Article

Cognitive Patterns and Coping Mechanisms in the Context of Internet Use

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Abstract: Recent research indicates there are different cognitive patterns and coping mechanisms related to increased levels of Internet use and emotional distress in adolescents. This study aims to investigate the relationship between coping mechanisms, dysfunctional negative emotions, and Internet use. A total of 54 participants aged between 14 and 19 years old completed a questionnaire containing several measures and demographics information. We measured participants' coping strategies, emotional distress, social and emotional loneliness, and their online behavior and Internet addiction using self-report questionnaires. In order to identify the relation between the investigated variables, we used correlation analysis and regression, and we tested one mediation model. The results showed that maladaptive coping strategies and Internet use were significant predictors of dysfunctional negative emotions. Moreover, passive wishful thinking, as a pattern of thinking, was associated with anxious and depressed feelings. The relation between Internet use and dysfunctional negative emotions was mediated by participants' coping mechanisms. Therefore, we can conclude that the level of negative feelings is associated with the coping strategies used while showing an increased level of Internet addiction. Future studies should also consider different and multiple types of measurement other than self-reports, especially related to Internet addiction.

Keywords: Internet addiction; dysfunctional emotions; coping strategies; emotional problems

1. Introduction

The Internet and the use of social networks are becoming important influences in the lives of adolescents. More than 70% of adolescents use one or more social networks, and 92% of 13–14-year-old adolescents use the Internet daily, as reported by the Pew Research Center [1]. Considering the growing importance of social networks in adolescents' daily lives, there is an increasing interest in the side effects of the use of these platforms. Several studies have shown that the use of the Internet may affect adolescents' well-being and mental health. [2–4].

Internet addiction refers to the loss of control over Internet use [5] and can be linked to serious emotional distress and socialization problems in everyday life [6,7]. Excessive use of the Internet means, among other things, investing a lot of time and effort in being present on social networks and neglecting basic needs, such as sleep, physical activity, food, or hygiene [8]. Regarding the emotional problems that are associated with Internet addiction, studies have found that anxiety and depression are among the most frequent issues among adolescents [9–11]. There is a bidirectional relationship between internalizing problems and Internet use; in other words, adolescents with negative dysfunctional emotions are

more likely to find refuge in the virtual world, and on the other hand, increased use of the Internet exacerbates negative dysfunctional emotions and loneliness over time. Internet addiction functions similarly to substance addictions, with characteristics that include withdrawal and loss of control [12,13].

When it comes to negative emotions that adolescents may experience, the binary model of distress may explain how the qualitative differences between emotions can dissociate between functional and dysfunctional emotions [14,15]. Contrary to the unitary model of emotions [16], which states that dysfunctional negative emotions (e.g., anxiety) differ from functional negative emotions (e.g., concern) only based on quantitative reasons, the binary model assumes that dysfunctional emotions appear when irrational beliefs are present, regardless of their intensity [17,18]. Moreover, dysfunctional negative emotions are linked to action tendencies, such as acting in a way that leads to experiencing pain, preventing their goals from being reached, and acting in the opposite direction of their goals [19]. According to Lazarus's transactional stress and coping model [20], the way in which individuals may act in a stressful situation depends on their appraisal of the stressor and their coping strategies. Therefore, in our study, we chose to look at both the adolescents' coping strategies and their dysfunctional emotions. The coping strategies involve cognitive and behavioral resources directed at eliminating or minimizing demands [20]. Usually, there are two major ways of coping with stress: problem-focused coping, which is centered on the management of the sources of stress, and emotion-focused coping, which deals more with the regulation of stressful emotions [20].

Studies have shown that there are adaptive and less-adaptive coping strategies: the first one can facilitate well-being and strong mental health, while the second one can impair mental and physical health [21]. Task-oriented coping is associated with lower psychological distress and less disruptive behaviors, whereas emotion-focused coping was found to be linked with more emotional and behavioral problems. [22]. A recent study [23] that investigated 508 undergraduate students aged 18–24 years showed that less-adaptive coping strategies were the main predictor of emotional problems, such as anxiety depression, and stress. Another study that used a cross-sectional survey design recruited 326 participants to examine coping styles and depressive mood in teenagers and found similar results, namely, that symptoms such as sadness or unhappiness for an unspecific period of time can be predicted by avoidant coping strategies [24]. The relation between less-adaptive (maladaptive) coping strategies and anxiety and depression symptoms has also been investigated in large samples. For example, Meng et al. [25] enrolled 13,512 adolescents aged between 12 and 19 years and investigated how psychological mechanisms were linked to mental health problems. Their results showed that coping mediated the relationship between life events and mental health. Considering all of the above-mentioned evidence, we hypothesized that coping styles could be strongly related to negative dysfunctional emotions, and we decided to investigate their impact on adolescents' mental health. We defined adaptive coping strategies according to a revised version of Lazarus theory [24] as problem-focused strategies, such as rational problem solving and seeking support and ventilation, and maladaptive coping strategies based on avoidance, such as resigned distancing and passive wishful thinking.

