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Internet Usage Trends among Indian College Students: A Comprehensive Review

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Abstract

The present study reviews existing research on patterns of internet usage among Indian college students, examining a broad range of factors influencing their online behavior. A total of 191 studies were identified, spanning seventeen areas of usage were identified and grouped into four overarching thematic categories: (a) Demographic and background factors (gender differences, academic discipline/stream of study, urban-rural differences in internet use and proficiency, internet experience, and internet users), (b) Access and usage patterns (devices used and internet access, device ownership, location of internet access, frequency of internet access, and time spent on the internet), (c) Purposes and skills (purposes for using the internet, preferred search engines, methods of obtaining/learning internet skills, and level of knowledge and awareness of internet use), and (d) Attitudes, barriers, and satisfaction (internet attitudes, barriers to using the internet, and satisfaction with the internet). The findings across studies remain mixed, reflecting differences in samples, research methodologies, and variables examined. Notably, since 2013, increased availability and affordability of technology has led to increased internet access, higher smartphone adoption, and stronger digital engagement among college students. Overall, the evidence suggests that internet usage behavior among Indian college students is influenced by technological, geographic, and cultural factors.

Keywords: Patterns of internet usage, College students, Gender, India

Data on internet usage in India indicates a sharp increase over the past decade (Figure 1). In 2014, only 233 million people (13.5% of the population) were internet users. By 2019, this figure had more than doubled to 574 million (41%), and by 2024, it reached 886 million people (52.4%) having access to the internet (Basuroy, 2024). Projections for 2025 suggest a user base of nearly 900 million users (55.3%) (Internet in India, 2024) with the total expected to surpass 1 billion users by 2027 (Parekh, 2024).

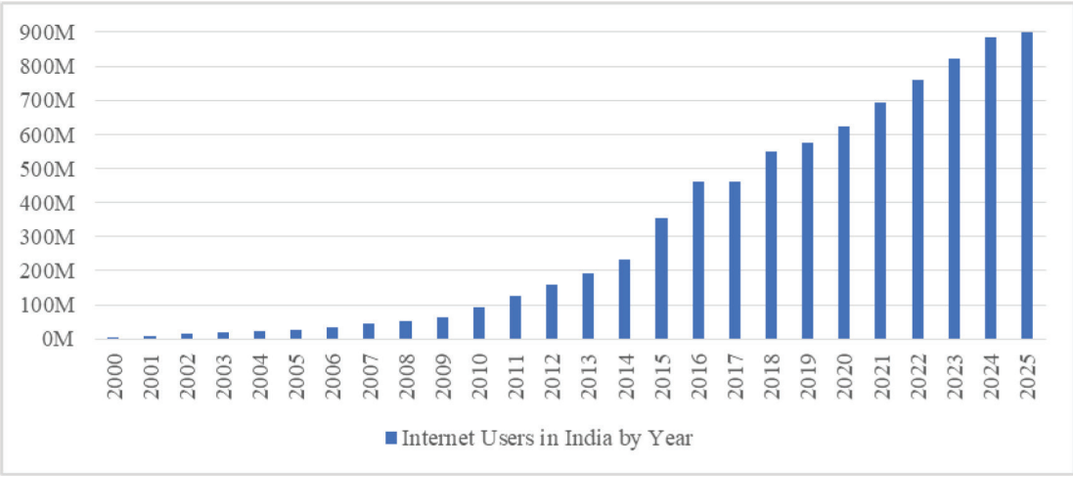

Figure 1. Internet Users in India from 2000-2025

Sources: India Internet Users (2016) and Internet in India (2024)

Statistics from 2023 indicate that individuals aged 15 to 29 constitute the largest group of internet users with 88% of males and 77% of females in this age range reporting regular internet use (Waghmare, 2025). India's youth represent the most active segment of the online population (Kumar, 2022), a trend reflected among college students, who consistently demonstrate high levels of digital engagement (Rani & Anuradha, 2017). Given this strong online presence, examining young people's internet usage patterns is essential.

Studies exploring internet usage with Indian college students are plentiful, focusing on gender differences, usage patterns and purposes, internet knowledge, time

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spent using the internet, training, internet experience and skills, social media usage, confidence and satisfaction, and barriers to using the internet (e.g., Agrawal & Dave, 2009; Aggarwal et al. 2015; Ansari & Jilani, 2008; Arora, 2005; Bagdey et al., 2017; Bala, 2021; Chakravarty & Jain, 2015; Chanda, 2016; Chandrashekara et al., 2011; Choudhary & Saini, 2016; Dange, 2010; Daniel, 2019; Deshpande, 2017; Devi & Roy, 2012; Eduljee et al., 2021; Firdaus & Haridasan, 2015; Giddaiah, 2022; Kumar & Kumbar, 2011; Inamdar & Rotti, 2004; Jayaprakash, 2018; Jyoti & Batra, 2015; Kaur et al. 2023; Kaur & Sharma, 2018; Kochhar et al., 2013; Kumar & Kaur, 2005; Kumar et al., 2019; Kumari, 2012: Kumari et al.,2018; Loan, 2011a; Loan, 2011b; Madhuri, 2012; Madhusudhan, 2007; Maharana et al., 2019; Manimekalai et al., 2006; Marya et al., 2013; Mhetre et al., 2024; Mishra et al., 2005; Muralidharan & Gaur, 2018; Naik & Kumar, 2019; Pandey et al., 2025; Parmar, 2015; Parul, 2014; Peter et al., 2017; Pradeepkumar & Priya, 2017; Priyanka & Pal, 2021; Rahaman, 2021; Rajasekhar et al., 2018; Raju & Anitha, 2017; Ramya et al., 2019; Rathod et al., 2022; Seetharaman, 2012; Sharma, 2008; Singh, 2016; Singh & Kaur, 2019; Singh et al., 2013; Sinha, 2004; Solemanpharcy, 2024; Sujatha, 2011; Suri & Sharma, 2013; Thanuskodi, 2011, 2013; Varma, 2023; Vijesh, 2019).

