

A Review of Internet Use as a Leisure Activity Among College Students: Trends, Impacts, and Future Directions

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Abstract: *The review article aimed to gather information regarding the use of the Internet as a leisure activity among college students. Many research articles are diversified towards different aspects of internet use, such as the importance of academics, the COVID - 19 period, preparing notes, etc., among students. This review aims to examine the role of internet use as a leisure activity among college students, assessing its prevalence, positive and negative impacts, and the implications for student well - being and academic performance. Only thirty - seven research articles focus on using the Internet during leisure activities among college students. The range of duration of published articles is between 2012 and 2024. Eight databases were searched: PubMed, Scopus, Embase, Cochrane Library, PsycINFO, Schematic Scholar, and Research Gate. Studies involved college students aged 18 to 25 from various Indian and international colleges. Playing games is the most popular Internet leisure activity among college students, followed by using Facebook and spending time to cope with multiple mental issues. Few studies have identified Internet use during leisure as "Internet Addiction". Using the Internet during leisure was not reported to be beneficial for college students. In summary, this review explores the use of the Internet as a leisure activity among college students, analyzing 37 research articles published between 2012 and 2024. The study examines various dimensions of Internet use, such as gaming, social media engagement, and its impact on mental health. Findings indicate that while the Internet serves as a key tool for relaxation and entertainment, it also poses challenges, including addiction and mental health issues. The review highlights the need for balanced Internet use and suggests further research into mitigating negative outcomes.*

Keywords: Internet use, Leisure activities, College students, Mental health, Internet addiction

1. Introduction

Leisure activities are occupations carried out in spare time for pleasure, unwinding, and self - fulfillment. They can range greatly, from more sedentary pursuits like reading, watching movies, and playing video games to more active ones like sports, hiking, and yoga. These kinds of activities are essential for improving one's physical and mental health, lowering stress levels, and building social bonds. Leisure time activities are vital to a balanced and healthy lifestyle since they enhance creativity, elevate mood, and give a sense of accomplishment.

Recreational activities offer many advantages for both physical and mental well - being, making them essential for upholding a balanced and healthy lifestyle. Enjoying leisure activities offers a break from the stresses and obligations of daily life, which helps lower stress levels. Lowering cortisol levels and fostering a sense of calm can be achieved by engaging in relaxing activities such as reading, gardening, or music listening. By providing opportunities for enjoyment and relaxation, leisure activities enhance mental health and help to reduce the symptoms of depression and anxiety. In addition to offering a feeling of fulfillment and purpose, hobbies and interests can add to general happiness and life satisfaction. Exercise is a part of many recreational activities, such as hiking, swimming, and sports. Frequent exercise develops muscles, increases flexibility, strengthens the heart, and strengthens the immune system.

It lowers the chance of developing chronic illnesses and aids in maintaining a healthy weight. Taking part in recreational activities, such as attending community events, team sports, or club membership, frequently entails social interaction. Relationships are cultivated, social skills are improved, and a sense of community and belonging is created via these interactions. Playing games like chess, solving puzzles, or picking up a new language are examples of mentally taxing hobbies that support and enhance cognitive function. These mental exercises improve creativity, memory, and problem - solving abilities. By giving oneself the much - needed respite from work - related responsibilities, leisure activities contribute to a good work - life balance. Maintaining long - term career satisfaction, boosting productivity, and avoiding burnout all depend on this balance. Engaging in leisure activities enables people to discover new passions and acquire new abilities.

A more expansive outlook on life, elevated self - esteem, and personal development can result from this investigation. The body's inherent "feel - good" chemicals, endorphins, are released during enjoyable activities and boost mood and energy. This boost has the potential to improve people's daily lives by increasing their motivation and enthusiasm. People can achieve a healthier, more balanced lifestyle and improve their quality of life by introducing leisure activities into their everyday routines.

College students' lives are greatly impacted by their leisure pursuits, which provide a much - needed break from their

demanding academic schedules. Participating in sports, hobbies, and social gatherings can reduce stress, enhance mental health, and enhance general well-being. Through these events, children can strengthen their social skills, make friends, and build a community of support. Recreational activities can also improve problem-solving, creativity, and time management abilities, which can make college life more rewarding and well-rounded. By including leisure activities in their routines, students can lead healthier, more productive, and more happy college lives.