Adolescence is considered to be a period of great changes at many levels: social, physical, psychological, moral, and spiritual [26]. This period is characterized by a struggle to define their own selves in relation to the social world [27]. Considering the fact that several studies have shown that social relations are associated with psychological well-being [28,29] and that social isolation is associated with loneliness [30], there is a need for a better understanding of how adolescents perceive their online social life.

Several studies have shown that there are some personality traits and temperamental characteristics that make some individuals more prone to become Internet addicts [31,32]. Among the most investigated features are high impulsivity, low self-esteem, and increased levels of shyness [33,34]. Additionally, recent literature suggests that we should also take into consideration the type of device that adolescents are using when analyzing Internet

addiction. Some researchers believe that the omnipresence and ubiquitous characteristics of smartphones may be important components of addictions [35]. Moreover, given the fact that Internet addiction is also associated with poor self-control [36] and that smartphones have become an essential part of our daily activities, the risks of overusing the technology are even higher. Therefore, we propose a theoretical model that researchers should consider when investigating the impact of Internet use on the lives of adolescents. As shown in Figure 1, the following components should be considered when investigating the impact of Internet use on adolescents: Internet addiction with the two components dependency and compulsive behavior, the type of coping mechanism (either adaptive or maladaptive), and emotional distress involving both social and emotional loneliness and functional positive or negative emotions vs. dysfunctional positive or negative emotions. All of the above-mentioned components may impact an adolescent's academic performance, well-being, and social adaptation.
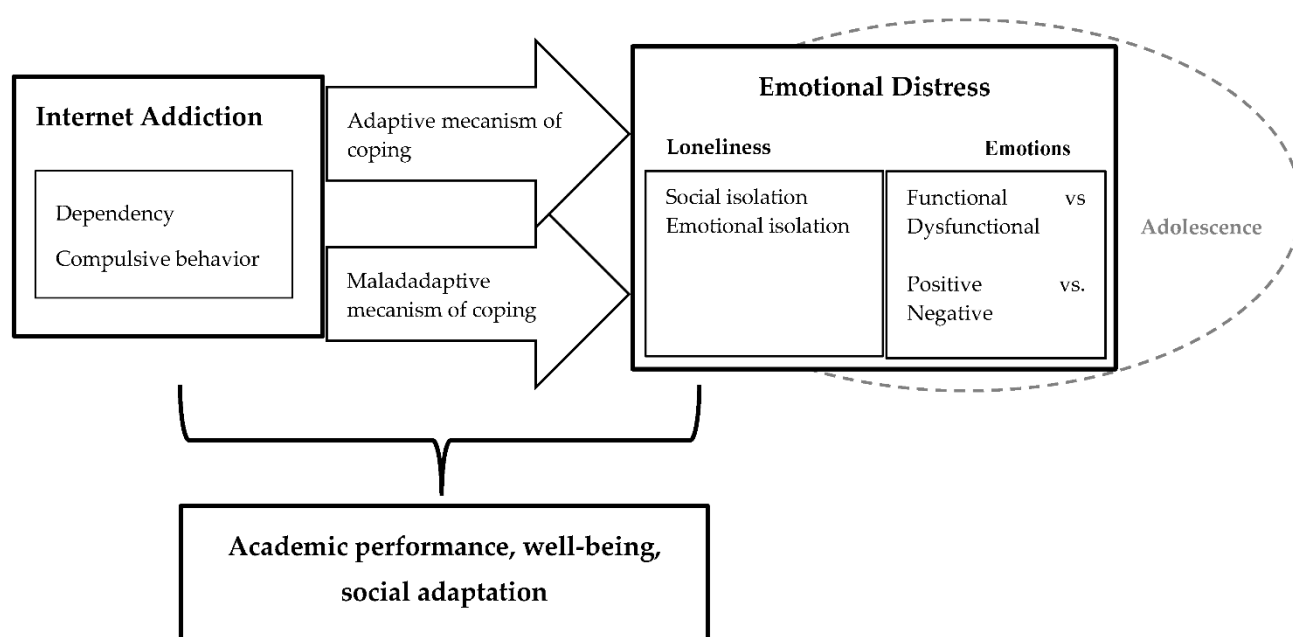

Figure 1. Proposed theoretical model.

