

## What are Medical Students Doing Online?- A Study in Kolkata, India

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### Abstract

Medical students, the future doctors of our country are an important part of the society. When they will enter into the professional world it would be very difficult to approach them and get time for conversation. If they can be approached in the virtual world it would be a unique opportunity for numerous business houses for line of work. This study aims to throw some light on the online behavior of medical students. We can learn about the websites they visit, what motivates them to use internet? What information do they seek? and on what topics they discuss? For the research different social networking websites and blogs involving medical students were studied. From this their topics of discussion were analyzed. To get more insights a questionnaire was formed and medical students in Kolkata were interviewed. It was seen that medical students used internet for various reasons. They use internet for sharing class notes, watching videos of surgery, finding books and looking for internship and socializing. Their internet usage pattern was analyzed and a trend was found.

**Keywords:** Medical students; Virtual world; Internet; Online habits; Behavior

### Introduction

The change in information technology, communication and data sharing has happened mainly due to internet. The Internet is a world-wide broadcasting capability, a mechanism for information dissemination, and a medium for collaboration and interaction between individuals and their computers without regard for geographic location [1]. It is having more influence on all aspects of the society and has become an integral part of the daily lives of people [2]. Students use internet to communicate with each other and share ideas, knowledge, experiences, lecture notes, perform many day to day activities like purchasing tickets, ordering books, banking, video calling and other entertainment activities. They can get any information on any subject from any place within seconds, can watch live telecasts, read online newspapers and perform a lot of activities without spending money [3]. The use of internet has a great impact on the student's academic career [4]. Education with computers helps in understanding the theoretical and critical concepts [5]. Internet provides support to curriculum especially when access to a library is difficult or time-consuming. It also supports interactive learning and provides a fast and efficient means of accessing online journals, conferences and seminars [6]. Medical students need to acquire computer and internet skills at the beginning of their medical studies [7]. As the number of internet users continue to grow explosively [8] it is important to study internet behavior patterns [9]. In the Western countries and in South East Asian countries, several studies have focused on internet behavior patterns in adolescents [10]. However, there is a dearth of such studies in India. This study aims to throw some light in the prevalence of internet addiction and study the internet behavior pattern of medical students in Kolkata [11,12].

### Objective

The broad objective is to study the internet usage pattern of medical students in Kolkata.

To understand the broad objective, the following sub-objectives have been designed.

- i. To study the various type of activities performed by medical students over internet.
- ii. To study the internet usage habit of medical students.
- iii. To find the influencing factors to use internet.
- iv. To find the most popular websites visited by medical students.

### Methodology

To achieve the broad objective both primary and secondary research has been carried out. The secondary research was carried out by analyzing the online activities of medical students by studying blogs, student groups and communities in Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and other discussion forums. In the primary research a survey was carried out by interviewing medical students from different medical colleges in Kolkata.

### Findings From Secondary Research

From secondary research the following trends were observed.

#### Purpose of internet usage

- Social communication/networking.
- Study or professional purposes.
- Entertainment.
- Other purposes (investments, banking, online ticketing etc ).

#### Educational and study purposes

- To know about different kind of drugs.
- Rational prescribing.
- Therapeutic guidelines.
- Recent advances in the field of medicine.
- Course curriculum.
- Downloading books.
- Project work.

#### Social networking/communication purpose

- Updating profiles, creating buzz in various social networking sites.

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- Instant messaging.
- Web boards.
- Chat rooms.
- News groups.

### Trends in the usage pattern

- Internet is used as a preferred medium of getting information.
- 1st and 2nd year students' use internet mainly for entertainment and social networking.
- Post Graduate / internship students used internet mainly for general information and research activities.
- 1st year and 2nd year students preferred instant messaging while post graduate students preferred email.
- Email is the most popular internet service.
- Pubmed, indmed and medline are the most commonly accessed journals.
- "Recent advances in medicine" is the most searched article.
- Post Graduate / internship students were satisfied with computer assisted teaching while 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year students were not.
- As the students advance through the curriculum the internet usage decreases among the medical students.

