

Internet Use among University Students: A Survey in Bharathidasan University, Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

The paper presents the results of a survey of the post graduate students of the Bharathidasan University, Tamil Nadu. The objective of the study is to explore the Internet use behavior of students. The results show that 232 users (58%) mentioned that they use Internet for preparing class assignments, 185 users (46.25%) use it for assistance in their research projects, 153 users (38.25%) pointed out that they use it to update their knowledge, 121 users (30.25%) use it for communication purposes, 96 users (24%) mentioned that they use it for entertainment, 86 users (21.50%) use it for the examination preparation, 57 users (14.25%) use it for reading news, 45 users (11.25%) mentioned that they use it to download software, 33 users (8.25%) use it for their specific purposes such as online job searching. The results of the study also show that 353 students (88.25%) mentioned that mostly they use Google for searching, 284 (71%) use Yahoo!, 84 (21%) use Alta Vista, 65 (16.25%) mentioned that they use MSN for searching information and 48 respondents (12%) revealed that they use Info-seek. The paper recommends that the university authorities should arrange training programs for the students' Internet use.

Keywords: Internet; Students; User studies; Search Engines; e-mail services.

Introduction

The growth of Internet and proliferation of technology has widened the scope of correspondence. You might be aware that an ordinary hand-written letter takes a long journey through buses, trains etc., and despite the hard work done by postal department gets delivered within 3 to 4 days. But with the advent of new means of communication, especially e-mails, the situation have become changed. Now even official communications are done using emails,

and delay in communication has been considerably reduced, if not almost removed. Another aspect is of less dependency on the telephone. In this regard, the user-librarian interaction is changing. The librarians are at the doorstep of IT; they can transfer the data among researchers and faculties using latest communication method of e-mail. Librarians can join some e-groups. The library can have its own portal or web site, and can provide web OPAC or catalogues online. As a result, a Librarian can boast of his library facilities and project

himself as an Information Manager. In addition to all this, much government information can be downloaded from various government agencies web sites, and their contact details, terms; policies can be known and circulated.

Review of literature

Mishra (2009) studied the use of Internet at the University of Maiduguri, Nigeria. The findings showed that Internet was very important for 60.8% of the respondents, with 74.6% using the Internet for research; 71.5% mentioned Google as their preferred search engine and concludes that necessary facilities should be put in place for faculty and students to make optimal use of information resources available on the Internet.

Malik & Mahmood (2009) conducted a study on web search behaviour of students of University of the Punjab. The study found that 59.5% of the students used the Internet to search the materials for their information needs at home, 25% at university, 15% at both home and University and 0.5 % at some other places. The majority of the students (67.5%) used the Internet daily; 72.5% of the population used the Internet for research, 76.5% for education, 68% for entertainment, 18.5% for sports and 6% for shopping purposes. Google was the most frequently used search engine by 97%, followed by Yahoo! (72%). The constraints faced by the students included slow speed, overload of information, irrelevant information, and poor quality.

Agarwal & Dave (2009) have studied the use of internet by the scientists and research fellows of Central Arid Zone Research Institute, Jodhpur (Rajasthan) on the basis of the results of a questionnaire survey in CAZRI, Jodhpur. Further, it also attempts to assess the frequency of use, location where used search engine accessed; purpose of use etc. The study revealed that the respondents accessed Google search frequently (100%) followed by Yahoo (85.29%).

It is also observed that equally (97.06%) respondents use the internet for education and research. The strong desire of respondents is that the library initiates various functions and services like e-portals, on-line information, and abstracts retrieval along with internet. Kaur & Manhas (2008) conducted a survey on the use of Internet services and resources by students and teachers in the engineering colleges of Punjab and Haryana states of India and found that all the respondents make frequent use of the Internet because they gained access from either college or at home. More than 75% of the respondents' use the Internet services for educational and research purposes. Google and Yahoo search engines were more widely used than other search engines.