In conclusion, adolescents are facing developmental challenges and issues regarding their college lives and social lives. Because of these challenges, they sometimes seek social support in social networks, and other times, they feel that they are ignored or neglected in their online virtual social lives and feel anxious or depressed. Either way, the strategies that they choose to use to cope with these challenges or social loneliness may affect their mental health and well-being. Understanding these bidirectional relations, along with the major factors that are related to adolescents' emotional problems and negative dysfunctional emotions, may lead us to relevant information that can be used by teachers, parents, and mental health professionals to determine the most suitable mental health intervention and prevention strategies. Therefore, this study has six major hypotheses: 1. There is a positive relation between Internet addiction and dysfunctional negative emotions; 2. There is a positive relation between negative dysfunctional emotions and maladaptive coping strategies; 3. There is a positive relation between and social and emotional isolation and coping strategies; 4. Internet addiction predicts increased levels of dysfunctional negative emotions; 5. Maladaptive coping strategies predict dysfunctional negative emotions; and 6. Coping strategies mediate the relation between Internet addiction and dysfunctional negative emotions. Although there are several studies that investigated the link between psychological, social, and family factors and Internet Addiction, to our knowledge, there are no studies that looked at this particular connection between dysfunctional negative

emotions, coping strategies, and Internet addiction. The added value of this research work lies in the fact that we analyze this relationship from a different point of view that considers not only the valence of emotions but also the functionality of the emotions (function vs. dysfunctional emotions) that adolescents experience in relation to the use of the Internet. Our study also provides a complex theoretical model that is partly tested in this research and that can represent a starting point for future studies in understanding the dynamics between Internet addiction behaviors and psychological factors.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

Fifty-four adolescents aged 14–19 years participated in this study. All of our participants were attending high schools in Romania, mainly in Transylvania, and 68.5% were from urban areas and 31.5% were from rural areas. The mean age was 16.9 with a standard deviation of 1.13. All participants completed the questionnaires online. Before answering the questions from the standardized survey, they filled in some information regarding their demographics, social network preferences, and devices.

2.2. Design and Procedure

In order to test our hypothesis, we used a correlational design and completed a regression and mediation analysis. After gaining informed consent, the questionnaires were completed using Google Forms and sent to one of the researchers of the study. The subjects had the option to receive personalized psychological reports based on what they had completed in the questionnaires regarding their online behavior, coping strategies, functional and dysfunctional emotions, and emotional and social loneliness. The study was carried out according to the law concerning the conduct of psychological studies, including abidance by international ethical standards foreseen in the updated Helsinki Declaration of Human Rights. We obtained the approval of the faculty ethics committee to conduct the study under the code Research Ethical Approval/10 October 2019. Data were used while respecting regulations regarding the subject's privacy and identity protection, and informed consent was obtained from each participant.

2.3. Instruments

The Internet Addiction Test [37] is a 20-item questionnaire that measures the characteristics and the severity of online behaviors, such as dependency and compulsive behavior. The questions also assess difficulties related to personal and social functioning that may occur due to Internet use. The scale was created by adapting the DSM-IV criteria for gambling pathology and uses a 6-point Likert scale, which ranges between "5 = always" and "0 = not applicable" [31]. The instrument was translated into Romanian and adapted for this particular research work by two independent psychologists. *The Internet Addiction Test* has an acceptable psychometric indicator (Cronbach alpha = 0.72).

The Profile of Affective Distress [38] is a 39-item scale that measures functional and dysfunctional negative emotions, such as anxiety, sadness, depression, or fear, and likewise for positive emotions. The items are grouped into 7 subscales and are rated directly from "1 = not at all" to "5 = very much". The overall distress score is obtained by summing the scores for the 26 directly rated negative items and the 13 reversely rated positive items. The higher the score, the more distress the participant experiences. Aside from the global score of distress, scores for all of the subscales can be calculated.

