

EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR PROBLEMATIC USAGE OF THE INTERNET CA16207

Networked research has the capacity to produce health, well-being and economic benefits.

The EU under its Horizon 2020 umbrella has just launched a new four year European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) Action Programme, led by researchers at the University of Hertfordshire and Hertfordshire Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust, to advance networked interdisciplinary research into problematic internet usage across Europe and beyond.

This COST action benefits from bringing together some of the foremost researchers and educators in the field of problematic internet usage and compulsive behaviours from a wide variety of disciplines and cultural backgrounds.

COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) is a funding agency for research and innovation networks. Our Actions help connect research initiatives across Europe and enable scientists to grow their ideas by sharing them with their peers. This boosts their research, career and innovation.

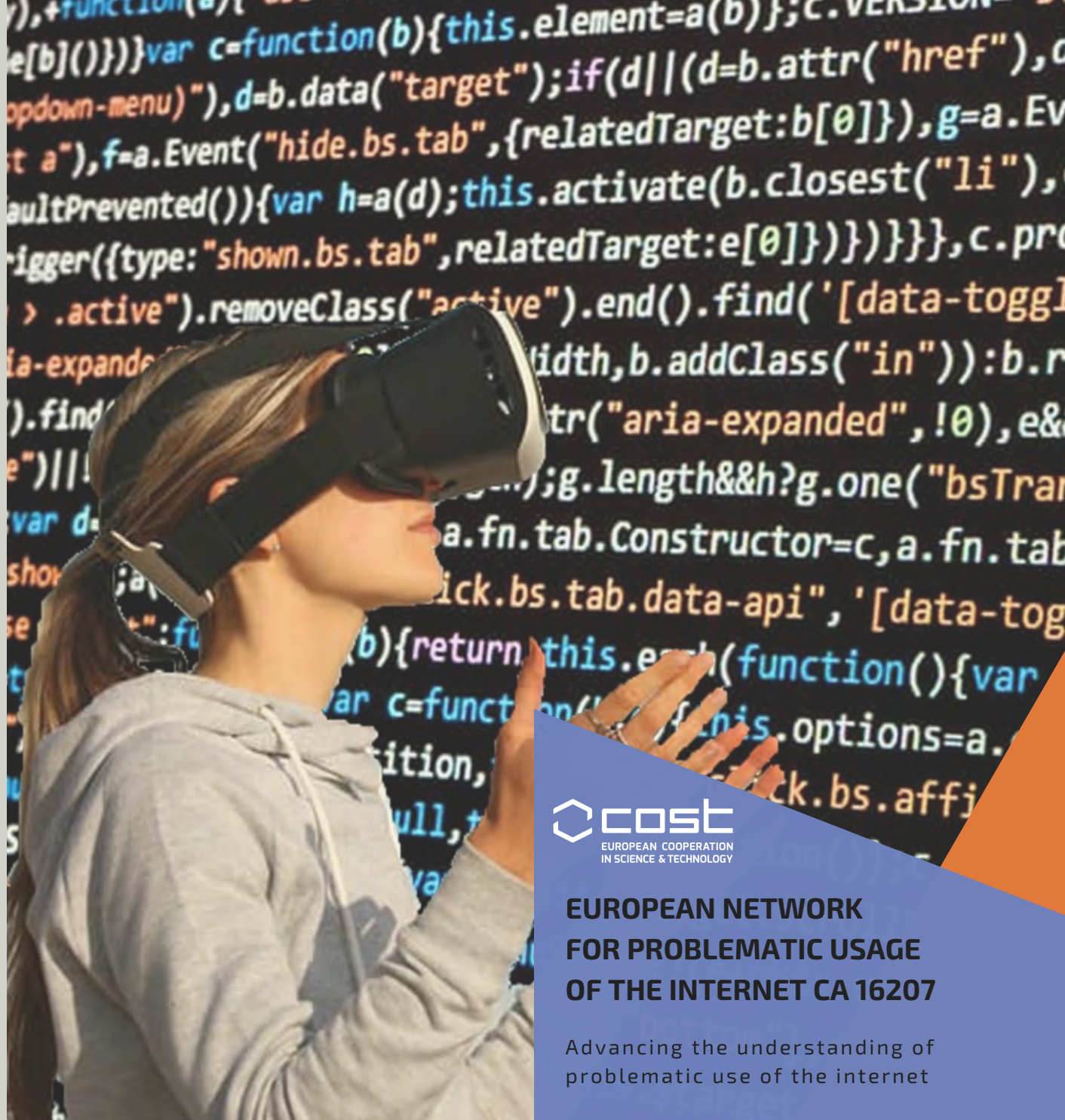
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Advancing the understanding of problematic use of the internet

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- Significant geographical differences in the magnitude of the problem (e.g. East Asia versus Europe) need to be better understood, to inform health policy and service development.
- The first steps will be to reach consensus on the reliable definition of the problem, devise age-appropriate assessment instruments to measure its severity, plan studies to clarify its clinical course and impact on health and quality of life as well as to clarify the underpinning brain-based mechanisms to support the development of screening biomarkers to identify those who are vulnerable before the problematic use becomes too entrenched, and ultimately to identify targets for treatment to guide the development of new and effective interventions.

European Network for Problematic Usage of the Internet

- Growing global concern about the public health and societal costs of problematic use of the internet, which has an estimated prevalence of 6% among the general population and which is increasingly recognised to affect children and young people, represents an emerging challenge for mental health research.
- The internet is now an integral part of modern life, but as its use has grown, it has given rise to a wide range of problematic behaviors.
- A spectrum of usage, from controlled and “adaptive” to uncontrolled and “maladaptive”, is recognised. Some disordered online behaviors, such as excessive gaming, buying, gambling, email checking, social media use and viewing pornography, cause such significant impairment of everyday functioning of some individuals that mental health professional help is sought. National health authorities are now expressing concern.
- The most recent literature suggests that PUI is strongly linked with mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). However there is lack of agreement on the definition of PUI as a ‘mental disorder’ and a critical scarcity of reliable information on its prevalence, clinical parameters, brain-based biology and socio-health-economic impact.

