

Usage Trend of Internet Time by Undergraduate University Students

Javed Ahmed Chandio*

Abstract

The use of internet is increasing with time. It is a major past time for people of almost all age groups but particularly the students. Students spend their internet time for academic as well as nonacademic purposes. Internet has transformed life today. The aim of the research was to assess the impact and effectiveness of Internet for undergraduate university students. This has been done through primary survey of the students. Variables were developed through three different Focus Groups. Primary survey was conducted using these variables. Some factors were gender dependent while others were not. Browsing for academic purposes was indeed a major consideration. Students also mentioned that they do visit obscene / vulgar sites. This was a bold and honest revelation, something we did not expect before the start of the study.

Keywords: Internet, Students, E-mail, Chatting, Net browsing

Introduction

Internet browsing is a major pastime for all including the students during their teens and post teens period. This activity while may be used for productive purposes, it has been seen that a major part of the time is spent on the non-productive activities as well.

Internet has transformed life today. It is because of internet that world has become a global village. Use and dimensions of internet has increased many folds during the past several years. Internet through continuously updated technology revolutionized the materials, programs and websites. Internet applications are growing exponentially and it is not possible to concise its usage. Through the use of Internet time management has been very precious. Internet's ability to store materials, calculate instantly and make available the browsing sites in seconds. This has made tasks much easier and time saving in almost every sphere of business. Internet has made banking easy, safe and less time consuming. Now banking is possible twenty four hours a day only because of

* Javed Ahmed Chandio, Assistant Professor, Institute of Commerce, University of Sindh, Jamshoro. E-mail: jchandio2011@yahoo.com

Internet. Internet has made it possible to buy and sell anything directly eliminating the intermediaries in the transactions. Direct marketing and online shopping have changed the nature of market in recent time.

Another area of importance for internet is the employment opportunities. Now, people can do a lot of jobs through Internet. This area has opened a new vista for students gaining higher education who need income while continuing their study. The widespread use has opened new areas in the employment sector too. The huge information available through the net have increased its importance for all without any discrimination. Now a days, all publication houses upload the electronic version of their publications and they are available to end users through the net. These include a lot of academic materials required by students and academicians alike. Internet has tremendously reduced the time for information search. While it has made life easier for banking, shopping and transactions, its contribution for academics, particularly for students is undeniable. The biggest benefit of the internet can be found in the educational sector. For instructors it is a valuable source for referencing material and enhancing the knowledge of their students.

Internet is also a great communication medium. It has eliminated distances and provide opportunity to people to talk, message, chat and email. Conferencing programs are also used for group communication. People enjoy the benefits of fast and economical communication and maintain close contacts with friends and loved ones. It is a great place for conferencing and collaborating with students from all over the world. One of the key user groups of internet is the students. They need a lot of information which they get through internet. They have access to digital libraries around the world. Through the courtesy of HEC (Higher Education Commission) of Pakistan, access to digital libraries is free. Students can search for information regarding their school courses via electronic libraries who offer a great variety of journals and scientific articles. The resources available over the net cover almost every aspect of the curriculum and students have a valuable machine for enhancing their knowledge and expanding their assigned work. In general Internet is a multi-tool with applications on every aspect of human life.

The aim of the research was to assess the impact and effectiveness of Internet for undergraduate university students. The objective of the study was to assess the time utilization by the students in different aspects of Internet usage.

Literature Survey

As we all know Internet is a vast network of computers around the world connected through satellites and cables. When users are connected to the Internet they can receive text, images, video and sound on their computer from computers anywhere in the world. Internet is a powerful force as well as dangerous destructor. The benefits are many but along with the benefits there are many hazards too. This is an exciting medium and beside other benefits provides educational benefits to the students. For example research information for school projects and businesses. (Jeremiah Owyang, 2008)

A survey under the supervision of US Department of Justice, found that one third of the surveyed youth who received solicitation were male and two third were female. The great majority (77%) of them were One-third of the surveyed youth who had received a solicitation were male; two-thirds were female. The great majority (77 percent) of the victims were 14 to 17 years old. (U.S. Department of Justice, 2001) Today's generation is the generation of internet, the Netizens. They are also the Facebook generation. Teaching these kids that it's OK to lie about one's identity has profoundly dangerous long-term consequences. It is legitimizing the idea of anonymity, thereby transforming the Internet from a community of real people into an atomized chaos of fictional characters. Generation Facebook have the potential to be the first real Internet citizens — yet genuine online citizenship is the first and most tragic casualty of an Internet inhabited by anonymous characters. (Andrew Keen. 2008a)

Children are learning to read and write with computers. But while learning online through the computers they do not share their thinking or ideas with the children. Thus a gap is being produced between the child and the parents and computer is responsible for creating this gap. (indianchild, n.d)

Another aspect of the net is that works for students have become too easy. All the information and papers are available at the net and with just few clicks one can access to a wealth of information. This has led to the door of plagiarism open to all such people. The time has come that tough actions should be taken on digital plagiarism. (Andrew Keen, 2008b).