The Emotional/Social Loneliness Inventory [39] (Cronbach alpha = 0.86) scale was developed to measure both loneliness and isolation from a social and emotional perspective. The instrument has 15 items distributed on 4 subscales: social loneliness (items 1–8, first set of questions), emotional loneliness (items 1–8, the second set of questions), social isolation (items 9–15, first set of questions), and emotional isolation (items 9–15, the second set of questions). ESLI uses a 4-point Likert scale, which includes "3 = almost always true", "2 = often true", "1 = sometimes true", and "0 = almost never true", and its items

are grouped in pairs to highlight a person's perception of a situation and how they feel about it.

The Ways of Coping Questionnaire [40] is the original form of the instrument used in our study and is a 68-item checklist covering a wide range of cognitive and behavioral coping activities, but after a series of studies developed by distinct research groups produced different results, the WCQ scale was reduced to 16 items. In our study, we used a revised version of the instrument, which has 4 subscales that include adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies such as rational problem solving, resigned distancing, seeking support and ventilation, and passive wishful thinking [35]. The above-mentioned short version of the questionnaire has good psychometric indicators (Cronbach Alpha = 0.62 for resigned distancing and 0.70–0.74 for the other subscales), and it was used to measure regulation strategies among both students and teachers in secondary education.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive Analysis

When analyzing adolescents' responses to the instruments applied, we found that the majority of them had positive emotions (42%), and only 21% showed negative dysfunctional emotions. However, we found that the mean of affective distress in our sample was 85.64, which represents a high level of distress. Regarding the score of Internet Addiction, with mean = 33.62, our sample indicated the presence of a mild level of Internet addiction. Among the most frequently used coping strategies by our participants, we found that rational problem solving was the most used, followed by resigned distancing and passive wishful thinking. Table 1 presents the mean, standard deviation, and minimum and maximum values of our sample.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations for the measured variables.

	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Internet Addiction Test (total score)	**33.629**	**15.313**	**4.00**	**70.00**
Emotional/Social Loneliness Inventory	23.463	18.282	0.00	70.00
Social Loneliness	6.78	5.05	0.00	21.00
Emotional Loneliness	6.50	6.04	0.00	22.00
Social Isolation	4.79	4.04	0.00	15.00
Emotional Isolation	5.39	5.12	0.00	18.00
Ways of Coping Questionnaire	**30.388**	**8.605**	**0.00**	**46.00**
Rational Problem Solving	8.42	2.71	0.00	12.00
Resigned Distancing	5.81	2.49	0.00	10.00
Seeking Support and Ventilation	8.07	3.29	0.00	12.00
Passive Wishful Thinking	8.07	3.12	0.00	12.00
The Profile of Affective Distress	**85.648**	**26.53**	**46.00**	**163.00**
Positive Emotions	41.98	13.372	15.00	64.00
Negative Dysfunctional Emotions	21.83	10.58	14.00	60.00

Correlation analysis (* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$).