Additional research has also explored internet usage across various factors like stream of study, urban-rural setting, college type and location, and internet attitudes, internet addiction, and usage by academic discipline (e.g., Agarwal & Jaiswal 2023; Anand et al., 2018; Aqeel & Misra, 2020; Balaje et al., 2024; Balu et al., 2013; Cindhana & Amalimary, 2018; Dahiya & Varma, 2013; Dange et al. 2013; Davey et al., 2014; Dey et al., 2025; Eduljee & Kumar, 2015; Eduljee & Kumar, 2017b; Ganganahalli & Dixit, 2024; Gawas & Barmola, 2021; Jain et al. 2020; Jali et al. 2014; Kaushik & Sharma, 2009; Kumar & Debata, 2018; Kumar & Tiwari, 2012; Loan, 2011c; Malik & Panwar, 2023; Menon et al., 2018; Mulla, 2011; Naik & Shivalingaiah, 2013; Nagarajappa et al. 2025; Naik et al., 2020; Parmar & Desai, 2018; Patil, 2001; Pinto & Poornananda, 2017; Sampath Kumar & Manjunath, 2013; Shafi & Maqbool, 2012; Singh & Pant, 2013; Sowbaranika & Kumar, 2023; Velvizhi & Ramasamy, 2017).

The need for this study is emphasized by the fact that most research on internet usage among Indian college students is disparate and cross-sectional. These studies typically examine usage at a single point in time across diverse populations, including research fellows and scholars, intern doctors, faculty, librarians, and students from various academic disciplines like medicine, dentistry, engineering, and the sciences, spanning both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. While this diversity is useful, it limits the ability to draw comprehensive or longitudinal conclusions about usage patterns, trends and influencing factors among college students as a unified group.

One of the earliest studies on internet use in the Indian academic context was conducted by Pangannaya and Kumar (2000) at the University of Mysore surveying students, research scholars, and faculty members across academic disciplines. The study found that 37% of students and research scholars had more than six months of internet experience, while 75% of faculty had over one year. Internet access occurred 2–3 times per week across all groups. Most students (67%) and faculty (71%) acquired internet skills with assistance from colleagues, though 42% of faculty members relied on self-instruction and trial-and-error. Yahoo (92%) and Altavista (41%) were the most widely used search engines. Reported challenges included limited access time, poor internet connectivity, and difficulty retrieving relevant information. The authors recommend improvements like more terminals, increased bandwidth, user training, local email addresses, and dot-matrix printers to support academic work.

Singh (2014) conducted a comprehensive review on internet use among Indian college students, covering general internet usage (25 studies), internet addiction (5 studies), and its impact on education and social life (11 studies). The review highlighted both positive and negative effects of internet use, including differences in time spent on educational websites, and the broader influence on the Indian education sector. However, in-depth research, specifically examining the reasons behind variations in usage patterns remains limited.

This review examines peer-reviewed research on patterns of internet usage among Indian college students since 2000. Understanding these patterns is important for several reasons. First, early studies (pre-2013) revealed digital disparities in usage, connectivity, or access. Second, the findings can guide curriculum design to strengthen digital literacy and support career development (Varghese & Musthafa, 2022), inform policies on expanding access and promoting digital skills, and provide evidence for researchers, businesses, and policymakers (Parekh, 2024). Finally, this research helps identify unhealthy behaviors such as internet addiction and disrupted sleep, thereby supporting the development of wellness programs and effective treatment strategies (Vyjayanthi et al., 2014).

Based on prior research on internet usage among Indian college students, the present study identified seventeen areas of usage, which are organized into four thematic categories:

(1) **Demographic and background factors**: gender differences, academic discipline/stream of study, urban-rural differences in internet use and proficiency, internet experience, and internet users,
(2) **Access and usage patterns**: devices used and internet access, device ownership, location of internet access, frequency of internet access, and time spent on the internet,

(3) **Purposes and skills**: purposes for using the internet, preferred search engines, methods of obtaining/learning internet skills, and level of knowledge and awareness of internet use, and
(4) **Attitudes, barriers, and satisfaction**: internet attitudes, barriers to using the internet, and satisfaction with the internet.

Thus, the primary objectives of this review were two-fold.

1. To review patterns of internet usage among Indian college students, and
2. To identify and explain factors contributing to differences in these usage patterns.

Method

Search Strategy

To examine internet usage patterns among Indian college students, data was drawn from peer-reviewed journals, online searches, and academic platforms such as Google Scholar, Academia, ResearchGate, Semantic Scholar, and other research databases. The review process involved a preliminary screening of articles for relevance, followed by a full-text evaluation, during which reference lists were examined to identify additional studies. Studies were included based on alignment with the review objectives, resulting in a final selection of 199 publications from 2000 to 2025, providing a comprehensive overview of trends over time.

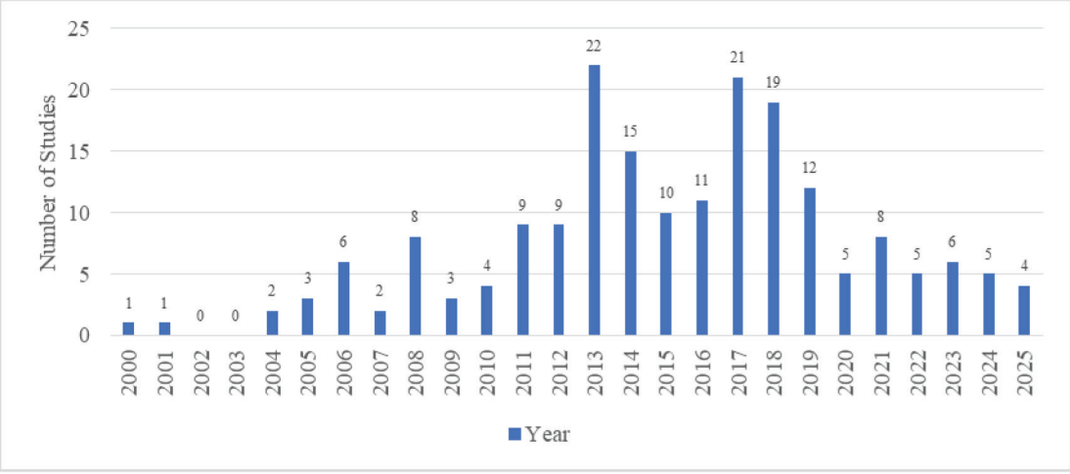

Figure 2. Number of studies located on internet usage by year (n = 191)