With the growth of Internet, it has become crowded. To facilitate the benefits Internet 2 and NGI (Next generation Internet) are being considered for implementation. Internet 2 is sponsored by high tech companies and universities while Next Generation Internet is a government project. Both the Internets are expected to develop new, faster technologies to enhance research and communication and it is

expected that both will further enhance the quality and extent of use of the current Internet. <<http://smithsonian.yahoo.com/nextgeneration.html>>

In his article, 'Grownups, not kids, are the dumbest generation' published in Internet Evolution, Alan Reiter (2007) says that teachers and parents are clueless about teaching effective use of Internet tools to the children.

In his book, 'The dumbest generation: how the digital age stupefies young Americans and jeopardizes our future' Baurlein writes that the kids spend too much time conversing and texting on cellular phones, starting at social network sites, watching television, playing video games etc. As a result, they have neither the time nor the inclination to read books and learn practical concepts. Baurlein says that by spending too much time on the Internet they find it more difficult to concentrate for long periods on a book or an article. They are in effect becoming infected with Internet generated Attention Deficit Disorder.

The next generation Internet, known as Internet Protocol Version (IPV6) is an expansion over the current Internet. This will increase the space to support the millions of modern devices used for Internet. Thus the use will further increase in terms of increase and content. (Techrepublic, n.d)

Andrew Keen (2009) writes in his book, 'The Cult of Amateur' that Internet is an easy to use platform to distribute ignorance and hatred. But he further argues that rather than being technology's fault, we are collectively to blame for the new media gloom.

In a Youth Internet Safety Survey in the United States it was found that youth are increasingly become the victims of Internet abuse. The survey confirmed current thinking that some youth are particularly vulnerable to online advances. The FBI has established the Innocent Images Program to focus specifically on computer facilitated child sexual exploitation. The US Postal Inspection Service protects children by monitoring transmission of child pornography through the mail. In addition the US Customs Service Cyber Smuggling Center monitors the illegal generation, importation and proliferation of child pornography. (Information and Intervention Resources, 2001)

Today's networking and other Internet based applications are being operated through the mobile. The industry leading innovation and integration of our growing single chip family empowers handset manufacturers to bring new capabilities to the market and makes these capabilities accessible to a wider base of wireless users around the world. <http://www.qctconnect.com/newsroom/news/2008/080211_nextgenmobile.html>

During 2008, use of its Mini browser on mobile phones more than tripled, reaching 5 billion page views in October. The increase is

especially marked in Southeast Asia and also showed spikes in Africa and the Middle East. (David Lawsky, 2008) This indicates the trend of Internet adding to mobile phones further increasing its use or misuse.

In a concept paper written in July 1997 the Next Generation Internet (NGI) Initiatives was already discussed. It was foreseen that the NGI would foster partnerships among academia, industry, and the government that will keep the U.S. at the cutting-edge of information and communications technologies. It will accelerate the introduction of new networking services for our businesses, schools, and homes. (NITRD, 1997)

China is an example of how it has made Internet a utility yet restricting its use for abusive purposes. They have made it possible to keep Chinese away from sites deemed unfit because of pornographic or politically sensitive content or because they waste teenagers' time with frivolous game. However despite the ban Chinese youth do navigate to Internet Café. (Edward Cody, 2007).

In view of the literature survey that we have conducted it would be appropriate that the use of computer and the Internet by the undergraduate students of the universities should be monitored.

Methodology

A survey was conducted to find out the time spent on Internet. A questionnaire was developed with 7 variables based on different activities that are done on Internet by the students. The activities were identified through 3 different Focus Groups conducted earlier. The Focus Groups were organized to explore these variables. The topics that were identified by the Focus Groups were then prioritized to limit the variables to the more frequent ones. Thus a total of 7 variables were finalized as follows. The eighth included all others (predominantly sight seeing and aimless roaming).

- i). Academic (related to study)
- ii). Non-academic but informational (other than news)
- iii). News and news related current affairs
- iv). Chatting
- v). E-mail
- vi). Social interactions (Facebook etc)
- vii). Obscene /vulgar site browsing
- viii). All others (including sight seeing, aimless roaming)

The questionnaire was administered to 300 students of two universities. One was public sector government university (Federal Urdu University of Arts, Science and Technology) situated on University Road at Gulshan e Iqbal, the other one was a private sector university (Institute of

Business Management) situated at Korangi Creek. All the students were studying at undergraduate level. The interviews were conducted by face to face personal interviews outside the class room at a convenient place. Gender discrimination was avoided. Total number of interviews finalized were 300. The incomplete interviews were discarded. Period of survey was 10 campus days from the start of the survey in the month of March 2012. All respondents were full time students of their universities and were available during the major part of the day at least four days a week. All were in the age group of 18-22 years and there were no break in their study. Likert scale (Tull and Del, 1998, p. 376). (Churchill, 1983, p. 256-257), (Peterson, 1982, p. 310) was used to measure the responses.