Considering the high score that our participants had on the Internet Addiction Test, we analyzed the way in which they spent their time on the Internet. Our findings showed that 90% of the participants spent their time on social networks and listening to music. The teenagers' favorite devices included smartphones, laptops, and tablets, and when it comes to favorite social networking sites, the applications that obtained the highest scores among the subjects were Messenger, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook (see Figure 2). Generally, the subjects reported less than an hour of activity on each social network; nevertheless, some of them spent more than 6 h on the Internet (see Figure 3).
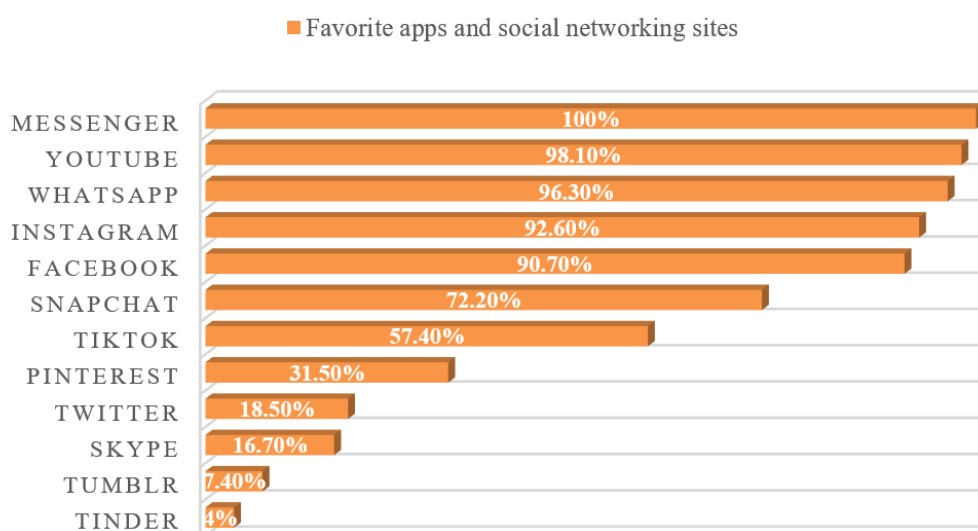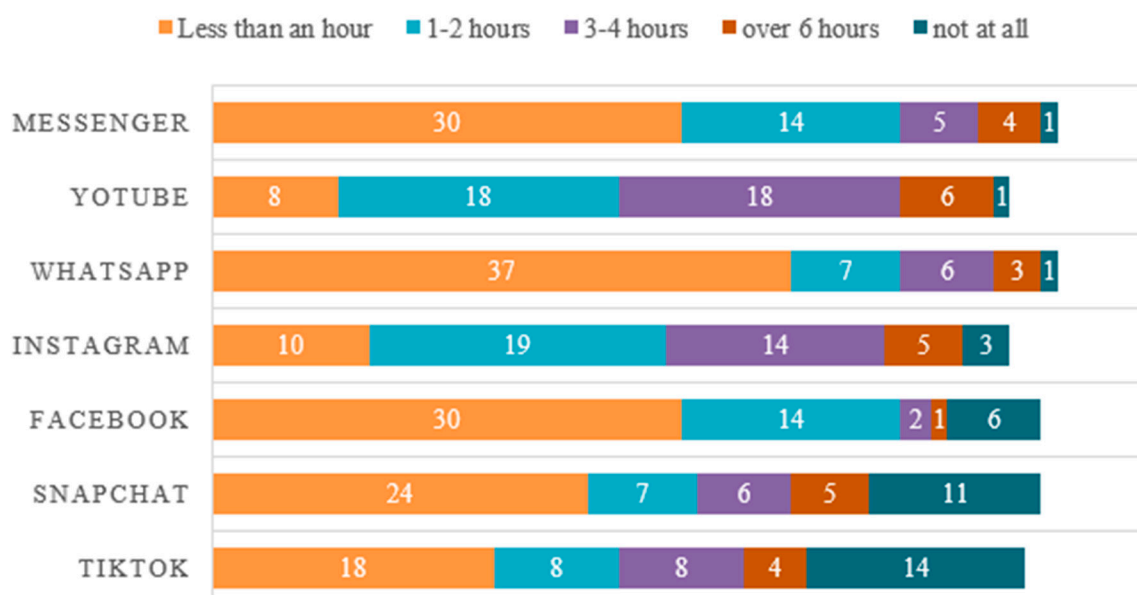
Figure 2. Favorite apps and social networks.

Figure 3. Time spent on each social network.

3.2. Correlation Analysis

When analyzing the relationship between Internet addiction and dysfunctional negative emotions, we found a significant positive correlation between the two variables ($r(54) = 0.351$, $p < 0.001$), meaning that if Internet dependence increased, dysfunctional negative emotions also increased. We were interested to see which negative emotions were associated with Internet dependence. Firstly, we looked at emotions that are linked to depressed mood, and we found that Internet addiction was strongly correlated with feeling grief ($r(54) = 0.360$, $p < 0.001$), hopeless ($r(54) = 0.342$, $p < 0.05$), useless ($r(54) = 0.344$, $p < 0.001$), and desperate ($r(54) = 0.332$, $p < 0.001$) (see Table 2). Afterwards, we found that there were emotions linked to anxious mood, which were also correlated with Internet addiction, such as terrified ($r(54) = 0.357$, $p < 0.001$), frightened ($r(54) = 0.287$, $p < 0.05$), and nervous ($r(54) = 0.317$, $p < 0.05$) (see Table 3).

Table 2. Association between Internet dependency and the dysfunctional negative emotions desperate, useless, hopeless, and grief.

	1	2	3	4	5
Internet Addiction Test	1				
Desperate	0.332 *	1			
Useless	0.344 *	0.493 **	1		
Hopeless	0.342 *	0.638 **	0.688 **	1	
Grief	0.360 **	0.777 **	0.599 **	0.614 **	1

Correlation analysis (* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$).

Table 3. Association between Internet dependency and the dysfunctional negative emotions terrified, frightened, and nervous.

