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Internet Use Behavior and Attitude of College Students: a Survey of Leadership Colleges' Network

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Introduction

The Internet is an inseparable part of today's educational system. The academic increasingly depends on the Internet for educational purposes. A majority of academic and research institutions provide Internet service to students, teachers, and researchers (Kaur, 2008). In recent years, use of the Internet has also increased in Pakistan. Policymakers in Pakistan have given top priority to the information and communication industry and have taken a number of favorable steps such as establishing IT policy and investment in IT infrastructure, fiber optic access, software technology, human resource development, and launching of e-government projects. Internet access is available in 1,700 cities and towns in Pakistan (Bashir, 2006).

In developed countries, a lot has been written on information seeking behavior. Such research is required for users in Pakistan. This study is an attempt to investigate the Internet use behavior and attitude of intermediate and bachelor's level students of the Leadership Colleges network in Punjab.

Objectives of this study:

1. The frequency of Internet use by college students
2. Computer and Internet availability at home
3. Most-used Internet resources and services
4. Reasons for using the Internet
5. Availability of help in using the Internet
6. Attitude of students towards the Internet

Literature Review

Developed countries have made huge investments in this industry with a profit-earning motive (Madan, 1987). Gulzar (2001) observes that the Internet is growing well in Pakistan but there is a need to provide this important service to working people. He says that there are 300 million Internet subscribers in Pakistan with 100 percent growth every year. Users with access to the Internet were linked with universities, research institutes, or government bodies, as students, researchers, or officials. After a revolutionary change in the world of telecommunication, the Government of Pakistan has defined the following objectives for this sector:

1. The improvement in the infrastructure of the telecom for the betterment of economic, social, and cultural development in Pakistan.
2. The encouragement of new private sector initiatives committed to improve the telecom sector
3. The protection of consumer interests
4. Facilitation of investment and competition

Sturges (2002) believes that it is impossible to count the networks which are linked to the Internet. Internet tools for communication and the exchange of information include email, usenet, bulletin boards, forums, and mobile technology (Branscomb, 1998). In a survey of the most popular search engines among librarians, students, and consumers Brazin (2004) enlisted Achoo Healthcare Online, Dogpile, Google, Health on the Net (HON) Foundation, etc.

College students are a unique population of Internet users. Students were the first group in USA who used the Internet for communication, recreation, and file sharing. College students and their teachers find the Internet convenient and useful for educational activities (Jones, 2002). Kubey, Lavin, and Barrows (2001) found that 68 percent of parents and 69 percent of teachers said that they have seen higher grades because of Internet use. Purposes for Internet use have appeared in many studies, and include educational, business, browsing, appointments, and entertainment. Fallows (2004) and Kaur (2006) found that the portion of Internet use for entertainment was 69 percent. Laurence and Miller (2000) indicate that scholars use the Internet for quick communication. Winship and McNab (1999) found a growing range of services offering to post, fax, or email full text journal articles, course outlines, and sources by colleges and universities.

Behavioral studies of the Internet indicate that it makes life easy, creates links between different communities and cultures, is a good way to connect people and find educational resources (Aydin, 2007; D'Esposito & Gardner, 1999). Fallows (2004) observes that the Internet can be used for scholarly purposes, map or contact information, purchase of tickets for travel, communication through emails or chats, and entertainment such as games or audio and video files. Nachmias, Mioduser, and Shemla (2000) found gender differences in the use of the Internet with a higher and more extensive usage for longer hours by males.

Not all information on the Internet is reliable or safe. Horrigan (2000), Sturges (2002), and Weitzner (2007) mention the unreliability of information on the Internet. There are not necessarily quality or authenticity checks on information on the Internet. Misrepresented, fake, and pirated literature causes problems for researchers and students. Users may have privacy concerns. There are sites that many users may find offensive, as well as instructions for carrying out violent or illegal acts.