Variables Analyzed

This study identified several key variables influencing internet usage patterns among Indian college students. These include gender, frequency and purpose of use, extent and location/of access, device ownership, time spent online, methods of learning internet skills, satisfaction with internet facilities and search engines, internet attitudes, academic stream, internet experience, awareness of internet use, and barriers/problems encountered.

Journals Accessed

Research on internet usage has been published in a wide range of journals, with no consistent pattern in publication patterns. The studies span diverse disciplines, including education, information technology, medicine, engineering, psychology, library and information studies, economics, business, dentistry, nursing education, pharmacology, healthcare, librarianship, and management.

Statistics Utilized

Tables 1 and 2 summarize the methodology used across the reviewed studies, which employed statistical techniques such as descriptive statistics, correlation, *t*-tests, chi-square tests, ANOVA, and regression. These methods were applied to examine variables related to internet usage patterns with Indian college students.

Results

I. Demographic and Background Factors

a. Gender Differences

Research on gender differences in internet usage among Indian college students is mixed. Some studies report no statistically significant differences (Kadam et al., 2017; Rai, 2014; Sridevi & Indrani, 2015), while others noted variations in usage patterns between males and females (Begum & Ramachandran, 2018;

Table 1. A Select Summary of Research Articles Examining Patterns of Internet Usage with Indian College Students (2000-2014)

Authors/Year of Publication	Population Studied/State	Research Methodology/Design/ Statistics
Pangannaya & Kumar (2000)	100 research scholars, 25 faculty/Mysore	Descriptive statistics/cross-Sectional
Patil (2001)	260 Librarians/Karnataka	Descriptive statistics/cross-Sectional
Inamdar & Rotti (2004)	394 medical students/Pondicherry	Descriptive statistics/cross-sectional
Kumar & Kaur (2006)	792 teachers, 1188 undergraduate students/ Haryana and Himachal Pradesh	Descriptive statistics/cross-sectional
Unnikrishnan et al. (2008)	500 medical students/Mangalore	Descriptive statistics, cross-sectional/ chi square test/
Agrawal & Dave (2009)	68 scientists and research fellows/Jodhpur	Descriptive statistics/cross-sectional
Dange (2010)	200 postgraduate students/Karnataka	Descriptive statistics/cross-sectional
Loan (2011b)	676 students/Kashmir Valley	Descriptive statistics/cross-sectional
Seetharaman (2012)	734 medical students/Chennai	Descriptive statistics/cross-sectional
Dange, et al. (2013)	150 post graduate students/ Karnataka	Descriptive statistics/cross-sectional/ *t* test, ANOVA
Jali et al. (2014)	340 dental students/Rajasthan	Descriptive statistics/cross-sectional

Table 2. A Select Summary of Research Articles Examining Patterns of Internet Usage with Indian College Students (2015-2025)

Authors/Year of Publication	Population Studied/State	Research Methodology/Design/ Statistics
Chakravarty & Jain (2015)	95 B. Tech students, 14 faculty members/Haryana	Descriptive statistics/cross-sectional
Eduljee & Kumar (2015)	323 college students/Mumbai	Descriptive statistics/Cross-sectional/ ANOVA
Singh (2016)	350 medical students/Central Kerala	Descriptive statistics/Cross-sectional/ *t* test, chi square
Eduljee & Kumar (2017b)	323 college students/Mumbai	Descriptive Statistics/cross-sectional/ ANOVA, correlations
Vasanthakumar & Balasubramanian (2018)	125 science students and 100 arts students/Tamil Nadu	Descriptive Statistics/cross-sectional
Mohan & Malhotra (2019)	212 undergraduate medical students/ North India	Descriptive statistics/cross-sectional/ ANOVA
Vijesh (2019)	100 students/Coimbatore	Descriptive statistics/cross-sectional
Naik et al. (2020)	65 undergraduates, 85 postgraduates/ Udipi City	Descriptive statistics/cross-sectional
Eduljee et al. (2021)	Study 1: 323 college students/Mumbai. Study 2: 319 college students/Mumbai	Descriptive statistics /cross-sectional
Gupta & Jaiswal (2022)	400 pre-clinical and para clinical medical students/Kanpur	Descriptive statistics/cross-sectional/ *t*-tests
Sowbaranika & Kumar (2023)	150 undergraduate students/n.a.	Descriptive statistics/cross-sectional/ mixed methods, chi-square, correlations, regression
Mhetre et al. (2024)	100 medical students/n.a.	Descriptive statistics/cross-sectional
Pandey et al. (2025)	144 first-year MBBS students/ Lucknow	Descriptive statistics/cross-sectional/ chi-square

Kaur & Sharma, 2018; Kochhar et al., 2013; Pinto & Poornananda, 2017). Yunus et al. (2015) found no significant differences in internet experience among university students, with 47.68% of males and 60% of females reporting 1–2 years of experience ($p > .05$). Similarly, Eduljee et al. (2020) found no gender differences in internet skills with 323 college students, although males reported significantly higher levels of internet experience than females.