In a survey of Internet usage of the students of an American agricultural college, Rhoades et al. (2007) found that most of them used Internet at their homes and used a search engine when online. The majority of students tended to indicate seeing the Internet as good, easy to understand, important, beneficial, believable, credible, and accurate. Ajuwon (2006) has conducted a study of the physicians' use of the internet for health information for patient care at the University College Hospital (UCH) Ibadan, Nigeria. The findings revealed that 98% of the respondents have used the internet. A majority (76%) access the internet at cyber cafes. Ninety percent have reported that they had obtained information from the internet for patient care; of this number, 76.2% have searched the database. Suhail & Bargees (2006) surveyed the Internet use pattern of 200 undergraduate students studying at the Government College University, Lahore. The purpose of the study was to investigate the positive and negative effects of excessive Internet use on undergraduate students. It was found that that most of the students used Internet for enhancing their academic skills and achievements. Majority of the students reported

positive than negative effects of Internet use. The results indicated that a great majority of the students (84%) found the Internet helpful for worldwide communication; 78% reported that Internet use actually helped improving their grades; 74% agreed that their reading, writing and information processing skills had expanded by using the Internet. Another 48% reported that they had become better students by using the Internet.

Chestnut and Reynolds (2006) have conducted a study of 457 dentists in Wales to identify how patient information on the internet has influences the delivery of oral care and the use practitioners make of the internet. Thirty-nine percent of respondents have agreed that information gained from the internet had led to patients demanding inappropriate care. Asemi (2005) has done a case study at the Medical Sciences University of Isfahan (MUI), Iran. The results of the study show that all the respondents use the internet frequently because all faculties have an internet connection. It reveals that the researchers of the university have been getting quality health information and patient care through the internet. Fifty-five percent of respondents search for scientific health information through the internet because the university library provides access to databases and online journals to students and staff. Ojokoh & Asaolu (2005) studied the internet access and usage by students of Federal University of Technology, Akure and found that only 3.4% of the respondents were not using the Internet. Cybercafés were the most frequent source of Internet access, and most of the respondents acquired Internet skills through teaching by friends.

Rehman and Ramzy (2004) have conducted a study on the internet use by health professionals at the health sciences centre (HSC) of Kuwait University. The study shows that 92.1% of the respondents access internet from their office, while 73.2% also access it

from home. Another 28.3% also use the HSC Library for accessing internet. The study indicates that 80.3% of the respondents use internet daily, 15% use it once in a week and 2.5% use it once a month. 88.2% of the respondents feel that the internet provides better access to health sciences information, 77.2% indicate that through the internet they have established better professional contacts and 57.5% state that with the use of internet they are able to use different channels of communication for their patient care and research. Jones and Madden (2002) examined the Internet's impact on college students' daily lives, and to determine the impact of that use on their academic and social routines. Surveys were randomly distributed to college students at a wide range of two-year and four-year public and private colleges and universities in the continental United States. Many students indicated that the Internet played an important role in their education, with 79% reporting the Internet has had an impact on their college experience. College students describe the Internet as a functional tool that helps them to communicate with professors, do research, and access library materials. Seventy-three percent of college students state that they use the Internet more for information searches than they do a campus library.

Objective and methodology

The objective of this study is to explore the Internet use behavior of students of the Bharatidasan University, Tamil Nadu. To achieve this goal a questionnaire survey was conducted. A data collection instrument was developed based on the review of literature. The population of the study was registered users of the Computer Lab at Bharathidasan University Library, out of which a sample of 400 users was chosen and the copies of questionnaires were distributed among the respondents. Author made various visits to the Computer Lab to collect data.

Data analysis

The data thus collected was tabulated, analyzed and interpreted. The results of the analysis are presented in the succeeding sections;

Table 1. Faculty wise distribution of respondents

Faculties	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Social Sciences	136	34.00
Science & Technology	214	53.50
Arts and Humanities	50	12.50
Total	400	100.00