Hypotheses were developed and tested.

Result

Results were compiled based on two parameters: gender and university type (public / government or private).

It is good to see that all the students without any exception do their net searching for academic purposes. This also shows that the teachers are good and responsible enough to give the students the task that require net searching and in depth research for studying purposes. It was found that academic sites browsing was most frequent and was for more number of hours as compared to any other sort of browsing. There was no preference by gender. Male and female students both were found almost equal in browsing for academic purposes. The same trend was followed in chatting, email and social sites like Facebook. Nonacademic informational site browsing was found to be frequent but less time consuming. Chatting was a major component for browsing and the duration was 1 – 4 hours for majority. E-mail though found a frequent mentioning but this was also less time consuming for majority. Surprisingly, students mentioned visiting obscene / vulgar sites too. Almost 46% of the respondents replied that they do visit such sites. More than one third of the total respondents were male while about 10% were female. The response shows a shift from the conventional thinking. At the start of our survey we assumed that this (obscene and vulgar site browsing) will be avoided by the respondents irrespective of his/her practice. But we found that students were bold and honest enough in their expressions.

Table.1: Time spent on internet by the undergraduate students on a daily basis

Topics	1 hr or less (%)	> 1-2 hrs (%)	> 2-3 hrs (%)	> 3-4 hrs (%)	> 4 hrs (%)
Academic (related to study)		33	24	16	27
Non-academic but informational (other than news)	29	27	28	9	7
News and news related current affairs	11	21			
Chatting		37	23	39	1
E-mail	65	30	4	1	
Social interactions (Facebook etc)	15	33	27	20	5
Obscene /vulgar site browsing			42	25	
All others (including sight seeing, aimless roaming)	41	45	14		

	Hypothesis (Gender specific)	Chi Square	Sig. Value	Empirical Conclusion
H1	Visit of academic sites is independent of gender	2.641	0.267	Accepted
H2	Visit of non academic but informational sites is independent of gender	1.134	0.769	Accepted
H3	Visit of news and news related current affairs sites is independent of gender	13.451	0.000	Rejected
H4	Chatting is independent of gender	4.962	0.175	Accepted
H5	Checking e-mails is independent of gender	7.448	0.024	Rejected
H6	Visit of social network sites is independent of gender	2.932	0.402	Accepted
H7	Visit of obscene/vulgar sites is independent of gender	8.428	0.015	Rejected
H8	Visit of academic sites is independent of university type	27.688	0.000	Rejected
H9	Visit of non academic but informational sites is independent of university type	46.680	0.000	Accepted

H10	Visit of news and news related current affairs sites is independent of university type	16.477	0.000	Rejected
H11	Chatting is independent of university type	3.322	0.345	Accepted
H12	Checking emails is independent of university type	2.290	0.318	Accepted
H13	Visit of social network sites is independent of university type	42.498	0.000	Rejected
H14	Visit of obscene/vulgar sites is independent of university type	0.434	0.805	Accepted

**University type indicates type of the university i. e. public / government or private.*

As explained earlier, two different universities were included in the study: one was public sector (government) university and the other one was a private university. The results were also compiled accordingly. Visit of academic sites was independent of university. That means students from both the universities visit the academic sites equally well. This trend was followed for nonacademic informational sites, chatting, e-mail as well as obscene / vulgar sites. News and news related sites were visited more by the students of private university. 27% of the students from private university replied that they do visit news and related sites while only 13% of the students from Government University mentioned that they do visit news and related sites. Out of the 46% students who replied that they visit obscene / vulgar sites, one third (33.33%) were from private university, while 13% were from the government university. This indicates the liberal attitude of the students from private university.

Remedial Measures / Recommendations

We feel that intensive and extensive research surveys should be carried out in all major public and private sector universities of Pakistan on this subject. It is important to know about the internet behavior of our students particularly with reference to time spent for academic activities and time spent for wrongful activities (visit of vulgar sites etc). Projects should be organized at university level to encourage academic activities to keep the students engaged which will indirectly influence to reduce the harmful activities. In our opinion no amount of preaching works for

this age group. It is the amount of work and their busyness that will keep them away from visiting indecent sites.

In view of the latest trend in higher education the students may be given research topics for net browsing and research writing. On the one hand this will consume their available time; on the other hand, this will help them to develop research ability thus increasing their academic competence for their relevant degrees. Such competence is a requirement of higher education throughout the world.

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