Increased internet use among college students has both positive and negative effects, impacting academic performance, social interactions, mental health, and overall well-being. The internet has become a vital tool for education and communication, but excessive use can also lead to challenges.

Positive Effects

- **Access to Educational Resources:** The internet provides college students with vast resources like online libraries, research articles, tutorials, and academic forums. This access enhances learning, allowing students to supplement their studies with diverse materials.
- **Efficient Communication and Collaboration:** Online platforms facilitate communication between students and professors, enabling quick exchange of information, assignment submissions, and group discussions. Tools like Google Docs and Microsoft Teams enhance collaboration, making group projects more manageable.
- **Skill Development:** Increased internet use fosters digital literacy, helping students learn essential skills like coding, content creation, and data analysis. Many students leverage online courses and tutorials to develop skills outside their formal curriculum.
- **Global Exposure and Networking:** Social media and online communities allow students to connect with peers globally, share ideas, and engage in discussions beyond their immediate environment. This exposure can broaden perspectives and open up opportunities for international collaboration and networking.

Negative Effects

- **Distraction and Procrastination:** The internet can be a major source of distraction, with students spending hours on social media, streaming services, or gaming. This often leads to procrastination and lower academic performance, as students struggle to balance entertainment with studies.
- **Mental Health Issues:** Excessive internet use, particularly on social media, is linked to feelings of anxiety, depression, and loneliness. The pressure to portray a perfect life online and the constant comparison with others can negatively affect self-esteem.
- **Sleep Disruption:** Late-night internet use, especially on smartphones, can interfere with sleep patterns. The blue

light emitted by screens disrupts circadian rhythms, leading to poor sleep quality, which in turn affects concentration and academic performance.

- **Addiction and Reduced Productivity:** Internet addiction, characterized by an inability to control online activities, can lead to neglect of responsibilities, reduced productivity, and withdrawal from real-life social interactions. This is a growing concern among college students who spend excessive time online.
- **Cybersecurity Risks:** Increased internet use also exposes students to risks like identity theft, cyberbullying, and scams. Many students are not fully aware of online safety measures, making them vulnerable to these threats.

While increased internet use among college students offers significant educational benefits and opportunities for personal growth, it also presents challenges related to mental health, productivity, and social well-being. Striking a balance between online engagement and offline activities is crucial for maintaining a healthy and productive college experience. This review is significant as it sheds light on the dual nature of Internet use among college students, emphasizing both its utility in leisure and its potential for addiction. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing effective strategies to promote healthy digital habits among young adults.

2. Material and Methods

Eight databases were searched: PubMed, Scopus, Embase, Cochrane Library, PsycINFO, Schematic Scholar, and Research Gate. The range of duration of published articles is limited between 2012 and 2024. Works involving college students of 18 to 25 years of age and from different colleges in India and abroad are considered for inclusion in this review article. Articles written on various other aspects of internet use like their importance in the academic field, their relation with different physical and mental issues, activities related to social and cultural behaviors, etc. are excluded as these articles are not found to be fit for selection. Articles written in the English language are considered. The review utilized a systematic approach, including a comprehensive search across eight databases. Criteria for inclusion were limited to studies published between 2012 and 2024, focusing on Internet use for leisure among college students. Data were analyzed based on thematic trends and the impact of Internet use on mental health.

3. Results and Discussion

Only thirty-seven research articles are found to be dedicated to the use of the Internet during leisure activities among college students. The colleges are chosen from both India as well as from outside India.