	1	2	3	4	5
Internet Addiction Test	1				
Terrified	0.357 **	1			
Frightened	0.278 *	0.899 **	1		
Fearful	0.136	0.709 **	0.707 **	1	
Nervous	0.317 *	0.350 **	0.425 **	0.317 *	1

Correlation analysis (* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$).

3.2.1. The Association between Emotional Problems and Coping Strategies

When it comes to the association between social and emotional isolation and the coping strategies that the participants used, we found that passive wishful thinking was positively associated with social loneliness (r(54) = 0.526, $p < 0.001$), emotional loneliness, (r(54) = 0.580, $p < 0.001$), social isolation (r(54) = 0.515, $p < 0.001$), and emotional isolation (r(54) = 0.552, $p < 0.001$). This means that maladaptive coping strategies are associated with emotional problems. Meanwhile, adaptive coping strategies are associated with reduced emotional loneliness. For example, seeking support and ventilation negatively correlates with emotional isolation (r(54) = −0.325, $p < 0.05$). Additionally, we found a strong association between seeking support and ventilation and adaptive coping (r(54) = 0.357, $p < 0.001$) (see Table 4).

Table 4. Association between coping strategies and social and emotional loneliness.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Social Loneliness	1							
Emotional Loneliness	0.801 **	1						
Social Isolation	0.662 **	0.798 **	1					
Emotional Isolation	0.525 **	0.868 **	0.825 **	1				
Rational Problem Solving	0.195	0.168	0.109	0.160	1			
Resigned Distancing	0.052	−0.039	−0.160	−0.129	0.478 **	1		
Seeking Support and Ventilation	−0.173	−0.325 *	−0.225	−0.227	0.478 **	0.546 **	1	
Passive Wishful Thinking	0.526 **	0.580 **	0.515 **	0.552 **	0.438 **	0.315 **	0.176	1

Correlation analysis (* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$).

3.2.2. Regression Analysis

In order to identify possible predictors of dysfunctional negative emotions, we conducted a multiple regression. As a predictive analysis, multiple linear regression is used to explain the relationship between one continuous dependent variable and two or more independent variables. We included the following variables in the regression model: Internet addiction and coping strategies (according to Hypotheses 4 and 6). Among the four types of coping strategies investigated, i.e., rational problem solving, resigned distancing, seeking support and ventilation, and passive wishful thinking, only the last one represented a significant predictor of negative dysfunctional thinking. The results of the regression indicated that the model explained 45% of the variance and was a significant predictor of dysfunctional negative emotions $F(2,51) = 6.732$, $p < 0.05$. Both the use of the Internet in an addictive way (B = 2.734, SE = 1.162,003 β = 0.302, $p < 0.05$) and using an avoidant coping strategy (B = 0.192, SE = 0.089, β = 0.277, $p < 0.05$) predicted negative dysfunctional emotions (see Table 5).

Table 5. Multiple regression to predict dysfunctional negative emotions from Internet addiction and passive wishful thinking.

	Model 1			**Model 2**		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Constant	16.386	2.332		10.932	3.385	
Passive wishful thinking	3.343	1.166	0.370 *	2.734	1.162	0.302 *
Internet addiction				0.192	0.089	0.277 *

$p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.01$; $R^2 = 0.457$; $\Delta R^2 = 0.209$ (model 2).