Several studies have reported gender differences in internet usage. Loan (2011a) found more males (86.54%) used the internet daily to weekly compared to females (67.02%). Vyjayanthi et al. (2014) reported that females were more active on social networking sites, while males engaged more in gaming. Other studies found that males spent significantly more time online than females (Rani and Anuradha, 2017; Rajasekhar et al., 2018; Thanuskodi, 2013). Laxmi (2016) observed that males primarily used the internet for content searches, while females used it for projects. Chandel and Lakhani (2018) reported significant gender differences ($p < .01$), and Kaur and Sharma (2018) highlighted differences in academic use, including class assignments and literature searches.

b. Academic Discipline/Stream of Study

Recent studies show notable disciplinary variations in internet usage among Indian students. Khare et al. (2007) in a survey of 100 Ph.D. scholars, found that management students had the highest usage (100%), followed by sciences and life sciences (90%), while only 30% of social science students reported using the internet. Loan (2011b) reported most students had less than three years' experience: 86.31% in social sciences and humanities, 84.50% in general sciences, 76.83% in computer science, and 72.22% in business and commerce. Only 12.96% of business and commerce students reported four or more years of internet experience, underscoring variations in digital familiarity across disciplines.

Access patterns also varied across disciplines. Loan (2011b) reported that students accessed the internet through commercial cybercafés, though computer science students (26.83%) were more likely to access the internet from home. Most students acquired internet skills through self-instruction with trial and error (45.70%) or with assistance from friends (27.15%). Laxmi (2016) observed disciplinary differences in purposes of use, arts students favoring entertainment and chatting, commerce students for completing assignments and accessing news updates, and science students for content searches and news updates. Pinto and Poornananda (2017) found no significant differences in usage across academic disciplines ($p > .05$). However, Parmar and Desai (2018) reported higher usage among science students than commerce or arts students, suggesting that academic demands influence usage patterns.

c. Urban-Rural Differences in Internet Use and Proficiency

Research highlights differences in internet usage and proficiency between urban and rural students. Singh and Kaur (2019) found no significant differences in internet use for educational purposes ($p > .05$), although rural students reported slightly greater engagement in online activities than urban students. Loan (2011c) noted higher daily use among urban students (27.87%) compared to rural students (21.01%), with urban students more likely to use the internet for information (39.89%), and rural students for educational purposes (35.29%). The challenges faced by each group also differed: urban students experienced information overload, whereas rural students struggled with financial constraints, limited internet literacy, and exposure to unreliable or excessive information.

Studies show mixed findings on urban-rural differences in internet usage. Some report higher proficiency and daily use among urban students (Raju and Anitha, 2017; Kadam et al., 2017; Karmakar and Karmakar, 2017; Pinto and Poornananda, 2017), while others found significant differences, suggesting a narrowing digital divide (Singh & Kaur, 2019; Hamza et al., 2019). Agarwal and Jaiswal (2023) observed higher usage among urban students, with 50% using the internet more than six hours daily compared to 20% of rural students ($p = .005$), and more urban students receiving formal training (82% vs. 60%). They recommend expanding cyber libraries, training, and a digital tool integration in academic and research activities.

d. Internet Experience

Several studies have documented varying levels of internet experience among college students and faculty**.** Kumar and Kaur (2005) found that 30.8% of students had 1–4 years of experience, whereas teachers reported longer use. Malik and Mahmood (2009) and Chandrashekara et al. (2011) similarly noted that many students had multiple years of prior computer experience. Madhuri (2012) reported that 35.71% of students had moderate levels of experience, while Kumari et al. (2013) found that 39% had four or more years. Balu et al. (2014) found that both engineering students and faculty typically had more than four years of experience, while Shivaraja (2014) noted that faculty were more likely than students to report sustained internet use.

Recent studies confirm these patterns. Most students reported 1–4 years of internet experience (Bagdey et al., 2017; Bharathi & Sujatha, 2014; Karthika et al., 2017; Mehla, 2016; Surwase et al., 2016). Eduljee et al. (2021) documented a sharp rise, with the proportion of students reporting four or more years increasing from 50.2% in 2014–2015 to 92.7% in 2019–2020 ($p < .01$). Similarly, Kumar (2022), in a study of 2,000 students, found that 44.6% had 1–3 years and 38.0% more than three years of experience.

e. Internet Users

Studies report varying levels of internet use among Indian college students. Early research indicated relatively low adoption, with 66% of Ph.D. scholars using the internet (Khare et al., 2007) and 44.67% of students across various disciplines (Loan, 2011b). Later studies show higher adoption rates: Chandrashekara et al. (2011) found overall usage of 81.66%, with males (52.50%) exceeding females (29.16%). Marya et al. (2013) noted 88.84% usage among 529 dental students. Kochhar et al. (2013) reported 84% internet experience among professional students, and Hadagali et al. (2013) found 61.70% among postgraduate students.

Studies indicate high internet usage among Indian college students, though figures vary. Balasubramanium and Vidyapeetham (2013) reported 55% across 53 state universities, while Singh and Pant (2013) reported a usage rate of 92.30%. Several studies found nearly 100% internet adoption (Padma and Ramasamy, 2014; Patel and Darbar, 2016; Meti, 2014; Choudhary and Dasgupta, 2014). Aggarwal et al. (2015) noted that almost all students used the internet (100% of males, 97.85% of females), whereas Jyoti and Batra (2015) reported much lower rates, with only 10% of males and 12.38% of females using the internet. Eduljee and Kumar (2015) observed usage rates of 92.5% in aided colleges and 97.7% in unaided colleges. Other studies also confirm widespread access (Balaje et al., 2024; Damor et al., 2018; Rani & Anuradha, 2017; Saha, 2016; Saxena et al., 2017).