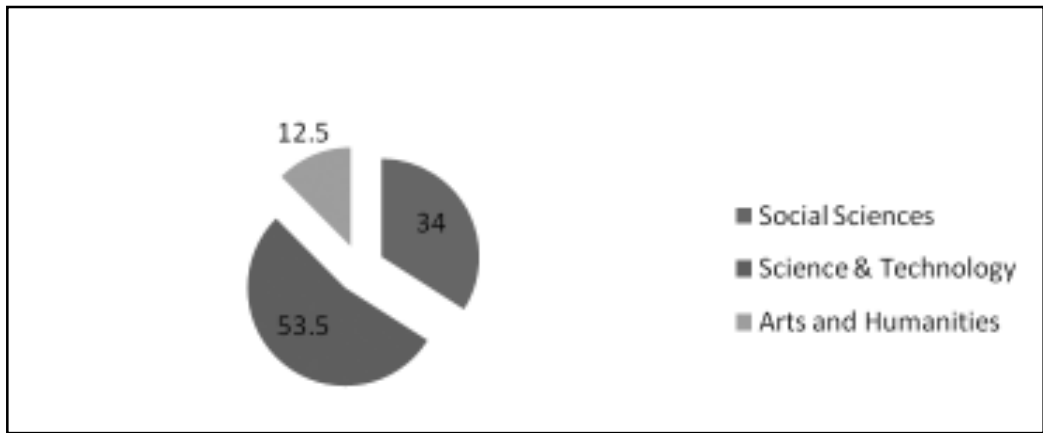


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents

Table-1 shows that majority of respondents (214 respondents; 53.50%) belong to Science and Technology, followed by social sciences (136 respondents; 34 %). However, the respondents from arts and humanities (50 respondents; 12.50%) are found less.

Table 2. Gender wise distribution of respondents

Gender	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Male	237	59.25
Female	163	40.75
Total	400	100.00

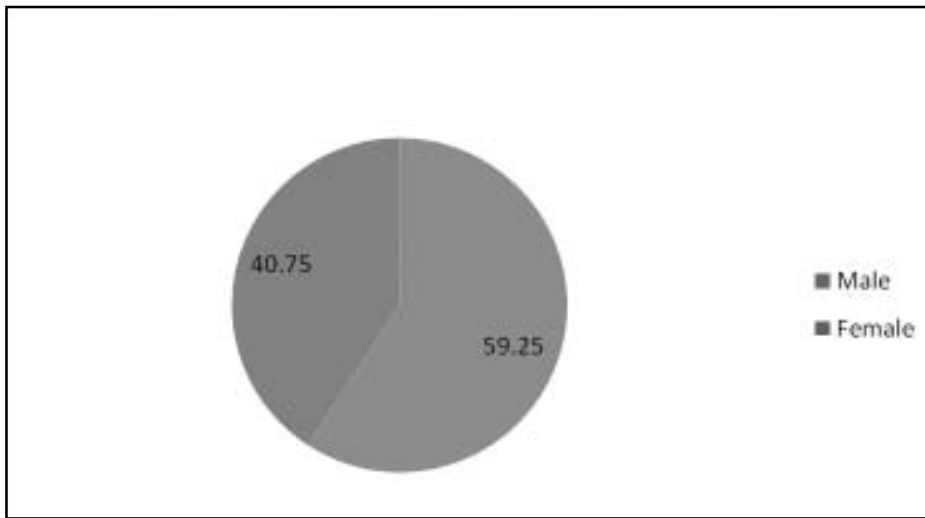


Figure 2. Distribution of respondents

According to the collected data (Table 2), 237 respondents (59.25%) are male, and 163 (40.75%) are female.

Table 3. Respondents' programs of study

Gender	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Master	252	63.00
M.Phil / Ph.D.	148	37.00
Total	400	100.00

It is found from Table-2 that majority of respondents are enrolled in Master degree programmes (252 students; 63%) obviously due to the higher rate of

enrollment at this particular level. However, 148 respondents (37%) from M.Phil and Ph. D. Programmes have also participated in the survey.

Experience of Internet use

Table 4. Respondents' Internet use experience

Period	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Up to 1 Year	56	14.00
2 years	83	20.75
3 years	127	31.75
4 years	44	11.00
5 years and above	90	22.50
Total	400	100.00

