



A Snapshot survey of Cyber café users in Dhaka City, Bangladesh

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Abstract

This study is an effort to draw attention to the characteristics of cyber café users in Bangladeshi perspective. Cyber café is one of the prevalent ways for people's access to the Internet in poor countries. Cyber cafés have become main centers for access to information in Dhaka City, the capital city of Bangladesh. The purposes of this study were to Find out the users usage pattern of cyber cafés in Dhaka city; frequency of use, explore various reasons for cybercafé dependency in Dhaka city and the problems they faced while using. The results showed that the majority of café users were students. It concludes that those who used the cafés mainly for down loading, reading news papers and less of them for academic purposes. The respondents mentioned problems of high cost, lower hardware facilities, and slow speed at cyber cafés.

Keywords: Snapshot, users, cyber café, high cost, lower hardware facilities, slow speed

Introduction

The Internet is central to the network revolution that is transforming the way people interact all over the world. In many parts of the world, societies are undergoing radical changes as a result of the rapid development of the information and communication technologies (ICTs). Access to ICT is essential for development, but in many developing countries, however, this access is still inadequate or non-existing. About 10% of the world has access to information and communication technologies¹. In the last few years, efforts are being made to establish or strengthen access to and dissemination of technology for economic and social development. International communities in general have become interested in telecenters as a way to build sensible development strategies, consistent with the situation of poor countries and marginal areas. This strategy holds that there is no point in investing heavily in extending access to those areas, given their limited production capacity and purchasing power, but recognizes the potential impact that increased access could have on their development. The development of public access to Internet in Bangladesh is characterized by paid cybercafé as the dominant of public access venue. There were a total of 4,500 cyber cafés in the country. Of them, some 250 cyber cafés are running their business having registration from Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC). According to the BTRC legal and licensing department there were a total of 1,000 cyber cafes in the country. Of them, some 250 cyber cafes were registered with the telecom regulatory authority².

Now most of the cities and towns in Bangladesh are connected to the Internet; computer prices are now within public range and many people use the Internet at their offices, educational institutions, homes, etc. DSL, cable and wireless services are emerging, but dialup connections are still popular, even though dialup access is costly and slow and many companies are

offering cheaper Internet rates to convert dialup users to broadband. Nevertheless, public access to the Internet is mainly provided by cyber cafes, which offer cheaper Internet access rates as compared to surfing at home. On the other hand negative use of the Internet is also very common in the cafes. Crimes like cyber terrorism, electronic fraud, cyber stalking, spamming, spoofing, hacking of websites and criminal access to secure data, access to pornographic sites and illegal games in Internet cafés pose a threat to the country's younger generation. Against this background, the existence of cyber cafés has become a necessary part of modern life, helping to bridge the gap in ICT diffusion. They admit that the cafés have some negative effects, but in stead of banning them, regulation should be improved. Furthermore, users should be made aware of other possibilities the Internet could have besides entertainment only.

The study is based on a survey among the cyber café users in the Dhaka city. The paper is organized in the following way. Following this introduction there is an overview of the development of cyber cafes in Bangladesh. There after we give a literature review. Our research methodology is then described, followed by the presentation of the data analysis, recommendations and the conclusion.

History of Cyber cafés s in Bangladesh: The young men and women sit inside a brightly-lit café, their eyes glued to the computer screens. The level of concentration suggests as if they are far from the city's hustle and bustle outside their small café, where internet has mixed with coffee and snacks. They seem to care little about their surroundings because of the 15-inch monitors bring the whole world in front of them. This is common in the cafés that have sprung up in the capital city and elsewhere in the country. Cyber café is the latest craze for the young generation in Bangladesh. Although the country lags behind in terms of this branch of technology the number of

cyber café is growing. With growing interest in using e-mail, internet, web browsing and chatting, the country's young is gradually becoming a 'cyber generation' despite all difficulties common in a third world country like Bangladesh. Although there is a vast scope of gathering information from the internet, it is, in Bangladesh, mainly used for sending e-mails or chatting. Even most students don't browse educational websites³. History of cyber café business is only for 24 years. The first cyber café in the world opened in 1984. In the early 1990's there were less than 200 Cyber cafés⁴.

Today there are more than 30000 cyber cafés in 113 countries according to Cyber Café Owners Association of Bangladesh (CCOAB). The cyber café is being recognized as an essential point of access for Internet services as the Internet becomes more and more a part of our every day life. No other business is playing such an active role as the cyber café in the process of bringing the future of Internet technology to the community people. The cyber café culture is hardly four-five years old in Bangladesh. In 1998, a fast food shop cum-ice-cream parlour at Banani for the first time introduced on-payment internet service for their customers⁵. Later, the business spread fast in Gulshan-Banani, Dhanmondi and different posh areas of the capital city. Now you can find cyber cafés at every 'para' and 'mahalla' of the city." Blue Planet" cyber café was opened in 1998 in Dhanmondi. There were not more than a dozen cyber cafés in the capital city until 2000. That number has now crossed 2000 according to Cyber Café Owners Association of Bangladesh. Cyber café is popular in the areas close to the Dhaka University, the business hub of Motijheel and residential areas like Dhanmondi, Mirpur, and Mohammadpur.

Cyber Café Owners Association of Bangladesh (CCOAB) is the Trade Association of cyber café business at national level in Bangladesh. Established in 2003, CCOAB safeguards rights and interests of the members of the association and for the development of ICT in Bangladesh using the combined strengths of the members. It is recognized by and registered with the Department of Trade Organization of Ministry of Commerce. CCOAB is working for exposition of new generation cyber applications products, solutions and services for experience the virtual world of computing and internet. CCOAB prompts ethical and positive business practices and its members are operating under the business Code of CCOAB. CCOAB co-operates the Government bodies and advises concerned department(s) in formulating necessary rules and regulations for smooth operation of the cyber café business as well as to increase ICT awareness of the community people⁶.

