

Goal-Directed Behaviors: The Eight Motivators

In the early 1900s, Alfred Adler argued that all human behavior is goal-driven. For Adler, this teleological perspective was foundational to understanding why people make the choices they do. Human behaviors actually have “payoffs” – desired goals that are met through specific behaviors. Consider the following eight motivators and how one or more of them may be motivating someone’s Internet behaviors.

Motivator #1. *Excitement*

Physical excitement is a strong payoff for using the Internet. This can include sexual arousal to pornographic images, the thrill of sexting, or the adrenaline rush of dabbling in illegal material or discussions. Specifically this involves release of *adrenaline* and *dopamine* into the nervous system.

Motivator #2. *Comfort*

Going online can bring about relief from life stressors. Research shows that the Internet helps release *endorphins*, *oxytocin* and *vasopressin* into our nervous system, which are powerful chemical relaxants.

Motivator #3. *Escape*

Going online can provide a means of escape from the mundane “grind” of daily living. Is your life boring? Exotic fantasy worlds are just a click away on your personal computer. A central feature of the Internet experience is the creation of “*trance states of mind*.” Trance is a common everyday occurrence for all of us. Simply defined, it involves an intense focus on an image while becoming less aware of one's physical surroundings, allowing the mind to wander while the body is in a relaxed state. Chemically this involves the release of *endorphins*, *dopamine* and *norepinephrine* into the nervous system. Once in trance, a person’s normal inhibitions are relaxed and they are able to experience events that seem very real, and can include sight, smell, touch, relationships and deep emotions. Trance also has a way of putting “time” on hold – hours can pass in what can feel like mere minutes. In the privacy of their own computer, a person can disappear into alternate worlds that feel intensely real.

Motivator #4. *Affirmation*

A universal longing is to “matter” – to have our value affirmed by someone else.

Motivator #5. *Belonging*

We are social creatures and our natural state is to be socially connected with others.

Motivator #6. *Power*

Dominance and control can compensate for a person’s internal sense of inadequacy.

Motivator #7. *Helplessness*

Compulsive Internet use can affirm a person’s self-belief they are “inept” and destined to fail.

Motivator #8. *Revenge*

Cyber affairs, sexual violence, bullying and “flaming chat” can act as a means of revenge against perceived wounds in the past or in the present.