### Blogs

On the analysis of the blogs the following trends were observed

- The medical students as well the professor Doctors blog more than the practising Doctors.
- The use of blog decreases with increase in the year of study.
- The use of blog increases with increase of the professional designation of the Doctors (in hospitals).
- Private practitioners (i.e. the Doctors practicing from their personal chamber only) seldom blog.

### Findings From Primary Research

#### Use of internet

From the total number of medical students surveyed, 92% used internet while only 8% abstained themselves from using internet (Figure 1).

#### Gender based internet usage pattern

Out of the total number of medical students surveyed only 8% females do not use internet while 32% of the females and 59% of the males used internet (Figure 2).

#### Mode of internet access

It was observed that PC was the most preferred device for using internet which was followed by laptop. In case of mobiles it was observed that male medical students used internet more with mobile than females (Figure 3).

#### Familiarity with internet

It was seen that 59% of the students had been using internet for more than 4 years, 21% for the past 2 to 4 years, 18% for the past 1 to 2 years and 3% for the past 6 months to 1 year (Figure 4).

#### Type of connection plan preferred

From the survey it was seen that 59% of the students used limited internet

connection while 41% of the students used unlimited internet connection (Figure 5).

### Frequency and internet usage plan

Survey revealed that most of the students preferred limited internet connection however it was also observed that the unlimited internet connection was preferred by the students who used internet 2-3 times a week (Figure 6).

### Connection type

It was observed that broadband was the most preferred internet connection type with 76% of the students using it, 12% used dialup and plug to surf devices and 3% used other connection types (Figure 7).

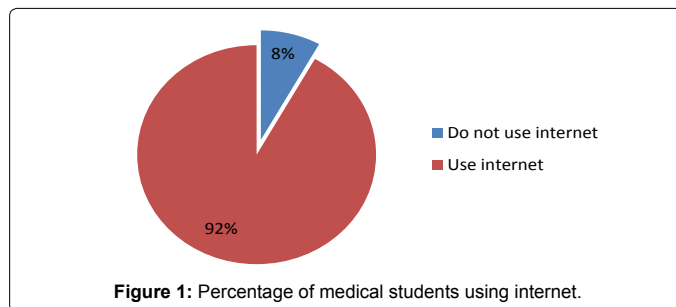


Figure 1: Percentage of medical students using internet.

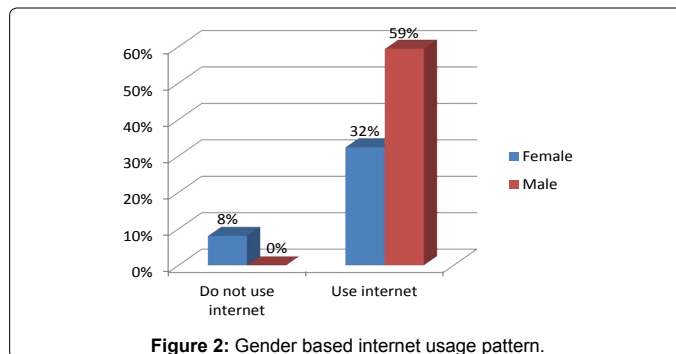


Figure 2: Gender based internet usage pattern.

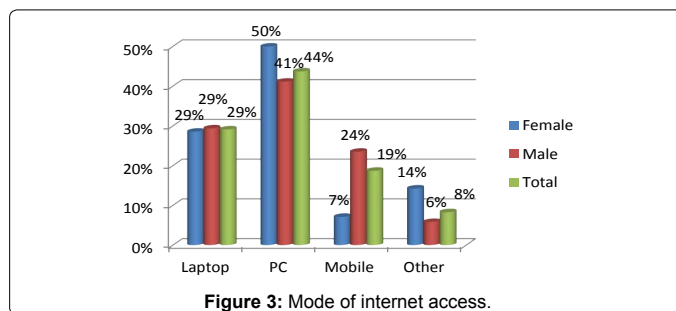


Figure 3: Mode of internet access.