II. Access and Usage Patterns

a. Devices Used and Internet Access

Internet access among Indian college students is now widespread, though early studies revealed regional and institutional differences. For example, Chowdary et al. (2013) reported access rates of 95.4% in Tamil Nadu and 77.8% in Andhra Pradesh, while Sekhar and Reddy (2013) reported nearly universal access (96.6%), with research scholars exhibiting the highest at 99.5%.

Device preferences among Indian college students have shifted markedly over time. Early research indicated heavy reliance on computers and laptops, with only a small proportion (4%) using mobile phones (Rai, 2014). Meti (2014) found that 48% of students accessed the internet through university computer labs, while 28% used smartphones. Shanmuga et al. (2017) and Saxena et al. (2017) similarly reported usage rates of 72.77% and 88%, respectively, among college students. By the mid-2010s, smartphones had become the primary access device, surpassing desktops and laptops (Saha, 2016; Kumar et al., 2016; Surwase et al., 2016; Priya et al., 2017). By 2018, smartphone dependence was nearly universal, with usage rates exceeding 97% in some samples (Dhamnetiya et al., 2021; Kumar & Debata, 2018; Rajasekhar et al., 2018; Renuka & Gurunathan, 2017; Vijesh, 2019).

Recent research confirms that smartphones remain the dominant mode of access, though usage patterns vary across gender, academic level, and institutional context. Thanuskodi (2013) observed that males were more likely to use cell phones than females. Kumar (2022) found that over 90% of students accessed the internet via their phones, while Kaur et al. (2023) reported higher dual-device use among postgraduates compared to undergraduates. More recent findings show some variability, with usage ranging from 32.7% (Sowbaranika & Kumar, 2023) to over 90% (Chitta et al., 2024), but overall, mobile phones continue to serve as dominant means of access to the internet for Indian college students (Dey et al., 2025).

b. Device Ownership

Recent studies show a steady rise in device ownership among Indian college students. Unnikrishnan et al. (2008) noted that computer ownership was highest among first- and second-year students (79.0%) compared to 68.0% of postgraduate students and interns and 38.5% of pre-final and final-year students. Similarly, Maroof et al. (2012) found that 53.7% of students owned a personal computer, with the highest rates of ownership among junior students, while Challa and Madras (2014) reported that 88.3% of medical students owned an internet-enabled device.

Aggrawal et al. (2015) reported ownership rates of 98.67% for males and 95.70% for females. Eduljee and Kumar (2015) noted mobile phone ownership was higher in aided colleges (94.3%) than in unaided institutions (90.2%), whereas laptop ownership was lower in aided colleges (20.5%) compared to unaided colleges (35.7%), suggesting institutional differences in access. Saxena et al. (2017) documented a sharp rise in smartphone ownership, with 94.23% of students reporting possession of a device. Sathikumar and Padmakumar (2018) found that 42.38% of 420 medical students owned a computer or laptop, while 45.72% shared a device with family members, and 80.48% used a mobile phone or tablet at college. Rahaman (2021) documented multi-device use, with 89.44% of students accessing the internet via smartphones and 88.33% via laptops.

c. Location of Internet Access

Indian college students access the internet through a variety of locations, with patterns shaped by financial resources, geographic location, and the type of educational institution. Most studies report home as the primary access point (Choudhary & Dasgupta, 2014; Eduljee et al., 2020; Kumar et al., 2010; Kumari et al., 2013; Malik & Mahmood, 2006; Unnikrishnan et al., 2008; Vijesh, 2019). Institutional access also remains important. Sekhar and Reddy (2013) found that students most often used libraries followed by academic departments, while Solemanpharcy (2024) reported 64.58% accessed the internet from departments and 22.5% from university libraries.

Beyond home and institutional settings, studies show that Indian college students access the internet through both formal and informal spaces, including hostels, cybercafés, workplaces, and friends' homes. This pattern is well documented across a broad range of studies (Agarwal & Dave, 2009; Aggarwal et al., 2015; Aqil & Ahmad, 2011; Bhat et al., 2016; Bharathi & Sujatha, 2014; Choudhary & Saini, 2016; Hadagali et al., 2013; Kandasamy & Vinitha, 2018; Kadli et al., 2010; Kaur & Manhas, 2008; Kumar, 2022; Kumar & Kaur, 2005, 2006; Kumar & Parmar, 2014; Madhuri, 2012; Mehla, 2016; Merugu et al., 2014; Mishra et al., 2005; Naik et al., 2020; Nazim, 2008; Nazim & Saraf, 2006; Padma & Ramasamy, 2014; Priya et al., 2017; Rajamannar & Muthu, 2017; Rani & Yadagiri, 2017; Sathikumar & Padmakumar, 2018; Singh et al., 2013; Sridevi & Indrani, 2015; Surwase et al., 2016; Thanuskodi, 2013; Vasanthakumar & Balasubramanium, 2018). These findings suggest that students' internet access is flexible and often shaped by convenience, availability, and socioeconomic conditions.

d. Frequency of Internet Access

Studies on internet usage frequency among Indian college students show varied patterns. Kumar and Kaur (2006) reported that 48.7% used the internet two to three times a week, with 43.6% reporting daily use. In contrast, Kumar et al. (2010) found that 32.8% of dental students accessed the internet monthly for general purposes and 55.5% never used it for dental-related purposes. Hinger and Hasan (2012) observed that 27.27% of students accessed the internet monthly, while Murthy et al. (2013) noted that 39.15% accessed it weekly, and 35.60% daily. Pinto and Poornananda (2017) reported 39.3% used it daily, whereas 16.2% used it less than once a week. Thenmozhi and Gomathi (2018) found that 35.71% of B.Ed. students accessed the internet twice a week, and Maharana et al. (2019) found that 50.54% used it weekly.

