



Effect of locus of control and reading practices and choices on the use of internet resources by college students

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Abstract

The study revealed that internal locus of control was prevalent among the students than the external locus of control. It means that most of the students in Indian collage are in control of their actions, exhibit good behaviour and social relationships. They believe that the effort they put into their studies is reciprocal of what their grades will be. They understand the fact that the more they study the better their grades becomes but not on what the lecturer just decide to give them. They also know that they are responsible for any course of action they might decide to take especially since their parents are not there to supervise them. The study also revealed that the level of computer skills possessed by the student have an influence on their use of the Internet resources. Those students that have very poor computer skills do not make use of the Internet as those with very good computer skills. The higher the level of computer skills possessed by the students the better they are in the use of the Internet and it resources. It is assumed that those having very poor computer skills are assisted while using Internet resources since all the students have used some of the Internet resources one time or the other. The influence of locus of control on the use of Internet resources was found to be insignificant and this is consistent with other findings. From the study, it was discovered that both the internals and the externals use the Internet almost equally. In other words, personality traits do not have influence on the use of the Internet although it has a significant effect on academic achievement. In the paper of, the relationship between locus of control and Internet use is insignificant.

Keywords: effect, locus of control, reading practices, choices, internet resources, college students

Introduction

College students have been at the forefront of social change since the end of World War II. They were among the first in the United States to use the Internet for communication, recreation, and file sharing, and the first to have regular broadband Internet access (The Chronicle of Higher Education, Almanac Issue 2001-2). Internet use first became widespread on collages campuses in the 1990s, and in many ways the Internet is a direct outcome of collages-based research. Yahoo, Napster, and many other Internet tools were created by collages students, while the vast majority of collages students are simply Internet users, as a group they can be considered pioneers.

A survey carried out in USA (Rainie and Packel 2001) shows that the demographic profile of today's collages students is not much changed over the past decade. One characteristic that sets them apart from past generations of collages students is their degree of familiarity with the Internet. Most of the 18-year-old collages first year students of today were born years after the personal computer was introduced to the public, and they are less aware of a "pre-Internet" world as they are of one in which the Internet also called the "Net" is central to their communication. A count put the number of Internet users in United States at over 104 million and every day, 50 million Americans go online (Rainie and Packel 2001). Statistics show that Africa as a continent has recorded an Internet user

growth of 171.4% between year 2000 – 2004, but accounts for only 1.5% of the world Internet usage. Asia is at the foremost with 32.0%, while North America and Europe has 28.1% and 27.9% respectively of the Internet users in the world (Fatoki, 2004) [7].

The Internet, sometimes called simply "the Net," is a worldwide system of computer networks - a network of networks in which users at any one computer can, if they have permission, get information from any other computer (and sometimes talk directly to users at other computers). It was conceived by the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) of the U.S. government in 1969 and was first known as the ARPANET. The original aim was to create a network that would allow users of a research computer at one collages to be able to "talk to" The Internet can now be accessed virtually anywhere by numerous means. Mobile phones, data cards, handheld game consoles and cellular routers allow users to connect to the Internet from anywhere there is a cellular network supporting that device's technology. Other Internet resources include email, www (World Wide Web), file sharing, streaming media, collaboration, remote access, voice telephony, and webcams and so on. Studies done on the use of Internet resources among Indian students show that the use of computer and the Internet to aid their academic activities is gradually becoming acceptable but the students have not fully used these facilities (Ajuwon, 2003) [3].

Review of Literature

Literature has shown that the use of Internet by students can be influenced by certain variables like demographic characteristics such as age, sex, marital status, educational qualification, computer skills, accessibility to computer and the Internet. In addition, Katz (1998) ^[14] indicated that student attitudes such as self-image, social image, self-confidence, locus of control, satisfaction, and motivation are those, which lay the foundation and contribute towards the willingness of students to use information and communication technology in learning. Basic personal computer skills are prerequisite to using the Internet, though in practice these skills are often acquired together, as the popularity of the Internet motivates many adults to use computers for the first time. Motor skills (learning to use a keyboard, learning to manipulate a mouse) and perceptual skills (learning to associate images and events on the computer screen with motor actions) form the most elementary substrate.