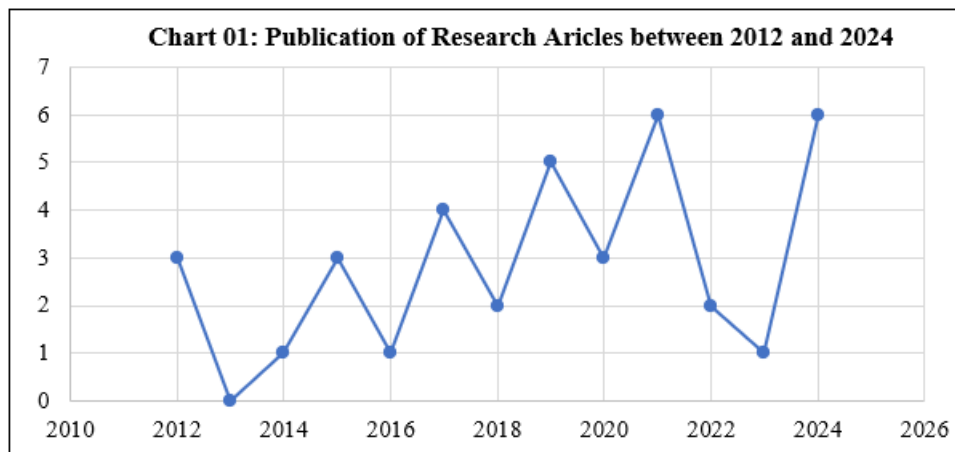


Chart 01 clearly shows the number of articles published between 2012 and 2024 considering the topic of the use of the Internet as a leisure activity among various college students. Between 1999 and 2004, only three articles have been published in the year 2012 (Chengzhi, 2012; Bian et. al., 2012, and Essig, 2012). Chengzhi in the year 2012 involved 556 college students of both sexes to clarify the effect of Internet use and the probable health issues as well as remedy. The study found that Internet surfing was a popular leisure activity among college students that involved playing games. The study suggested that taking leisure activity classes might solve the problem. In China, a study has been conducted in 2012 by Bian et. al. revealed that playing games on mobile using the Internet was the most popular leisure activity among Chinese college students (both sexes). One case study had been put forward by Essig in the year 2012, that revealed excessive gaming might lead to 'internet addiction' which is not at all beneficial for students. No research work has been found in the year 2013 concerned with the present topic of review. In the year 2014, Ruzic - baf et. al. did research involving 136 college students irrespective of sex. Playing video games was reported to be the most highlighted leisure activity among students. In the year 2015, Wang et. al. reported that 100% of the college students involved in that study are involved in Internet use for various reasons during their leisure periods. Li et. al. (2015) studied college students and reported that the students who faced boredom, depression, and sex - related issues were mostly addicted to the use of the Internet in their leisure time. Deniz & Geyik 2015 conducted a study on college students regarding their use of the Internet in their leisure time and reported that most of the students used the Internet to get relief from their daily stress. Matos (2016) conducted a study on internet addiction during leisure and observed that addiction leads to psychological disorders. Husain et. al., in 2017 reported that college - going students were using the internet in their leisure periods to reduce stress. A study was conducted in the U. S. A. by Mc - Cain (2017) on college students of both sexes. The study reported that the majority of the student who participated in that study used the internet for social participation in various programs during their leisure time. Kass & Ugur in the year 2017 worked on 498 college students and reported that Internet addiction was mainly due to relief from boredom. Schmiedeberg & Schroder in 2017 reported from their study that to get proper life satisfaction college students used the internet during leisure periods. Wang (2018) involved 475 college students to study about the involvement in the internet during leisure. The report reflected the findings

of Kass & Ugur (2017). Yarasani et. al. (2018) observed that among 575 college students, 75 - 80% were involved in gaming using the internet during their leisure time. The outcome of the study also revealed that the effects of this addiction were worse students were found to be suffering from gaming disorders, psychological disturbances, anxiety, depression, mood swings, sleep disturbances, lack of social interactions, etc. Five research works have been put forward in the year 2019. Baturay et. al., 2019 found that college students (n=159) spent hours on the internet for gaming and social media like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Most of the participants were found to suffer from loneliness and bad relations with teachers. Yao in the year 2019 involved the college students of China and observed that most of them play games on the Internet during leisure. Borges et. al. (2019) worked on 7022 college students and concluded that leisure time internet use leads to IGD (Internet Gaming Disorder) which is included under DSM - 5. Baturay & Toker (2019) observed the use of the Internet among college students during their leisure time. Das et. al; (2019) found gaming to be the most popular form of the internet used during leisure by college students. Ventayen et. al., (2020) found that college students use the internet to minimize boredom during their leisure time which in turn gave rise to psychological disorders. Bashar et. al. (2020) observed that most of the participants (college students) used the internet during leisure time for mental and physical pleasure. In the same context, the study found symptoms of depression among students. Zia et. al. (2020) conducted a study involving students in Pakistan and found Facebook to be the most popular leisure activity using the internet. Male students were found to use more internet than females. Shubochkina et. al. (2021) involved 111 college students and found that most of them use the internet during leisure to get relief from educational stress. The study found visual impairment, fatigue, headache, and sleep disorders as complications. Kumari (2021) reported that new internet connections during the COVID - 19 period gave rise to internet addiction among college students. Abdulrahman et. al. (2021) found that more male college students (n = 675) surf the internet during leisure time than females. Borges et. al. (2021) observed the same findings as Abdulrahman et. al. (2021). Kim et. al. (2021) reported that excessive internet use during leisure time leads to depression and, anxiety. Rodriguez et. al. (2021) investigated the college students of Spain (n=1013) and found that leisure time use of the internet is mainly concerned with Facebook and sex. In 2022, Mamedova et. al. studied college students and observed that most of the leisure time was spent using Internet. Adeyemi in