Other studies indicate a clear pattern of frequent or daily internet use among Indian college students. For example, Agarwal and Dave (2009), Aggarwal et al. (2015), Anand et al. (2018), Avinash and Agrawal (2018), Balu et al. (2013), Bansode and Pujar (2008), and Bhat et al. (2016) all reported daily internet use among students. These findings are further supported by a wide range of studies, that similarly observed high levels of regular internet engagement, indicating the internet's important role in students' academic, personal, and social lives (Bharathi & Sujatha, 2014; Chakravarty & Jain, 2015; Challa & Madras, 2014; Chhari & Chakole, 2015; Chitta et al., 2024; Choudhary & Dasgupta, 2014; Kandasamy & Vinitha, 2018; Karthika et al. 2017; Kochhar et al., 2013; Kumari et al., 2013; Madhuri, 2012; Merugu et al., 2014; Naik et al., 2020; Patel & Darbar, 2016; Parmar, 2015; Priya et al., 2017; Rai, 2014; Rani & Yadagiri, 2017; Saha, 2016; Shivaraja, 2014; Sridevi & Indrani, 2015; Thanuskodi, 2013).

e. Time Spent on the Internet

Studies on the duration of internet use among Indian college students reveal both consistent patterns variations across time, discipline, gender, and academic level. Most students spend 1–4 hours online daily or 2–8 hours weekly (Chathoth et al., 2013; Eduljee and Kumar, 2015; Grover et al., 2010; Kadli et al., 2010; Kumar and Kaur, 2005; Meti, 2014; Muralidharan & Gaur, 2018; Murthy et al., 2013; Naik & Shivalingaiah, 2013; Nazim, 2008; Solemanpharcy, 2024; Sridevi & Indrani, 2015; Swetabh, 2018; Thanuskodi, 2013; Vijesh, 2019).

Some studies report higher durations of usage, with students spending 3–10 hours per day or 11–14 hours weekly, particularly among postgraduates or those in professional disciplines (Dhamnetiya et al., 2021; Gupta & Jaiswal, 2022; Karthika et al., 2017; Limaye & Fotwengel, 2015; Patel & Darbar, 2016; Rahaman, 2021; Taj & Begum, 2017; Thenmozhi & Gomathi, 2018). In dental education, Priya et al. (2019) found that 52.2% of students spent 2–3 hours online each day.

Usage patterns also vary by gender, with males often reporting longer durations and a higher risk of problematic use (Anand et al., 2018; Gupta & Jaiswal, 2022), and by academic level, with postgraduates typically spending more time online than undergraduates (Chakraborty et al., 2021). Recent studies suggest that roughly half of students spend 2–5 hours online daily (Dey et al., 2025; Solemanpharcy, 2024; Sowbaranika & Kumar, 2023).

III. Purposes and Skills

a. Purposes for Using the Internet

Indian college students use the internet for diverse purposes, with usage patterns shaped by discipline and academic level. Academic use dominates, particularly among engineering, science students, medical students, undergraduates, and postgraduates, who rely on the internet for education, research, class preparation, and email (Andurkar & Godale, Avinash & Agrawal, 2018; Dey et al., 2025; Kadiwal, 2021; Kandasamy & Vinitha, 2018; Kumar & Kaur, 2006; Malik & Mahmood, 2006; Maroof et al., 2012; Mohan & Malhotra, 2019; Mulimani & Gudimani, 2008; Padma & Ramasamy, 2014; Unnikrishnan et al., 2008). Scientists, research fellows, and postgraduates use it extensively for research, communication, literature searches, and staying updated on current affairs (Agarwal & Dave, 2009; Chaudhary & Dasgupta, 2014; Hinger & Hasan, 2012; Taj & Begum, 2017),

Non-academic use is also substantial. Social media is widespread, with 35.1% of students in one study perceiving it as addictive (Kochhar et al., 2013), while email and file sharing remain essential for communication (Merugu et al., 2014). Ganganahalli and Dixit (2024) reported that social networking (99%), watching videos or movies (85%), and study-related

activities (70%) were the most common online activities.

Gender differences persist, with female students favoring academic and informational use, while males tend to prefer entertainment and chatting (Aggrawal et al., 2015; Anand et al., 2018). Other common activities include social networking, messaging, and entertainment (Balaje et al., 2024; Chitta et al., 2024; Kadli et al., 2010; Nagarajappa et al., 2025; Rahaman, 2021) as well as other practical tasks such as job searching and browsing (Chakravarty & Jain, 2015; Shivam, 2025). These findings highlight the internet's dual role in supporting both academic success and social connectivity among Indian college students.

b. Preferred Search Engines

Studies of search engine preferences among Indian academic and professional users consistently highlight Google's dominance. Trivedi and Joshi (2008) found that Yahoo and Google were the most used search engines among healthcare professionals, while Chowdary et al. (2013) reported that 40.7% of dental students in Tamil Nadu and 39.8% in Andhra Pradesh favored Google as their preferred non-dental website. Sampath Kumar and Kumar (2013) confirmed Google as the top search engine (91.93%), followed by Yahoo (43.85%). Additionally, significant relationships were observed between search engine usage and profession ($p = .018$), and between the knowledge of search strategies and profession ($p = .008$).