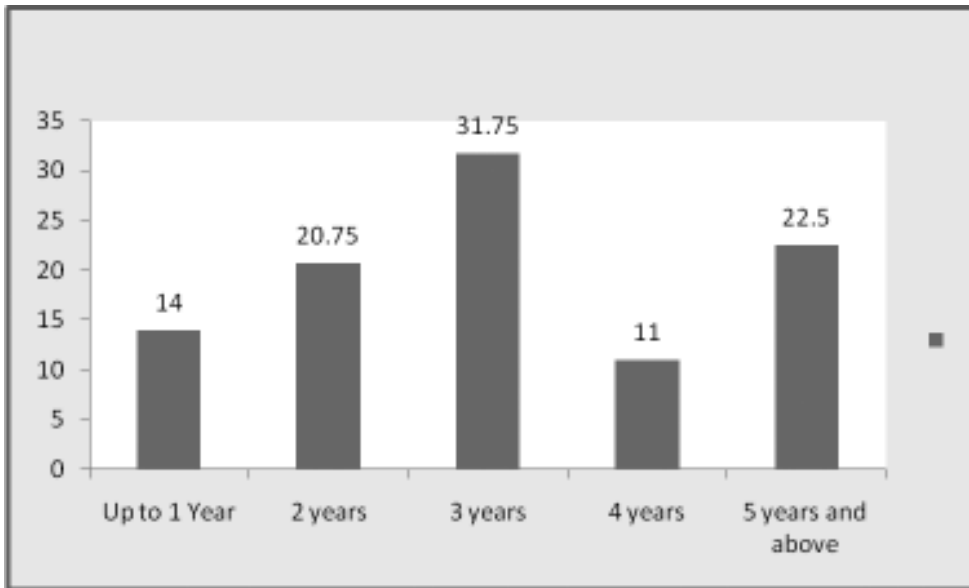


Figure 3. Respondents' Internet use experience

The students asked about the period, since they had been using Internet. The responses varied between one year to five years and above (Table 4). The analysis shows that 56 students' (14%) used Internet period up to one year. 83 (20.75%) students had two years experience, while 127 (31.75%) students had three years,

and 44 (11%) students had four years of experience of using Internet. Interestingly, majority of them (90 students; 22.50%) used Internet for 5 years and above. Thus, it is inferred that students of Bharathidasan University, Tamil Nadu have a fair exposure to Internet and its use.

Location of Internet use

Table 5. Location of Internet use

Location	No. of Respondents	Percentage
University Library	324	81.00
Home	137	34.25
Department	105	26.25
Internet cafe	63	15.75
Friend's / relative's home	58	14.50
Office	42	10.50
Any other	35	8.75

Note: Total sample exceeds the required size since the questions are multiple choices

The respondents were asked to mention the location where they were using Internet (Table 5). As the sample was selected among the registered users of the computer Lab of the University Library, around 80 % respondents reported to have been using Internet at this Lab. 137 students (34.25%) preferred to use Internet at their homes, 105 respondents (26.25%)

answered that they used it at their departments, 63 students (15.75%) used it at Internet cafe, 58 (14.50%) responded that they used it at their friends' and relatives' homes, 42 users (10.50%) of opinion that they used it at office, 35 users (8.75%) mentioned other places namely, neighborhood, language institution, etc.

Frequency of Internet use

Table 6. Frequency of Internet use

Frequency	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Daily	104	26.00
2-3 days in week	128	32.00
Fortnightly	94	23.50
Once a month	45	11.25
Rarely	29	7.25
Total	400	100.00