2022 involved 200 Nigerian college students in a study and reported that most of the leisure periods were spent observing videos & listening to music using the internet. Lin et. al. (2023) involved 500 female students and reported that most of their leisure time was spent on the internet which leads to being overweight. Sen et. al. (2024) conducted a study on 500 male college - going students and observed that playing games, watching movies, and web series all have been done during leisure periods using the internet. Tihamiyu et. al. in

2024 reported that most college students used the internet during leisure to reduce stress. Tappas et. al. (2024) also found almost the same findings as the previous study. Nweke et. al. (2024) found internet use during leisure time for games which was related to mental fatigue, and internet dependency. Ali et. al. (2024) worked on the college students of Jordon and found that the internet is used during leisure time as an alternative to other recreation.

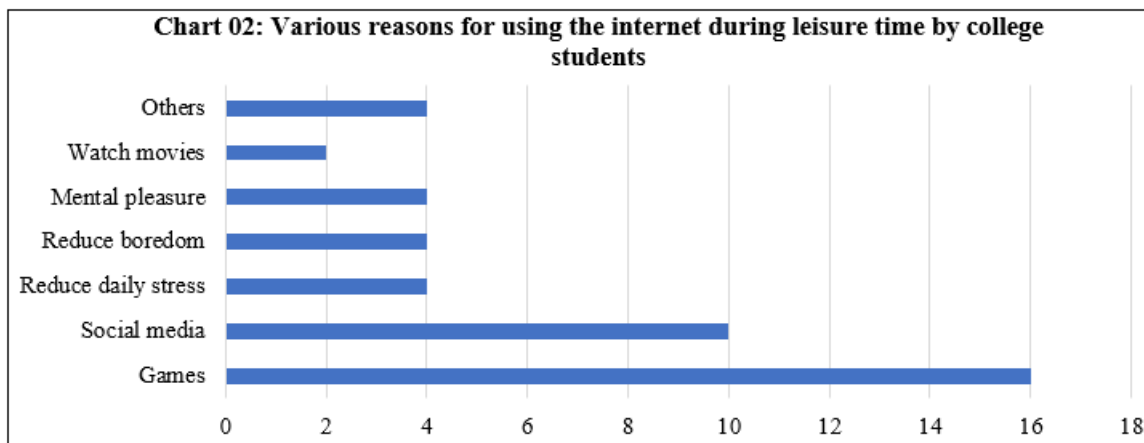


Chart 02 clearly shows various reasons for using the Internet as the only leisure activity among college students in India and abroad. Playing games was reported to be the most popular internet addiction among college students (Ruzic - baf et. al.2014; Sen et. al.2024; Yarasani et. al.2018; Bian et. al.2012; Borges et. al.2019). This addiction leads to IGD (Internet Gaming Disorder) which is included under DSM - 5 (Borges et. al.2019). Surfing social media comes next in interest for using the Internet during leisure time Zia et. al.2020; Adeyemi 2022; Rodriguez et. al.2021). The most

popular social media was reported to be Facebook, followed by Instagram and YouTube. Reducing daily stress, relieving boredom, and mental pleasure comes next to using social media (Ventayen et. al.2020; Bashar et. Al.2020; Husain et. al.2017; Tihamiyu et. al.2024). Watching movies on the Internet was reported in two studies (Sen et. al.2024 and Adeyemi 2022). There are other reasons for using the Internet during leisure time including watching web series (Sen et. al.2024), social participation (Mc - Cain, 2017), listening to music (Adeyemi 2022), and sex (Rodriguez et. al.2021).