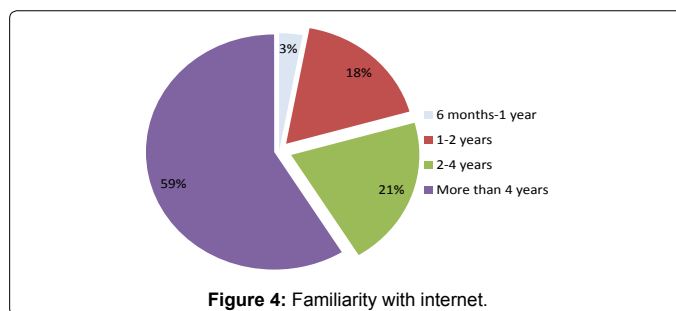
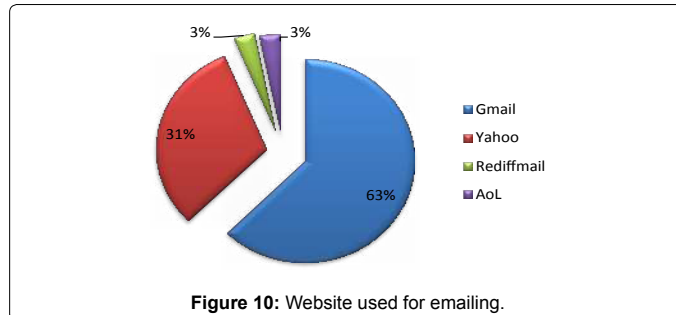
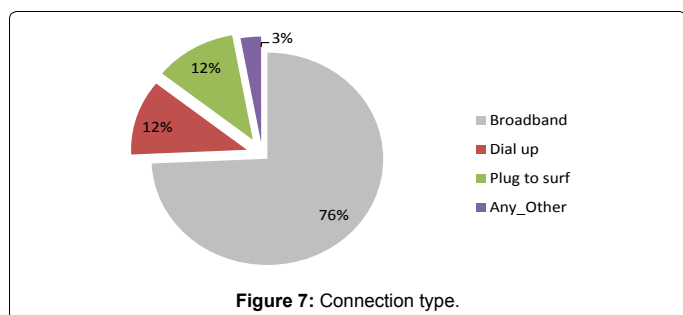
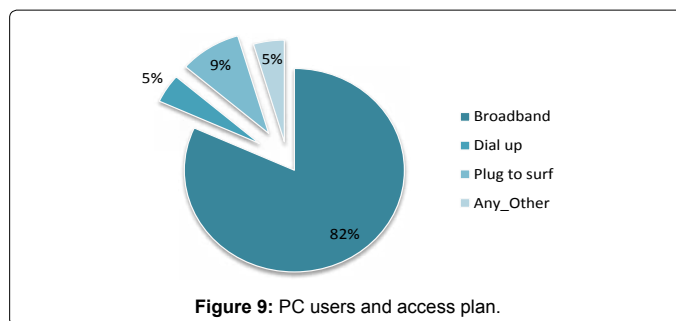
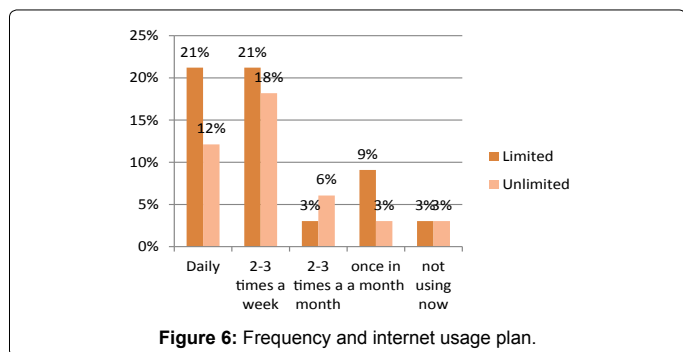
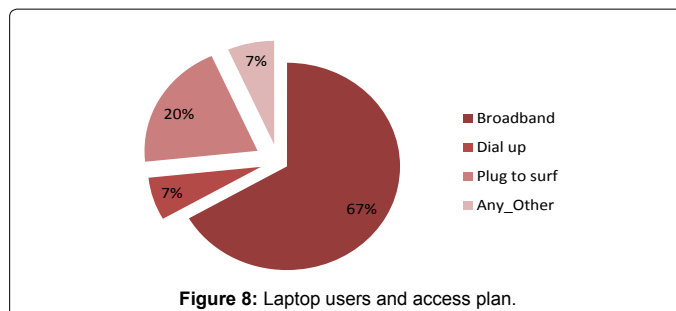
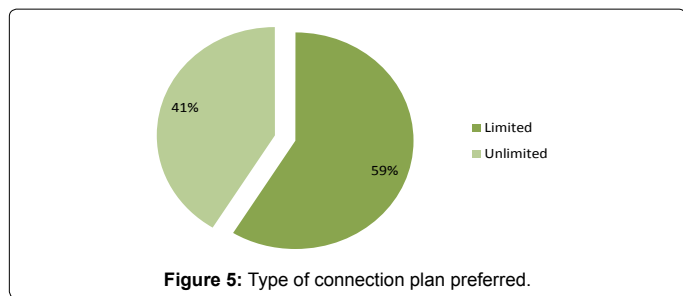