Malipati and Angadi (2017) found universal use of Google (100%), followed by Yahoo (73.48%) and Bing (58.33%). Numerous other studies across disciplines confirm Google, and to a lesser extent Yahoo, as the dominant search engines for academic purposes (Aggarwal et al., 2015; Bharathi & Sujatha, 2014; Chhari & Chakole, 2015; Hinger & Hasan, 2012; Kaur & Manhas, 2008; Khare et al., 2007; Kumari, 2012; Maheswari & Aravind, 2021; Madhuri, 2012; Nazim, 2008; Mulimani & Gudimani, 2008; Padma & Ramasamy, 2014; Patel & Darbar, 2016; Rahaman, 2021; Rajasekhar et al., 2018; Sharma et al., 2006; Shivaraja & Padmamma, 2023; Sudhier & Anitha, 2014; Thanuskodi, 2013; Thenmozhi & Gomathi, 2018; Velvizhi & Ramasamy, 2017). Collectively, these findings highlight the consistent preference for Google as the primary academic search tool, with Yahoo and Bing serving as secondary options.

c. Methods of Obtaining/Learning Internet Skills

Students acquire internet skills through both formal and informal means, including self-study, computer courses, peer guidance, and institutional support. Many gain proficiency through trial and error, online tutorials (e.g., YouTube, Google), training modules, workshops, and manuals or handbooks, with additional support from colleagues, peers, the college curriculum, or external courses (Balu et al., 2013; Challa & Madras, 2014; Chitta et al., 2024; Eduljee & Kumar, 2015; Kadli et al., 2010; Kumar & Kaur, 2006; Loan, 2011b; Nazim, 2008; Patel & Darbar, 2016). Supporting these findings, Vijesh (2019) reported that 68% of students learned internet skills through self-interaction, while 14% learned from friends. Reflecting these varied learning pathways, Polepalli and Ramesh (2016) recommend targeted internet training programs and improved access, such as campus-wide Wi-Fi hotspots, to better support academic use.

d. Level of Knowledge and Awareness of Internet Use

Studies on students' internet awareness show mixed results. While some reported full awareness (Bharathi & Sujatha, 2014; Kumari et al., 2013), others found slightly lower levels, such as 87% (Chhari & Chakole, 2015). Rajamannar and Muthu (2017) noted that despite positive opinions, actual usage was limited, highlighting the need for additional support. More recently, Solemanpharcy (2024) found that 91.66% of postgraduate students had good to excellent knowledge, though 8.33% still showed poor knowledge, suggesting persistent gaps among certain groups.

IV: Attitudes, Barriers, and Satisfaction

a. Internet Attitudes

Research on internet attitudes among Indian college students, though limited, provides useful insights. Early studies report widespread confidence and satisfaction with internet use for academic and personal purposes (Angadi, 2012; Mahajan, 2006) with science students showing slightly more positive attitudes than arts students (Dahiya & Varma, 2014). Similarly, Reddy & Karthik (2013) found strong agreement with the statements: "knowledge of internet is essential" and "internet is easier to use than library," indicating widespread recognition of the internet's academic utility.

Positive attitudes were reported across genders (Rahaman, 2014), with more experienced users expressing greater confidence (Eduljee & Kumar, 2017a). However, large-scale surveys revealed variations. Manikandan & Raja (2017) found that nearly equal proportions of students had favorable and unfavorable attitudes (26.5%), while many students remained undecided (44.5%). Chakraborty et al. (2021) reported that all students considered the internet to be important or very important as a learning tool. Jha & Bhutia (2019) found that 88.33% of students had neutral attitudes, while 11.66% had favorable attitudes, with no gender differences observed in attitudes towards cyber resources ($p > .05$).

b. Barriers to Using the Internet

Students face a range of barriers to effective internet use, including financial constraints, lack of time or training, internet illiteracy, and information overload and pollution. Technical challenges such as frequent

crashes, limited number of computers, long waiting period, inadequate hardware, connectivity problems, frequent facility closures, slow speeds, and power outages were also common. Additional barriers included lack of effective search strategies, lack of knowledge of important sites in the field, impolite staff, viruses, and general disinterest. These challenges have been documented across numerous studies (Aggrawal et al., 2015; Aqil & Ahmad, 2011; Choudhary & Dasgupta, 2014; Chowdary et al., 2013; Gupta & Jaiswal, 2022; Hadagali et al., 2013; Hinger & Hasan, 2012; Kandasamy & Vinitha, 2012; Kadli et al., 2010; Khare et al., 2007; Kumar & Kaur, 2005; Lal et al., 2006; Loan 2011a; Loan, 2011b; Loan, 2011c; Madhuri, 2012; Maroof et al., 2012; Patel & Darbar, 2016; Rahaman, 2021; Rajasekhar et al., 2018; Renuka & Gurunathan, 2017; Sekhar & Reddy, 2013; Sharma & Lalotra, 2013; Shivaraja, 2014; Pandey et al., 2025; Rani & Yadagiri, 2017; Vijesh, 2019).

c. Satisfaction with the Internet

Studies on student satisfaction with internet facilities reveal mixed findings. Early research indicated moderate to low satisfaction. Kumar and Kaur (2005, 2006) found students and teachers were only partially satisfied with internet facilities, while Sujatha (2011) reported low satisfaction among teachers (16.7% fully satisfied, 18.1% least satisfied). Kumari et al. (2013) found that 43.6% of students were least satisfied, and Mehla (2016) found that 54% of research scholars were dissatisfied with university facilities. Aqil and Ahmad (2011) observed that 52.64% of students rated internet-based academic information as average, whereas Hinger and Hasan (2012) found that 29.55% of postgraduate students reported "much" satisfaction with the available online information. In contrast, Balu et al. (2013) reported high satisfaction among both students and faculty, suggesting institutional differences may influence user perceptions.

Satisfaction with search performance was also varied. Chakravarty and Jain (2015) found 27% of students and 43% of faculty were always satisfied, with others somewhat satisfied. More recent studies indicate improvement as Rahaman (2021) reported that 53.3% of students were satisfied and 21.7% highly satisfied, indicating gradual enhancement in user experience over time.

Discussion

Research on internet usage among Indian students shows mixed results, with a turning point around 2013, when affordable smartphones and mobile internet expanded access. This shift from limited, institution-based use to widespread personal connectivity transformed academic, social, and recreational engagement. Findings often varied by year of data collection, reflecting rapid technological change as well as differences in location, institution type, discipline, and infrastructure. These factors have shaped students' access and behavior, making it essential to interpret each study within its specific context.