Locus of control is a person's perceived control over his or her own behaviour (Rotter 1966). It is the orientation that a person holds as to where control over life events is relative to the self—internal or external meaning, self-control, or other controlled. It is also defined as a psycho logic concept that defines people as having either an internal or an external locus of control, depending on whether they are more self-reliant and independent or more communally focused and dependent on others. The classification internal locus indicates that the person feels in control of events; external locus indicates that others are perceived to have that control. Studies carried out by researchers on the relationship between locus of control and the use of Internet among students are inconclusive and are basically in U.S and other western countries. In India however, studies conducted on the use of Internet by students in Indian collages and factors that affect its use are scanty. It is against this background therefore that this research study is carried out.

Advances in telecommunication technology in the last two decades have led to the development of computer networks that allow access to vast amount of information and services (Gershaw, 1989). Of the many computer networks that have been developed, the most prominent and widespread is the Internet, a global network of networks that enables computers of all kinds to directly and transparently communicate throughout the world. This 'global network of networks' has been described as the 'Information Super-highway' or 'Infobahn' because it constitutes a shared global resource of knowledge, and means of collaboration and co-operation in diverse communities. It is an open and unregulated community of people who communicate freely across an international electronic computer network (Coiera, 1995). It is simply the linking together of individual computers in a network (Mckenzie, 1997).

The Internet was originally conceived by the United States of America's military in the sixties, as a means of ensuring a workable communication system in the event of a strike by enemy missiles or forces (December, 1994) ^[6]. It has grown over the years to include academic and government computers as well as anyone who owns a computer, a modem and an account with an Internet Service Provider. Although there is no precise statistics, it is estimated that there are at least

100,000 networks, attached to more than 5 million computers located in over 100 countries, connected to the Internet. While access to the Internet was originally restricted to government departments, and organizations such as collages, in the 1990s it became available to those with access to a computer network, in both the developed and developing countries (Millman, 1995).

Use of internet resources by collage students

The Internet is used in many cases to supplement students' academic activities and provide some alternatives for professors and students looking to bring new life to familiar educational experiences. For example, two-thirds (68%) of students reported that they have subscribed to one or more academic-oriented mailing lists that relate to their studies. They use these lists to carry on email discussions about topics covered in their classes (Jones, 2002). The journey to Internet connection and use started in India in 1995, and since then many organizations and educational institutions have been laboring to achieve connectivity to enhance their corporate productivity and objectives (Fatoki 2004) ^[7]. Few Collageies have achieved satisfactory Internet connectivity, though some through dial up and others through wireless options (Oduwole, 2002). Jagboro (2003) ^[11] in her study of Internet usage in Indian Collages observed that both postgraduate and undergraduate students of Obafemi Awolowo Collages, Ile Ife, use Internet for research purposes. Similarly, Adomi (2003) ^[1] in a survey of cyber cafés in Delta state of India reported that 77.8% of the customers/users of the cyber cafés were students. Luban (2000) reported that Internet had positive influence on the students' academic work. Students have access to more information like online reference materials and sources. The Internet provides improved information on current events and the latest opinions since it is easily gotten to, fun, interesting and it exposes students to a greater variety of materials and predisposes them to do more reading.

Locus of control and use of internet resources:

Rotter (1996) originally described the psychological construct of locus of control as an element of personality. Locus of control refers to the perception of the extent to which individuals can control events in their lives. Individuals with an internal locus of control judge outcomes of events to be internally controllable. An important feature of locus of control is that it is not reality that is being measured but rather an individual's perception of control over reality. So, if they think they can control what happens in their lives, they behave as though they can. Most people lie somewhere in between these two extremes, believing that both personal effort and outside circumstances will affect the outcomes in their lives. Other findings suggest that evaluating online behaviour in the context of an individual's locus of control may have important consequences for Internet policy. It was found that an internal locus of control was positively related to acquiring information. It is believed that Internals who use the Internet may make better decisions and feel more empowered in general and as student in particular, than Internals who do not use the Internet (Hoffman, Novak and Schlosser, 2000) ^[8]. Understanding what underlying function the Internet serves

for Internals and Externals can assist scholars in important applications such as the design of more effective, educative and policy-oriented Web sites. Hoffman, Novak and Schlosser (2000) [8] stated that for Internals, navigational ease in the search process and cross-reference's between on- and offline sources may be most positively related to the ability to influence these students. For Externals, navigational ease in browsing seamlessly without needing to make choices may be positively related to influence. Furthermore, the primary communication goal for collagees students made up primarily of Internals versus Externals may be different according to Levenson (1974). For example, the more relevant goal for Internals may be to enhance on/offline activism while for Externals; the primary goal may be to build a large online audience, which can be influenced through creative, carefully targeted content.