Figure 4: Familiarity with internet.



### Laptop users and access plan

It was seen that 67% of the laptop users used internet through broadband while 20% used plug to surf devices and only 7% used dial up connection (Figure 8).

### PC users and access plan

It was observed that 82% of the PC users used internet through broadband and 9% used plug to surf devices while only 5% used dial up connection (Figure 9).

### Website used for emailing

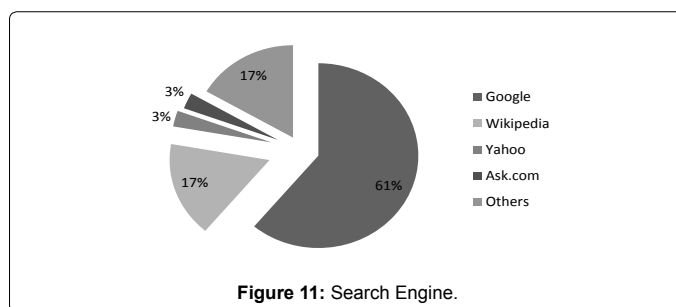
From the survey conducted it was seen that Gmail (63%) was the most preferred emailing website which was followed by Yahoo (31%) and Rediffmail (3%) (Figure 10).

### Search engine

Google (61%) came out to be the most preferred search engine which was followed by Wikipedia (17%), Yahoo (17%) and Ask.com (3%) (Figure 11).

### Conclusion

The data collected from the secondary and primary survey gives a trend about the online behavior and internet usage pattern of medical students. It is seen that medical students start using internet for



socializing and exchanging class notes, does chatting in the initial years of their study but slowly takes on to emailing, research and blogging. As medical students advance towards higher semester's internet becomes a part of their daily life. They use internet for social networking, e-banking, e-ticketing, downloading videos, movies, songs, watching online medical surgeries etc. They keep themselves updated with news from the internet and the happenings in the friend circle through tweets, comments and status updates. They also participate in discussion about political, legal and environmental causes in discussion forums and social networking sites. They actively participate in viral campaigns to spread news about some social cause. Gmail is the most common mail server for emailing while Google is the most common search engine used by medical students. They mainly prefer broadband connection and limited data plan.

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