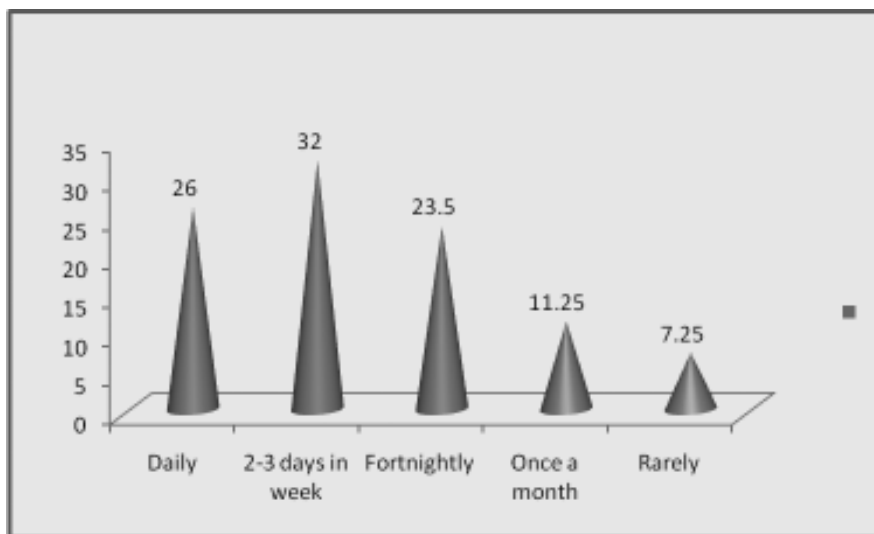


Figure 4. Frequency of Internet use

The students were asked to mention how often they used Internet (Table 6). The results reveal that daily users are 104 (26%) while 128 users (32%) use Internet 2-3 days in a week, 94 users (23.50%) use it fortnightly, 45users (11.25%) do it once a month and 29 (7.25%) are found to use it rarely. Thus, it is evident

from the analysis that majority of the respondents use 2 to three days a week. The trend of internet usage reported here is not so impressive. Therefore, this particular needs serious introspection by the library managers and the policy makers to ensure the frequency of use of internet by the students' community.

Sources of Internet training

Table 7. Sources of Internet training

Sources	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Self study	265	66.25
From friends	182	45.50
By attending training programme	94	23.50
From teacher	76	19.00
Staff of University Library	63	15.75
From any other sources	46	11.50

Note: Total sample exceeds the required size since the questions are multiple choices

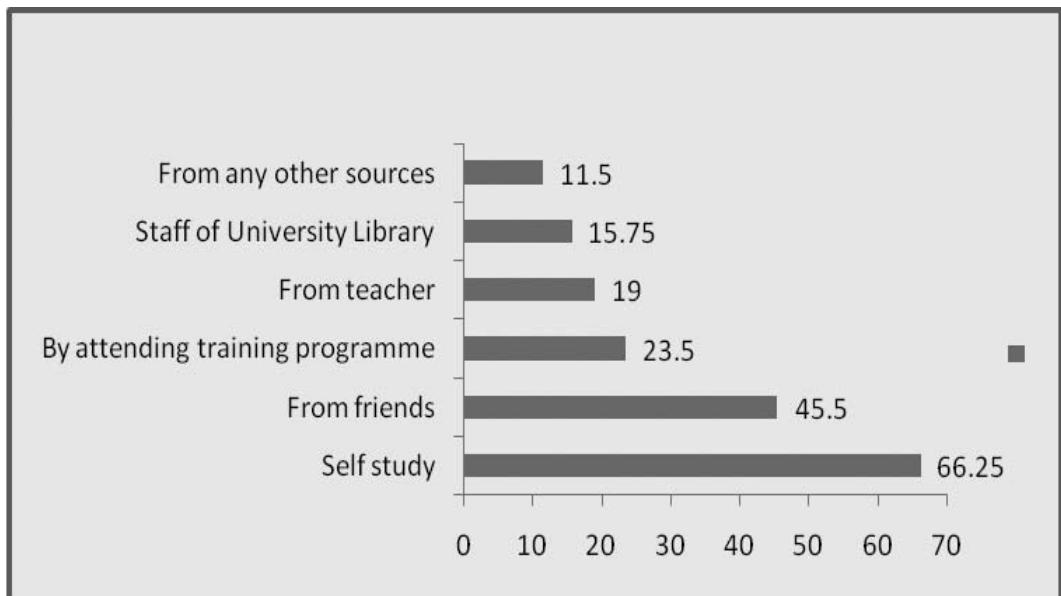


Figure 5. Sources of Internet training

The students were asked to mention the sources from where they acquired skills to use Internet (Table 7). 265 users (66.25%) mentioned that they learnt skills by self study. 182 users (45.50%) revealed that they got training from their friends, 94 users (23.50%) mentioned that they

learnt it through training programs, 76 users (19%) mentioned that they learnt it from their teachers, 63 users (15.75%) got training from the staff of the university library, 46 users (11.50%) learnt it from other sources, i.e., family members, colleagues and through computer books.

