychosocial rupture but also evaluates innovative therapeutic approaches, including cognitive-behavioral therapy, narrative reconstruction, schema therapy, and digital detox protocols tailored to the psychological conditions of internet-dependent individuals. It also foregrounds the importance of developing a hybrid therapeutic model—one that bridges classical psychoanalytic concerns with the demands of 21st-century neurocognitive and behavioral challenges. Given the rising global demand for mental health services, the inability of existing clinical paradigms to fully comprehend or treat the digital self underscores the urgent need for scholarly engagement, empirical exploration, and clinical adaptation, which this study actively seeks to advance[10]. Finally, from a societal and policy-making perspective, the article's relevance extends to educational reform, digital literacy programming, and public health strategy. In a world where children are increasingly introduced to digital environments at an early developmental stage, and where social media becomes a formative space of identity rehearsal, the risks associated with uncritical digital exposure must be addressed at the systemic level. Therefore, the significance of this research is not confined to psychological diagnostics or therapeutic modalities but speaks to the broader challenge of preserving human psychological integrity in the face of technological acceleration. By conceptualizing Modern Mowgli Syndrome as a clinical and sociocultural construct, this article fosters a comprehensive understanding of how internet addiction is not merely a behavioral excess but a transformative force that demands interdisciplinary scrutiny and multi-level intervention.

CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of identity disruption resulting from internet addiction represents a pressing psycho-social and clinical issue in contemporary society, particularly among adolescents and young adults. The empirical and theoretical findings presented in this study confirm that excessive immersion in virtual environments leads to significant alterations in self-concept, emotional regulation, and interpersonal functioning. Individuals affected by this condition—conceptualized herein as exhibiting characteristics of the so-called "Modern Mowgli Syndrome"—demonstrate impaired social adaptation, weakened attachment to real-life cultural and familial norms, and the internalization of fragmented digital identities. These disruptions are most acutely observed in developmental stages where identity formation is crucial, thus making young individuals especially vulnerable. The "Modern Mowgli Syndrome" metaphor effectively encapsulates a psychosocial withdrawal wherein the individual, like the mythic child raised outside human society, constructs a self-image detached from social reality and deeply embedded in digital narratives. This disconnection fosters cognitive-emotional dissociation, loneliness, and chronic escapism, often masking deeper psychopathologies such

as depression, anxiety, or unresolved trauma. The convergence of identity confusion and internet dependency creates a closed feedback loop in which attempts to alleviate psychological distress through online immersion further deteriorate one's authentic sense of self. In addressing this dual pathology, psychotherapeutic interventions must operate at both the cognitive and affective levels. Evidence-based modalities such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), narrative therapy, and schema therapy have demonstrated promising outcomes in re-establishing coherent identity structures and reducing maladaptive digital dependence.

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