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### Educational Article

## Utilization of internet by health colleges students at the University of Dammam



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### المخلص

**أهداف البحث:** تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التعرف على موقف الطلبة تجاه استخدام الإنترنت ومحركات البحث المختلفة، ومواقع التواصل الاجتماعي، وأغراض الاستخدام، والمعوقات التي تواجه الطلبة أثناء استخدام الإنترنت في خمس كليات صحية بجامعة الدمام، بالمملكة العربية السعودية.

**طرق البحث:** أرسل استطلاع على الإنترنت لجميع طلبة السنة الثانية (٢٣١ طالباً) في خمس كليات صحية. وكانت الاستجابة من ١٣٩ طالباً. تضمنت الاستبانة ١٣ سؤالاً وكانت الإجابة باستخدام مقياس ليكرت ذي الخمسة الاحتمالات، وبعض الأسئلة ذات النهايات المفتوحة وأسئلة عن التركيبة السكانية.

**النتائج:** يدرك طلبة الكليات الصحية أن استخدام الإنترنت مهم جداً لتحقيق النجاح الأكاديمي. وكانت المواقع الأكثر زيارة من المشاركين هي جوجل والفيس بوك. وكانت ردود الطلبة لا تختلف بشكل ملحوظ بين الكليات الصحية الخمس بجامعة الدمام.

**الاستنتاجات:** أظهر طلبة الكليات الصحية الخمس بجامعة الدمام موقفاً إيجابياً تجاه استخدام الإنترنت لأغراض أكاديمية. كما ظهرت الحاجة إلى تقديم خدمات لاسلكية في الحرم الجامعي، وعمل دورات تدريبية للاستخدام المناسب لمصادر الإنترنت.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الحقل الأكاديمي؛ الكليات الصحية؛ الإنترنت؛ مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي

### Abstract

**Objectives:** This study aimed to explore students' attitudes towards using the Internet and various search engines, social media websites, usage purposes, and the barriers faced by students while using Internet in five health colleges at the University of Dammam, Saudi Arabia.

**Methods:** An online survey was administered to all 2nd year students in the five health colleges. The questionnaire included details about demographics, 13 questions with five Likert-scale responses, and some open-ended questions.

**Results:** Of the 231 students, 138 responded (response rate; 59.7%). The health colleges' students perceived that using the Internet was very crucial for their academic success. Google and Facebook were the most visited sites by the participants. The students' responses were not significantly different across the five health colleges at the University of Dammam.

**Conclusion:** Health colleges' students at the University of Dammam showed a positive attitude towards using the Internet for academic purposes. There is a need to provide wireless facilities on campus which will enhance the usage of Internet for educational purposes. Training courses about the appropriate usage of Internet sources are also emphasized.

**Keywords:** Academic field; Facebook; Google; Health colleges; Internet; Social media

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## Introduction

The use of the Internet among university students has greatly expanded. No aspect of student life is unaffected by the use of the Internet (the world's biggest library).<sup>1</sup> The internet is one of the most effective methods of communication. It is a cost effective and fast tool for health and medical education systems, providing many important applications, tools, sources of up-to-date information, and online databases.<sup>2,3</sup> Moreover, the use of the Internet provides an efficient way to access online textbooks, journals, seminars and conferences.<sup>4</sup> This use of the Internet encourages the integration of technology into the 21st-century classroom. Technology helps educators meet their students' expectations and abilities. The use of technology creates new opportunities for students to succeed and impacts their future careers.

Use of the Internet, specifically by college students, has been recognized as an important way of gaining information because it provides a wealth of knowledge on health education systems.<sup>5</sup> A study conducted at Qassim University in Saudi Arabia showed that male students preferred the Internet for obtaining media information.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, university students use the Internet as much for social communication as they do for their education.<sup>7</sup> It has been documented that most students depend on the Internet and they use primary search engines to meet their information needs.<sup>8</sup> Shanahan (2007) also suggested the need for organizing workshops among students for developing information literacy skills.<sup>9</sup> Many researchers have shown the impact of integrating technology into the curriculum on the quality of teaching and learning.<sup>10–14</sup> In Saudi Arabia the integration of technology into the curriculum is strongly recommended by the National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA) as one of the proposed learning outcome domains.<sup>15</sup> Conlon and several other researchers have indicated that using technology is a potentially powerful tool for extending educational opportunities and improving the efficiency of the process of teaching and learning.<sup>16,17</sup>

Due to the revolutions in technological trends, the majority of students are using smart devices and cell phones in addition to computers, which gives them access to online information and an innovative method of communication in their hands. Many students are using the Internet for different types of social media websites to create and sustain relationships with one another.<sup>17</sup> This phenomenon seems to be growing rapidly among students: they post whatever they want, create personal profiles, upload photographs and send public or personal text messages.<sup>18</sup> Research has indicated positive relationships between the use of social media and students' success. There is a positive correlation between the use of social media websites and student engagement.<sup>19</sup> Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) revealed a significant relationship between Facebook use and students engagement.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, an experimental study also indicated a positive correlation between the use of Twitter and students' engagement in the classroom.<sup>5</sup>

The authors of this study have found very little research that has been conducted in Saudi Arabia related to the use of technology for teaching and learning. Many studies found positive attitudes among Saudi students towards the general

use of technology in colleges of education.<sup>21–23</sup> These findings are supported by another study published in Korea.<sup>24</sup> The present study was conducted to evaluate the utilization of technology among health colleges' students at the University of Dammam in Saudi Arabia.

Needless to say, the use of technology is restricted by some challenges or barriers. There are many obstacles to the use of technology. These barriers include technical support, heavy workload, difficulties in the adaptation of using new technology, breakdown of devices, and teachers' limited professional skills in using technology.<sup>25</sup> Other studies have also added that some instructors and students at the university level are comfortable with just emails and are less interested in using the technology in the classroom.<sup>26</sup>

This study was aimed at exploring students' attitudes towards using the Internet, different search engines, and social media websites, as well as their usage purposes and barriers faced by students while using the Internet, in five health colleges at the University of Dammam, Saudi Arabia. To achieve this aim an online questionnaire survey was sent to all of the students in the five colleges to find answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the health colleges' students' attitudes towards the use of the Internet?
2. What are the most popular smart devices used by the participating students to surf the Internet?
3. What are the most popular search engines used by the health colleges' students?
4. What social media websites are used by the health colleges' students?
5. Are there significant differences among colleges in their use of the Internet for increasing scores and helping students in their research projects? How important do they think it is to have wireless Internet connections in their colleges?
6. What are the challenges that students face when using technology?

## Materials and Methods

The study was conducted at the University of Dammam, which is located in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. The university has five health colleges (Nursing, Pharmacy, Medical, Applied Medical Sciences, and Dentistry) along with 17 other colleges. Second-year students were considered in this study because it is in practical terms their first year in the major after finishing their first year at the Preparatory Year College. All the students were Saudis.

An online survey was sent to all second-year students (231 students) in the five health colleges. The sample of the study was composed of 139 second-year students from the health colleges at the University of Dammam. The survey consisted of twenty questions with five Likert-scale responses (1 = Strongly Disagree – 5 = Strongly Agree) and some demographic and open-ended questions. In the results section, the Likert scale was collapsed to form two categories. Responses of 1 and 2 on the scale were treated as *Disagree*, while 4 and 5 were treated as *Agree*. Number 3 on the scale was removed as it represents the neutral position.

The questionnaire was prepared by two experts in the medical profession and was validated by a psychometrician

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