Reasons for Internet use

Table 8. Sources of Internet training

Reasons	No. of Respondents	Percentage
To prepare class assignment	232	58.00
For research projects	185	46.25
To update knowledge	153	38.25
For communication	121	30.25
For entertainment	96	24.00
To prepare for examinations	86	21.50
To read news	57	14.25
To download software	45	11.25
For other reasons	33	8.25
To purchase items	23	5.75

Note: Total sample exceeds the required size since the questions are multiple choices

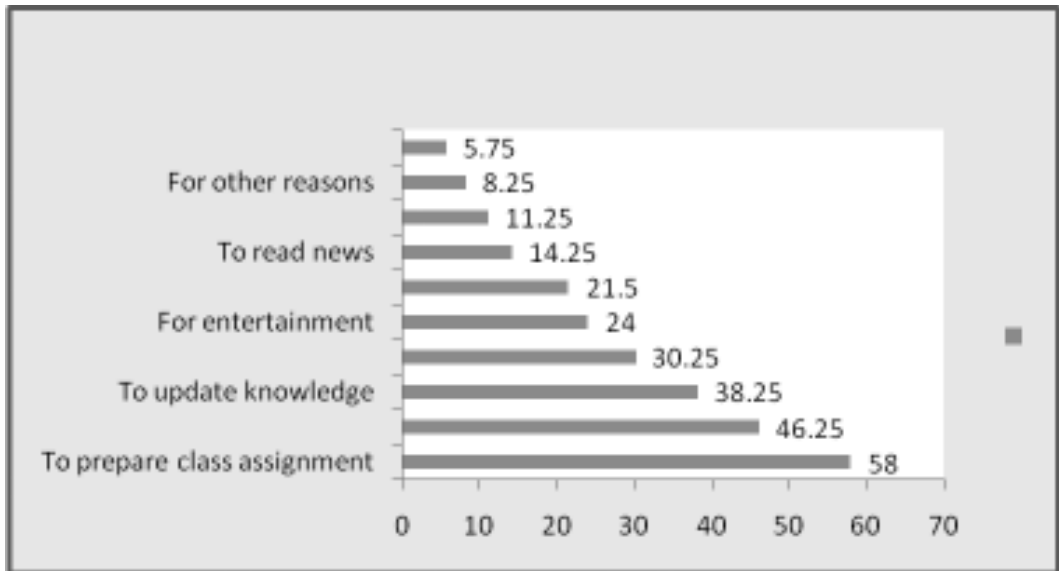


Figure 6. Sources of Internet training

The students were asked to mention the reasons for using Internet (Table 8). 232 users (58%) mentioned that they use Internet for preparing class assignments, 185 users (46.25%) use it for assistance in their research projects, 153 users (38.25%) pointed out that they use it to update their knowledge, 121 users (30.25%) explore Internet for communication

purposes, 96 users (24%) mentioned that they rely on for entertainment, 86 users (21.50%) use it for the examination preparation, 57 users (14.25%) use it for reading news, 45 users (11.25%) mentioned that they use it to download software, 33 users (8.25%) use it for their specific purposes such as online job searching & application, spending leisure time,

chatting, for presentations, projects and notes, communities, poetry reading, career development, to know about latest developments,

to know about international political & global affairs, and sports updates, while 23 users(5.75%) use it for purchasing items.

Appealing features of Internet

Table 9. Appealing features of Internet

Features	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Ease to work	187	46.75
Time saving	152	38.00
Searching tools	106	26.50
Authenticity of information	84	21.00
Internet graphics	65	16.25
Other features	42	10.50

Note: Total sample exceeds the required size since the questions are multiple choices

The students were asked to mention the appealing features of the Internet (Table 9). One 187 respondents (46.75%) mentioned that ‘Ease of working’ was the most appealing feature of the Internet, 152 (38%) mentioned ‘Time saving’ as appealing feature, 106 (26.50) pointed out ‘Searching tools’, 84 (21%) mentioned ‘Authenticity of information’, 65

(16.25%) mentioned ‘Internet graphics’, 42users (10.50%) mentioned other features such as ‘up to date information’, ‘entertainment’, ‘full text articles’, ‘latest research’, ‘key word searching facility’, and ‘e-mail service.’ Apparently, easy to work as a distinct feature of Internet became the major voice of the respondents.