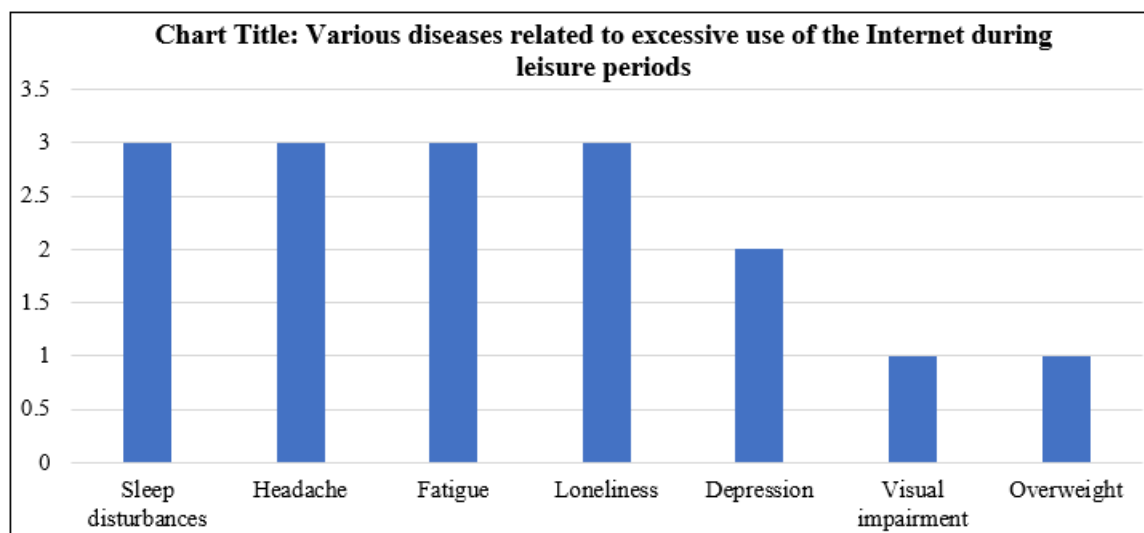


Chart 03 clearly shows the variations of diseases associated with excessive use of the Internet during leisure time among college students. Most of the students were reported to suffer from loneliness (Baturay & Toker, 2019), fatigue (Nweke et. al.2024), headache (Shubochkina et. al.2021; Sen et. al., 2024), and sleep disturbances (Hammad et. al., 2024). Use of the Internet during leisure periods also leads to depression (Shubochkina et. al.2021; Sen et. al., 2024). Visual impairment was also reported among students (Shubochkina

et. al.2021). Being overweight was another health issue reported in the study of female college students (Lin et. al.2023).

4. Conclusion

The review paper sought to learn more about college students' use of the Internet for recreational purposes. Numerous

studies have been conducted on various facets of internet usage among students, such as the value of education, the COVID - 19 pandemic, note - taking, etc. There are just thirty - seven study studies on college students' use of the Internet for recreational purposes. The papers that have been published span the years 2012 through 2024. PubMed, Scopus, Embase, PsycINFO, Schematic Scholar, Research Gate, and the Cochrane Library were the eight databases that were searched. Students between the ages of 18 and 25 from various Indian and international colleges participated in the works. College students' favorite online pastime is playing games, which is followed by Facebook and spending time on mental health support. There aren't many studies that label using the Internet for fun as "Internet Addiction. " College students were not found to benefit from using the Internet for pleasure. This review provides a comprehensive overview of internet use as a leisure activity among college students. While the internet offers significant opportunities for education and social interaction, excessive use, particularly for leisure, poses risks such as addiction and mental health challenges. Future research should focus on developing interventions to promote healthy internet habits among students, ensuring a balanced and productive use of this vital resource.

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