UNIT: INTERNET-ADVANTAGES AND RISKS

1. **Introduction: What the Internet Is**

The Internet is a global system of interconnected computer networks that serves billions of users worldwide. It is a network of networks that consists of millions of private, public, academic, business, and government networks of local to global scope.

The Internet has enabled and accelerated new forms of human interactions through instant messaging, Internet forums, and social networking.

The origins of the Internet reach back to research of the 1960s, commissioned by the United States government in collaboration with private commercial interests to build computer networks. Funding for the National Science Foundation in the 1980s, as well as private funding for other commercial backbones, led to worldwide participation in the development of new networking technologies and the merger of many networks. The commercialization of the internet in the 1990s led to an international network; as of 2011, more than 2.2 billion people – nearly a third of Earth's population – use the services of the Internet.

2. **Advantages of Internet Use**

The Internet allows people to share information no matter where they live in the world. Because it is worldwide, working hours are now almost all day, every day, regardless of time zones. The use of mobile internet devices such as smartphones, handheld game consoles, and tablets allow users to be online almost anywhere on Earth.

- **Socialization**

Email is an important communications service available on the Internet. Pictures, documents and other files are sent as email attachments. Emails can be cc-ed to multiple email addresses.

Social networking websites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Tuenti have created new ways to socialize and interact. Users of these sites are able to add a wide variety of information to pages, to pursue common interests, and to connect with others. Sites

like LinkedIn foster commercial and business connections. YouTube and Flickr specialize in users' videos and photographs.

- **Resource-Sharing and Media**

The low cost and nearly instant sharing of ideas, knowledge, and skills has made collaborative work easier, with the help of collaborative software (an example of this is the free software movement, which has produced Linux, Mozilla Firefox, and OpenOffice.org). Internet chat lets colleagues to stay in touch when working at their computers during the day. Messages can be exchanged even more quickly and conveniently than via email. These systems may allow files to be exchanged, drawings and images to be shared, or voice and video contact between people.

File sharing is an example of transferring large amounts of data across the Internet. A computer file can be emailed to customers, colleagues and friends as an attachment. It can be uploaded to a website or server for easy download by others. It can be put into a "shared location" or onto a file server for instant use by colleagues.

Streaming media is the real-time delivery of digital media for the immediate consumption or enjoyment by end users. Many radio and television broadcasters provide Internet feeds of their live audio and video productions.

Video chat rooms and video conferencing are also popular with many uses being found for personal webcams. YouTube was founded on 15 February 2005 and is now the leading website for free streaming video with a vast number of users.

- **Education**

Educational material of all levels from pre-school to post-doctoral is available online. For distance education, help with homework and other assignments, self-guided learning, or just looking up more detail on a fact, it has never been easier for people to access educational information at any level from anywhere. The Internet is an important enabler of both formal and informal education.

3. Risks Associated with the Internet

Though the internet is a vast resource, there are several dangers associated with it. The network of networks connects at all points, and you can open your own computer to information, downloads, and threats from the net.

- **Viruses and other threats**

There are several ways in which the internet can be dangerous to users.

- It is possible to bring viruses into an individual computer or an entire network. These viruses can seriously disrupt or even destroy important work.

- People can be tricked by con artists who advertise products on the Internet.

- Information that is presented as accurate or important may be inaccurate and misleading.

- Children may encounter information that their parents and teachers don't want them to encounter.

- People can be tempted to do illegal or improper things on the Internet. Examples include gambling and the perpetration of pranks or criminal activity.

- **"Internet addiction"**

Another growing issue with the internet is a growing concern about something called "internet addiction." Scientists continue to study this, especially in regards to the internet's effect on young people. Experts say the internet encourages users to dart between pages instead of concentrating on one source (such as a book). This new 'associative' thinking leaves the majority incapable of 'linear' disciplines like reading and writing at length because their minds have been remolded to function differently. Scientists are not yet sure what kinds of long-term impacts this may have on developing brains.

Some people use the internet so much that they have entire other lives that are completely online. There is a danger of such people becoming ill or psychologically damaged (or even becoming bankrupt, if they cannot leave the internet long enough to earn money from a job).

Many studies continue to be done about the impact of the internet in young people's lives.

4. Conclusion

The internet is a huge information network. It can be used to share files and to learn, to keep in touch with other people or to create a virtual life. Like anything, it should be used with some degree of caution. However, when used smartly and safely, it can serve as a vast resource for almost any information anyone could want.