

Pattern of internet use by undergraduate students at the Faculty of Medicine: a case of University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

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The way undergraduates read for the medical degree is considerably influenced by modern technology, where internet plays a major role. The major functions that the internet offers are searching information, entertainment, communication and socialization. Internet is used in the Faculty of Medicine for official work such as uploading notices, lecture notes and videos, examination results and small group discussions, tutorial questions, etc. The response of students towards these new trends has not been considered scientifically and statistically. The objective of this study was to describe the pattern of internet use among students at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Peradeniya.

A self-administered questionnaire was distributed to all the students in four batches (861) at the faculty and out of them totally 716 (83.2%) responded. Microsoft Excel software was used as the data entry package and SPSS was used for the analysis of data. The frequencies of distribution of each variable and cross tabulation when appropriate were calculated. The chi-square test was used to compare the frequencies of different variables.

A majority of the students accessed internet at the faculty (94.4%) using smart phones (84.6%) via Wi-Fi connection in the faculty (83.4%) mostly for academic purposes (99.4%) on daily basis (66.1%) for 1 to 2 hours per day (41.5%). Most had 1 to 2 years of experience (41.8%) in using internet, through self-learning (87.2%), and most of them were satisfied with their skills to use the internet (77.4%). Most popular activities in academic, social networking, entertainment and communication fields were downloading Moodle lecture notes (95.1%), Facebook (89.0%), listening to music (89.2%), and e-mail (80.6%) respectively. Most frequently faced problems were slow internet connection (63.0%), using e-data bases (41.6%) and staying longer than intended (46.5%) with no difference according to sex or academic year. According to the student perception their academic work was significantly affected due to internet use (17.1%).

The findings indicated that females used internet mainly for academic purposes while males used mainly for social networking and entertainment. Preclinical students spent significant time on academic purpose. For academic information search students mostly used search engines such as yahoo and google, which may be unreliable, compared to databases such as HINARI. It is important that the faculty play a prominent role in the organization of internet skill building courses for students to enhance their capability to adapt to new technologies.