Method

The questionnaire survey method was used in this study. A total sample of 800 students (200 each) was selected from all four campuses of the Leadership Colleges network, i.e., Lahore, Multan, Rawalpandi, and Sailkot. A convenience sampling method was applied. The useable number of responses was 599 (75%).

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Results

Table 1 shows respondents' gender and program of study. Most participants were female. They belong to science, arts, and commerce programs at intermediate and bachelor levels. According to Table 2, 89 percent students had computer facility at home while 59 percent had Internet access as well. Only 20 percent had formal training in using the Internet. Most (53 percent) mentioned that their friends provided assistance in using the Internet. The second largest group of helpers is relatives (23 percent).

Table 1. Profile of respondents

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	347	58
	Female	252	42
Program of study	B.Sc.	112	19
	B.A	48	8
	B.Com	139	23
	F.Sc	138	23
	F.A	17	3
	I.Com	92	15
	I.C.S	53	9

Table 2. Availability of computer, Internet, training, and assistance

		Frequency	Percent
Computer availability at home		532	89
Internet facility at home		356	59
Formal training in using Internet		120	20
Assistance in using Internet	Teachers	100	17
	Friends	320	53
	Relatives	138	23
	Others	53	9

Internet use behavior of the students is shown in Table 3. The variables include frequency, place, experience, reasons for use, and most-used search engines and e-mail services. Many respondents used the Internet 2 or 3 days in a week (34 percent). The second largest group (29 percent) used the Internet rarely. Most use the Internet at their homes. They use it to update their knowledge, communicate, and make friends. They took help from their friends for solving problem in using the Internet. According to the participants, the Internet has made their life easy with quick access to knowledge and information as well as for communication. Nearly one-fifth of respondents had two years of Internet experience and an almost equal number had one year. Only two percent had used the Internet more than seven or eight years.

Table 3. Internet use

		Frequency	Percent
Frequency of Internet use	Once a day	96	16
	2-3 days in a week	204	34
	Fortnightly	41	7
	Once a month	70	12
	Rarely	175	29
Place of Internet use	Home	346	58
	College	175	29
	Net Café	101	17
	Any other place	48	8
Experience of Internet use (years)	1	106	18
	2	111	19
	3	71	12
	4	49	8
	5	58	10
	6	22	4
	7	9	2
	8	9	2
	9	5	1
	10	6	1
	11	1	0
	12	2	0
Reasons of Internet use	To communicate with others	231	39
	To make class assignments	129	22
	To prepare for examination	69	12
	To update your knowledge	285	48
	To read news	111	19
	To download software	109	18
	To purchase items	21	4
	For entertainment	207	35
	Any other reason	30	5
Search engines	Google	423	71
	Yahoo	217	36
	MSN	73	12
	AltaVista	11	2
	Any other	7	1
E-mail services	Hotmail	231	39
	Yahoo	378	63
	Gmail	39	7
	Any other	26	4

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Most participants (48 percent) stated that they used the Internet to update their knowledge. Nearly two-fifths use the Internet for communicating with friends, relatives, and teachers or for making online friends. A third major reason (35 percent) was entertainment, while more than one-fifth use the Internet for preparing class presentations.

To measure the attitude of students towards the Internet, 16 statements were provided with a 5-point Likert scale (strongly agree=5, agree=4, undecided=3, disagree=2, strongly disagree=1). The data were analyzed in two steps. First, the mean and standard deviation were calculated for each statement. Then, a t-test was applied to see the mean difference on various independent variables, i.e., class level (program of study), gender, computer facility at home, Internet access at home and formal Internet training (Table 4).