3.3. Mediation Analysis

In order to identify possible mediators of the relation between Internet addiction and dysfunctional negative emotions, we used a bootstrapping procedure for assessing indirect effects; this approach is based on a methodology proposed by Preacher and Hayes [41]. This method was proven to be more reliable when compared either to Baron and Kenny's mediation procedure [42] or to Sobel test approach [43] because it is not dependent on the sample size and it does not assume a normal sampling distribution of the indirect effect [44]. In our study, we used the Preacher and Hayes mediation script for SPSS. We used bootstrapping tests with 500 re-samples and calculated the bias-corrected and accelerated confidence interval [45]. Mediation is considered to be present when the confidence interval for the estimation of the indirect effect does not contain 0. Theoretically speaking, while a mediation effect would imply a significant correlation between the independent variable and the outcome (i.e., a significant total effect), an indirect effect is not based on this assumption [46]. Our correlations suggest that a maladaptive coping strategy (passive wishful thinking) is linked to both Internet addiction and dysfunctional negative emotions; therefore, we conducted a mediation analysis with Internet addiction as an independent variable, negative dysfunctional emotions as a dependent variable, and passive wishful thinking as a mediator. The results revealed that passive wishful thinking (indirect effect = 0.1069, 95% CI = 0.0321–1819) mediated the relation between Internet addiction and dysfunctional negative emotions. The indirect effect diagrams are presented in Figure 4.
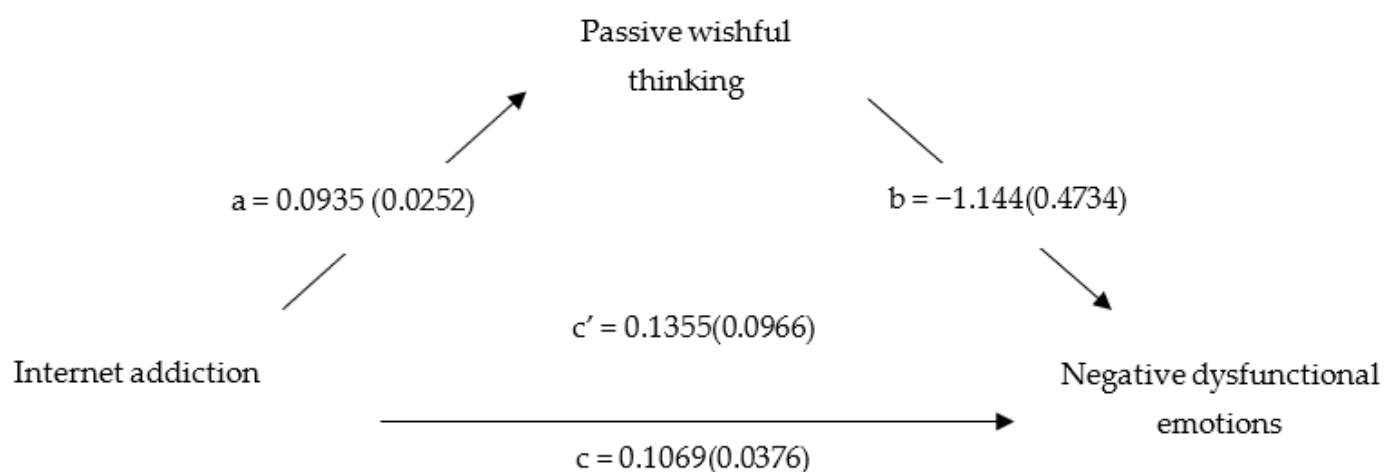
Passive wishful
thinking

a = 0.0935 (0.0252)   b = −1.144(0.4734)

c′ = 0.1355(0.0966)

Internet addiction   Negative dysfunctional
emotions

c = 0.1069(0.0376)

Figure 4. Values are path coefficients representing unstandardized regression weights and standard errors. The paths are represented as follows: a = independent variable to mediator; b = mediator of dependent variable; c = total effects of independent variable on dependent variable; c′ = direct effect of independent variable on dependent variable.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

Considering the fact that Internet addiction is so high among adolescents, a fact that was also proven in our sample, meaning that our results show that the adolescents who participated in the study have a mild level of Internet addiction, there is a need for more studies to highlight the consequences of this phenomenon. In our research, we looked at not only the amount of time spent online but also how adolescents from Romania spent their time online. Our findings suggest that the most preferred activity online among youngsters (90.7%) is surfing on social networks, followed by listening to music online and watching movies. The most used social networks are Messenger, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook. We also analyzed the amount of time that youngsters spend on their favorite network, and we found that 55% of them spend less than 1 hour on Messenger and 25% of them spend between 1 and 2 hours on Messenger. YouTube seems to be the online activity that is most engaging: 33% of the participants answered that they spend between 3 and 4 h per day on YouTube. After analyzing the online behaviors of our participants, we focused on their emotions and coping mechanisms.

Regarding their emotional pattern, almost half of them (43%) declared that they have positive emotions, such as happy, content, and joyful; this illustrates that the majority of the participants can manage their emotional state and express functional negative emotions. Only 21% of them showed dysfunctional negative emotions, of which the most prevalent are anxious, depressed, hopeless, and desperate. Even if only a small number of adolescents from our sample present this type of emotion, from our results, we found that the affective distress level is pretty high compared to the general population. These results are relevant considering the fact that there are studies showing that there is an association between Internet addiction and mental disorders, such as depression or social anxiety [47]. Therefore, we can conclude that almost a quarter of our sample is at risk of developing serious mental health problems, such as depression or anxiety.