Welsh (1999) investigated the relationship between Internet use, coping style, expectancies, and locus of control among undergraduates at a large private collage in the northeast where Internet dependence was defined as students demonstrating at least 3 criteria from a list of 7 items. From an initial sample of 1006 participants, 83 students were identified as scoring in the Internet dependent range, 42 of which completed the entire study. Using the Rotter (1966) internal external control scale, no difference was found between the 42 dependent and a matched sample of 42 nondependent Internet users. However, there was a tendency for dependent users to have a more external locus of control, a finding which approached significance.

Computer use, computer skill, and use of internet resources

The use of the computer and Internet is rapidly becoming a key component among the collagee students in many parts of the world. The level of computer skills among the students has been found to influence the use of Internet. In a study carried out in India (Ajuwon, 2003) [3], only 43% of the sample could use the computer. The relatively lower proportion of those who could use the computer may be a reflection of a limited access to computers among first year health sciences students in India. The relatively high cost of this product within the country is one of the primary reasons for this situation. Increased funding to Collages by government and Non-Governmental Agencies (NGA) is likely to solve this problem. This would enable Indian collagees to set-up computer laboratories in various faculties where students can have full access to Internet services as it is done in other countries including America. Similar studies in Finland and Malaysia also showed that there is higher proportion of students using computer for their studies (Nurjahan, 2002). According to Ajuwon (2003) [3] and Nurjahan, (2002) more medical students, than student nurses had used both the computer and the Internet. In addition, more medical students than student nurses regularly obtained health-related information from the Internet.

Computer skills refer to one's ability to use the software (and sometimes hardware) of a computer (Davis, 1999) [5]. They include basic computer skills like knowing how to switch on the computer, being able to use a mouse to interact with elements on the screen, being able to use the computer

keyboard and being able to close down the computer after use. Intermediate skills include being able to use the word processor, e-mail, spreadsheets, databases, and the use the Internet, while advanced skills include programming and the use of computer for scientific research.

Constraints on internet use

Statistics (The World Bank, 2004) indicate that Internet use depends on the financial situations of countries. For example, some values on the Internet accessibility of overall population are 75.6% in Sweden, 61.4% in Holland, 68.7% in Japan, 50% in Germany, 17.7% in Greece, 14.2% in Turkey, 11.1% in Russia, 10.9% in Thailand, 6.6% in Saudi Arabia and 4.5% in Kenya. Internet unfamiliarity is another problem that causes lack of training in second language classroom. In other words, little experience on the Internet is an anxiety source for both second language learners and teachers. Third, since the Internet offers all types of information, some of them have no intellectual basis. Though serious precautions are taken today, this is still an important problem for students and everybody in general (Singhal, 1997). Last and fourth, the increasing amount of information generally makes learners confused while they try to reach specific information (Chafe, 1999) [4]. Consequently, problems of Internet use focus on computer unavailability, lack of Internet accessibility and training, computer anxiety, computer unfamiliarity of both teachers and students and some financial obligations. A major hindrance to Internet connectivity on the African continent has been identified to be poor communication infrastructure but despite this, Jensen (1996) observed that over half of African countries have developed some form of low-cost dial-up store and e-mail service with a gateway to the Internet.

Conclusion

The study revealed that internal locus of control was prevalent among the students than the external locus of control. It means that most of the students in Indian Collages are in control of their actions, exhibit good behaviour and social relationships. They believe that the effort they put into their studies is reciprocal of what their grades will be. They understand the fact that the more they study the better their grades becomes but not on what the lecturer just decide to give them. They also know that they are responsible for any course of action they might decide to take especially since their parents are not there to supervise them. 82.1% and 75.6% of the students respectively make use of the Internet either to check their mails or to browse the web for academic information mainly. 5.5% of the students even perform activities like online shopping, 29.4% listen to news and 19.9% watch sports on the Internet apart from the fact that an ample size 46.3% of the student uses the Internet for entertainment purposes. This is consistent with predictions that have been made that beyond 2004, majority of the people will be Internet users. The studies show that majority of collagees students have a positive attitude toward the Internet and its communication tools. They are comfortable with Internet communication, and even report finding enjoyment while using it for academic and personal reasons. Their Internet habits are split between academic and social uses, and they find it functional for both purposes. An overwhelming number of students feel that Internet

communication has positively enhanced their college academic experience. The fact that Internet connectivity now abound on campuses cyber cafés, collages libraries provide access to the Internet from the students' classes, and hostels at a subsidized price has made it possible.

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