Table 4. Independent samples t-test for various independent variables

				t values				
No.	Statement	Mean	SD	Class level	Gender	Computer at home	Internet at home	Internet training
a.	Internet provides easy life	4.06	.839	1.901	.170	.141	1.908	2.813**
b.	Internet is a fast way to reach knowledge	4.54	.704	1.250	.619	1.910	3.560	.709
c.	Internet creates close relationships among societies	3.96	.940	.216	1.205	.748	1.033	3.465**
d.	Internet provides freedom to people	3.76	1.102	1.774	1.408	.456	1.922	1.898
e.	It is enjoyable to chat on the Internet	3.96	1.061	.306	1.489	.744	1.134	2.144
f.	Internet is a good source to make friends	3.76	1.130	1.602	3.885**	.815	.693	3.080**
g.	Internet can allow you to do more imaginative work	3.83	.915	1.962	.731	.792	1.148	1.837
h.	Internet has a potential to be an effective teaching/training tool	3.82	.952	3.325**	.259	.549	2.955**	1.658
i.	Use of Internet by students is just a waste of time and money	2.91	1.347	1.607	2.000*	2.583*	1.589	.774
j.	Internet includes unnecessary, non-useful knowledge	2.97	1.364	2.740**	.122	.582	.689	.060
k.	Internet causes destroyed societies	3.14	1.235	3.990**	.866	.413	.211	1.720
l.	Internet creates addiction	3.46	1.122	4.417**	3.005**	.002	.843	.319
m.	Internet creates cultural problems	3.22	1.219	2.771**	1.868	.187	.515	1.556
n.	Internet forces people to be alone	3.01	1.276	.160	2.217*	1.038	.728	.128
o.	It is not safe to make shopping at Internet	3.12	1.208	2.380*	1.833	.113	.703	1.401
p.	Use of foreign languages in Internet is a problem	3.11	1.266	1.619	.191	2.554*	1.383	.872

* Significant at p <.05 ** Significant at p <.01

The participants strongly agreed to the statement "Internet is a strong way to reach knowledge." They agreed to the following statements (mean > 3.5):

- Internet provides easy life.
- Internet creates close relationships among societies.
- Internet provides freedom to people.
- It is enjoyable to chat on the Internet.
- Internet is a good source to make friends.
- Internet can allow you to do more imaginative work.
- Internet has a potential to be an effective teaching/training tool.

The respondents remain "Undecided" about all other statements (mean between 2.5 and 3.5).

There is a difference of opinion between two groups of respondents based on their class levels, i.e., intermediate (I.C.S., I.Com., F.A., and F.Sc.) and bachelor (B.A, B.Com., B.C.S., and B.Sc.) is shown in Table 4. No significant difference was found in ten statements. The bachelor students showed stronger attitudes towards the Internet's role as an effective training tool, unnecessary and non-useful knowledge, damages society, unsafe for shopping, creates addiction, and cultural problems.

Men and women showed significant differences of opinion on only four statements. Male students thought the Internet was a good way to make friends. Female students considered that use of the Internet a waste of time and money, a way to create addiction, and a way to force people to be alone.

There was no major difference of opinion found among students with and without a computer at home. Students without computers at home thought that foreign languages material on the Internet was a problem.

Students with access to the Internet at home did not show any difference of opinion with the students without Internet access. Students with Internet access had a stronger attitude towards the Internet's potential to be an effective teaching/training tool.

Formal Internet training did not create a significant difference among students. Students who received training had a stronger attitude toward three statements, i.e., the Internet makes life easy, creates close relationships among societies, and is a good source of making friends.

Conclusion

Results of the study reveal that the students were new Internet users but used it regularly. Most had access to the Internet at home. They used this technology mostly for communication and educational purposes. A majority of users had no formal training. They preferred to contact their friends or relatives for solving problems in Internet use. Their attitude towards the tools and services of the Internet was positive. Users agreed that the Internet was very helpful in meeting their information and communication requirements swiftly.

Keeping in view the positive attitude of students towards the Internet it is recommended that they be provided with formal training. Assistance in solving problems in Internet use should also be provided formally, i.e., by teachers or laboratory staff. College administration should take steps to encourage the Internet use by providing Internet access on campus.

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"Internet Use Behavior and Attitude of College Students: a Survey of Leadership Colleges' Network," Muhammad Safdar, Dr. Khalid Mahmood, Saima Qutab. *Library Philosophy and Practice* 2010 (May)

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