Our findings suggest that there is an association between Internet addiction and dysfunctional negative emotions, especially those emotions related to sadness and anxiety. This was proven by the Pearson correlations developed in order to test our first hypothesis. Considering the fact that the main activity online is being on social networks, we believe that there are some particularities of online activity that need to be further investigated in order to prevent the appearance of mental health problems. For example, 40% of the participants in our study responded that their main activity on social networks is to share their experience with their friends and chat about it. The contents of online stories need to be further investigated in order to better reveal the source of the teenagers' distress.

When testing our second hypothesis, we found that the way in which adolescents interpret reality or a social situation is associated with the way that they feel. Specifically, we found that among the investigated coping strategies, passive wishful thinking is associated with dysfunctional negative emotions. This type of coping refers to the fact that individuals imagine different positive future scenarios and dream about them, but they do not act in order to fulfill their dreams. Compared to rational problem solving, which is a more adaptive means of coping whereby individuals take actions and prepare themselves for the worst scenarios, previous research has shown that passive wishful thinking is more associated with emotional distress [23–25]. Our fourth and fifth hypotheses investigated this relation in terms of prediction. Therefore, we used a multiple regression model to investigate whether coping strategies and Internet addiction predict dysfunctional negative emotions. Our results show that both Internet addiction and one specific maladaptive coping strategy (i.e., passive wishful thinking) predict emotional distress. This relation was previously investigated in both typical and atypical populations, and similar results to ours were found [48]. Internet addiction predicts negative emotions, but when we tested our sixth hypothesis, we found that the coping style mediates the relation between Internet addiction and emotional distress. Thus, even when adolescents from our group show a mild level of Internet addiction, the appearance of dysfunctional emotions is mediated by the way that they interpret the online behaviors of others and their own.

There are several important implications of our research; firstly, it is important to know which are the most common activities of adolescents online and from which type of applications and sites they get their information. Considering the fact that they use a lot of applications that allow them to communicate in writing with their friends (Messenger, WhatsApp), we suggest that mental health specialists involved in school programs focus more on written assertive communication and social skills when using online platforms. On the other hand, children should also benefit from classes regarding how to select and interpret the information that is posted on social networks. Secondly, our findings show that there is a connection between Internet use and emotional distress; even though there are also other relevant factors that may influence the level of distress in adolescents, parents, teachers, and mental health specialists should pay more attention to their online behavior. Depression and anxiety symptoms may influence their academic performances and quality of life, and therefore, we should be aware and consider all the factors that may contribute to an increased level of emotional distress. Thirdly, even though depressed mood and anxiety symptoms may be linked to Internet use, we found in our research that the way that adolescents interpret the situation mediates the relation between the two. Therefore, task-oriented coping strategies seem to be more effective in reducing emotional distress, whereas emotion-focused coping strategies are less effective. Passive wishful thinking—as a coping strategy—may also be linked to the content that adolescents access online; for example, they watch other friends' posts, activities, and achievements, without having real information about the necessary steps in order to achieve certain goals. Proactivity and reappraisal strategies could be part of their educational programs and also be considered as alternatives to annual evaluation systems.

Although our results are in line with the findings of other researchers [23–25] who showed that there is a link between coping strategies and negative emotions, the use of the Internet and its consequences add an interesting view of this relation. More specifically, when analyzing the types of maladaptive coping strategies, we found that passive wishful thinking is highly correlated with dysfunctional negative emotions, meaning that adolescents imagine different positive future scenarios and dream about them, but they do not act in order to fulfill their dreams, and this can increase their anxiety and depressive mood. However, there are also studies that claim [35] that the possible negative impact of technology overuse on our daily activities could be less significant than our current level of concern regarding these issues.

There are a few limitations that need to be considered when interpreting the results of our research. Our measurements do not cover all of the possible factors that may influence

the level of emotional distress, such as irrational beliefs, family background, personality traits, etc. Moreover, even the collected information regarding Internet use and emotional distress must be interpreted with caution because it reflects the opinions of the participants (self-report). More objective measures and information from different sources should be included in future studies, such as direct observation, daily motorizing, and interviews with parents, teachers, and friends.

Through our findings, we only partially validated the proposed theoretical model, mainly because we did not include instruments that measure well-being, academic performance, or social adaptation in our study. These variables represent important features that can be linked to Internet addiction and emotional distress. Future studies should involve measurements such as well-being, social adaptation, and academic performance for a better understanding of the phenomena of Internet cognitive factors and Internet use and should also use a larger sample of adolescents. Furthermore, it may be interesting to analyze the way that their online behavior and coping strategies change during development, i.e., at different ages in adolescence.

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