Use of search engines

Table 10. Use of search engines

Search Engine	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Google	353	88.25
Yahoo!	284	71.00
AltaVista	84	21.00
MSN	65	16.25
Info-seek	48	12.00
Other search engines	57	14.25

Note: Total sample exceeds the required size since the questions are multiple choices

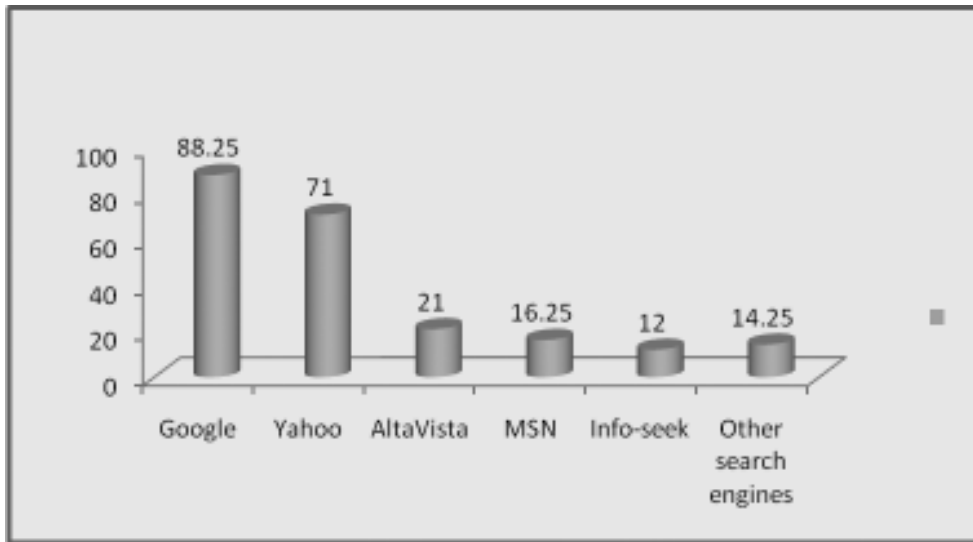


Figure 7. Use of search engines

The respondents were asked to mention which search engines they use to get required information (Table 10). 353 students (88.25%) mentioned that mostly they use Google for searching, 284 respondents (71%) use Yahoo!,

84 respondents (21%) use Alta Vista, 65 (16.25%) mentioned that they use MSN for searching information and 48 respondents (12%) revealed that they use Info-seek. 57 (14.25%) mentioned the use of other search engines.

Email service

Table 11. Internet based e-mail services

Search Engine	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yahoo!	318	79.50
Gmail	206	51.50
Hotmail	92	23.00
Other	63	15.75

Note: Total sample exceeds the required size since the questions are multiple choices

The students were asked to mention which Internet based e-mail services they use (Table 11). 318 users (79.50%) mentioned 'Yahoo!' e-mail service, 206 respondents

(51.50%) use 'Gmail', 92 users (23%) use 'Hotmail', while 63 users (15.75%) mentioned the use of other e-mail services such as orkut.com, etc.

Conclusion

The results of this study resemble those of many studies previously conducted in other countries. Like other developing nations, proliferation of the Internet is a new phenomenon in India. Its use has become common in academic quarters very recently. Most of the university students have started the use of Internet since last five to seven years. The survey clearly shows that students are making use of the Internet for course related reading and research needs. Only one-third students use it update their knowledge. Ease of work and time saving are the reasons of Internet use among university students. Authenticity of information on the Internet could attract only a few students. The results on the popularity of search engines among Indian students correspond to the global ratings. Google is the most popular search engine followed by Yahoo! and Alta Vista. Among Web-based free email services Yahoo is followed by Gmail and Hotmail.

The universities in India should arrange training programs to orientate the students and teachers to the hidden potential of this technology. Modules on basic and advanced searching techniques should be included in the curricula of all departments. Teachers and staff can encourage Internet usage among students. As this study has shown, more students are relying on the Internet for their academic needs than in the past; it is recommended that future studies should continue to monitor students' usage and attitudes toward the Internet. It is also important that we study those students who are not using the Internet in spite of efforts made by the university authorities.

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