I: Demographic and Background Factors

Research on internet usage among Indian students shows mixed results regarding gender differences. While some studies report notable differences, others have found no significant gender differences. These inconsistencies may reflect variations in economic background, access to digital resources, urban–rural divide, educational opportunities, and cultural norms. For instance, in certain rural areas, females may have restricted internet access due to parental control, whereas in urban environments, the gender gap in access and usage is minimal or nonexistent.

Internet usage among students varies by stream of study, with those in science, engineering, and computer science reporting higher usage than their peers in the arts, humanities, and social sciences. This disparity likely reflects the demands of technical and scientific coursework, which often requires regular engagement with online journals, databases, and specialized software. Across disciplines, students now rely on the internet for academic communication, research, accessing course materials, and attending lectures online, highlighting the central role of digital access in college.

The urban–rural divide in internet usage among Indian students reflects disparities in infrastructure, device ownership, and connectivity. Rural students often have limited access to devices, and may be

restricted to a single smartphone, with males prioritized for use. Urban students benefit from better technological infrastructure, more reliable electricity, enabling more diverse and frequent internet use. Connectivity issues, inadequate power supply, and lower digital literacy limit rural students, especially females (Karmakar & Karmakar, 2017; Parekh, 2024). Smartphones can provide rural women with private access at home and helping to bridge this gap (Pinto and Poornananda, 2017).

Gender disparities persist in computer ownership. Parul (2014) reported that 21.1% of males and 16.3% of females owned computers, while Priyanka and Pal (2021) noted only 38.4% ownership among graduate medical students. Online safety concerns, particularly cyber harassment and bullying, also disproportionately affect women and limit their online engagement. Vijayarani et al. (2024) link this to increased internet use, limited parental monitoring, low awareness of online safety, and heavy social media use, recommending digital literacy programs, cyber safety education, and targeted anti-cyberbullying programs.

The mixed findings on internet experience are noteworthy. Earlier studies reported lower levels of internet experience, often due to limited access to digital devices, high data costs, and insufficient technological infrastructure, especially in rural areas. More recent studies point to a marked increase in internet

experience, driven by affordable smartphones, reduced data costs (Kumar et al., 2025) and expanded network coverage. This broader access has enhanced usage and improved students efficacy and digital competence (Eduljee et al., 2021).

II: Access and Usage Patterns

In India, about 95% of households own a smartphone, but only 9.9% have access to a computer. This disparity is even sharper across geographic regions; 21.6% of households versus 4.2% of rural households report owning a laptop or desktop respectively (Magazine, 2024). In Gujarat just 10% of households report owning a laptop or desktop (Sharon & Kaushik, 2024). These figures highlight a persistent digital divide, especially in access to more versatile computing devices.

Before 2013, internet use among Indian students was limited, with many relying on college labs, friends' homes, or local cybercafés. The rise of affordable smartphones, low-cost data plans, and improved infrastructure marked a turning point, shifting access from shared institutional settings to widespread personal connectivity. Today, students are active users, with internet use now more personal and deeply integrated into both academic and social life (Waghmare, 2025).

III: Purposes and Skills

Students use the internet for academic tasks (research, communicating, virtual lectures, job portals), social interaction (messaging, social media, videoconferencing), and entertainment (gaming, music, shopping, fitness, news, and blogs). While usage is wide-ranging, engagement patterns often differ between male and female students, influenced by social, cultural, and psychological factors.

IV: Attitudes, Barriers, and Satisfaction

Research on internet attitudes among Indian college students remains limited, partly due to the lack of instruments suited to the Indian context. Additionally, the rapid change in internet technologies complicates comparative or longitudinal studies, making it difficult to collect consistent and meaningful findings over time.

Students face barriers such as financial/economic constraints (e.g., cost of using), lack of infrastructure (e.g., slow connectivity, hardware, power issues, limited terminals, and low bandwidth to access information), and personal factors (e.g., lack of internet at home, lack of time and training). Kumar (2023) emphasizes that ensuring internet access for all students should be a government priority.

Limitations and Future Research

A comprehensive review of research on internet usage patterns among Indian college students reveals several limitations and suggests directions for future studies.

1. Prior studies have focused on specific student groups, such as urban versus rural areas, aided versus unaided colleges, or different streams of study, limiting the generalizability of findings. More comprehensive studies are needed to capture the diverse experiences and internet usage patterns of Indian college students.
2. Most reviewed studies were cross-sectional, providing only snapshots of internet usage. While informative, they cannot capture how usage evolves with changing technological, social, and educational needs. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to track changes and trends over time.
3. Psychological factors like internet efficacy, confidence in using internet technologies effectively (Eastin & LaRose, 2000), are often overlooked, despite their impact on usage and attitudes. Future research should explore internet efficacy among Indian college students to inform interventions that strengthen digital skills and engagement (Eduljee & Kumar, 2017a; Wu & Tsai, 2006).
4. A recurring theme in recent studies is the link between internet addiction and mental health among Indian college students (Kumar et al., 2025), which this review does not cover. Future research should examine how general internet use, internet addiction, and mental health interact, focusing on predictors, consequences, and interventions (Balaje et al., 2024; Dhamnetiya et al., 2021; Mhetre et al., 2024; Nagarajappa et al., 2025; Patel, 2019).
5. Given the vast literature on internet usage, some relevant research may have been omitted. Future studies should adopt a bibliometric approach to systematically analyze and visualize large volumes of scholarly publications, providing a comprehensive mapping of research trends and themes related to internet usage among Indian students, offering clearer insights into emerging patterns in the field.

Conclusion

Studies on internet usage among Indian college students show mixed results. While smartphones and affordable data plans have significantly improved internet access and usage, gender disparities and urban–rural divide continue to influence how students engage with digital technologies. Integrating digital literacy into the curriculum is crucial for maximizing the benefits of internet access for Indian college students.

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