Objectives and focus of the study: The objectives of this study were to find out the: i. Find out the users usage pattern of cyber cafés in Dhaka city; ii. Frequency of use of cyber cafés; iii. Explore various reasons for cybercafé dependency in Dhaka city; iv. Find out the problem faced during their time in cyber cafés; v. Provide recommendation to overcome these problems.

Literature Review

Based on a multi-national survey of Internet use, and by use, Boase et al. found that recreational use is more common among younger users. The authors do not offer definitions of instrumental and recreational, but examples of instrumental use are sending and receiving e-mail, using online libraries and other sources of information, taking online courses, doing business, and various administrative activities. Examples of recreational use include chatting, collective role-playing, and playing online multi-user games. These authors additionally and keeping in touch with relatives and friends⁷.

A questionnaire survey of 318 users in 21 cyber cafés was conducted by Singh and Krishnatray in Bhopal, a Central Indian city. The study revealed that a significant reason for using Internet cafes was the low cost. Most of the Internet users' daily activities were emailing, gaming and chatting; fewer users were interested in job hunting, seeking admission details for colleges, universities etc⁸.

Also Shiu and Dawson found that teenagers in Great Britain, Germany, Japan and Taiwan use the Internet especially for activities such as communication and gaming, while older people to a larger extent use it for instrumental purposes such as purchasing goods and services⁹.

Wahid, Furuholt and Kristiansen Users with better education, greater personal capability and more previous Internet experience tend to use Internet cafes in Indonesia for more serious purposes than other users. Schools could play an important role in educating young people in how to use the web to search for information¹⁰.

Li and Kirkup compared the use of the Internet among Chinese and British students and found that men in both countries played more computer games than women. The Chinese were the most active game players. Generally, women were more inclined to use the Internet for study purposes and were higher among the British than in the Chinese group, and the British students were generally more inclined to use Web-connected computers for study purposes¹¹.

Warf and Vincent. In the Arab world, of 300 million Arabs there are only 23.3 million Internet users, most of whom rely on Internet cafes due to high internet access fees. Jordan made the Guinness Book of World Records for having the largest concentration of Internet cafes any where. Here users spend 12 hours per week on line, often in chat rooms¹².

Furuholt, Kristiansen and Wahid compared the Internet usage of Indonesians and Tanzanians at cyber cafes. It was observed that cyber cafés were very popular in these countries. Males were dominant users at the cafés. Favorite activities were email, information seeking and chatting¹³.

Batool and Mahmood found that Internet cafés are the most popular public access Internet points in Pakistan at Lahore.

People go there to fulfill their entertainment, communication and academic needs. Users' profiles show that the cafés were mainly occupied by male users. Students were the most regular users who came mostly for entertainment, chat and email facilities. The respondents mentioned problems of low service quality, poor environment and lack of privacy at Internet cafés¹⁴.

Research Methodology

The study employed a structured questionnaire to collect data within the scope of the study. The study sample consisted of 200 users from 6 Internet cafés in Dhaka the capital city of Bangladesh. Users of the Internet cafés were approached from noon till late evening in order to consider the rush hours. All users present during the visits to the cafés were requested to

complete the questionnaire. All respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire which consisted of 16 items. The questionnaire was divided into four sections. Section one addressed the socio-demographic characteristics while the second section focused on the background of IT knowledge, third and fourth section reason for using cyber café, using pattern and associated factors. The data collection instrument consisted of demographic and multiple choice questions with an option of 'other' in all questions. Data were analyzed using SPSS version16.0.

Figure-1 shows that the great majority 129 (74.14 %) of café users were male and only 45(25.46%) percent of respondents were female. It confirms the findings of similar studies in other countries that male users are leading in Internet cafés.

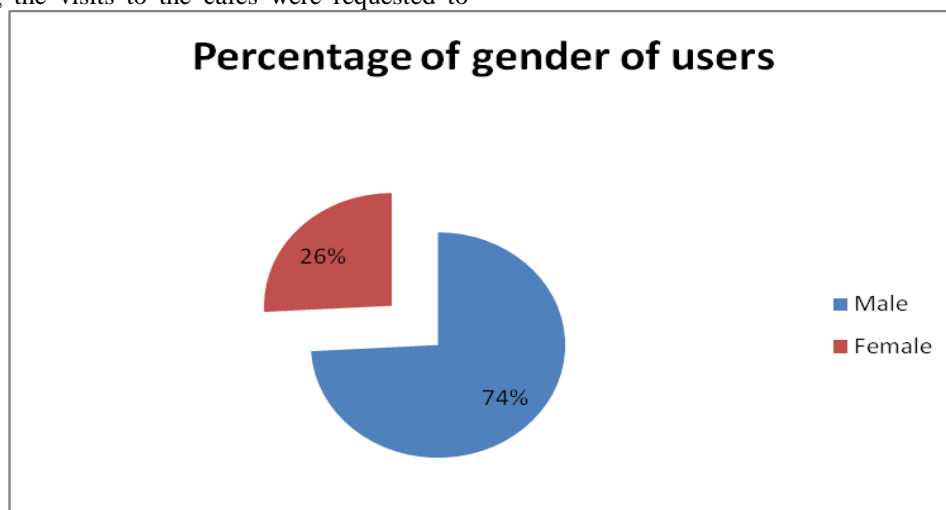


Figure-1
Respondents' profile

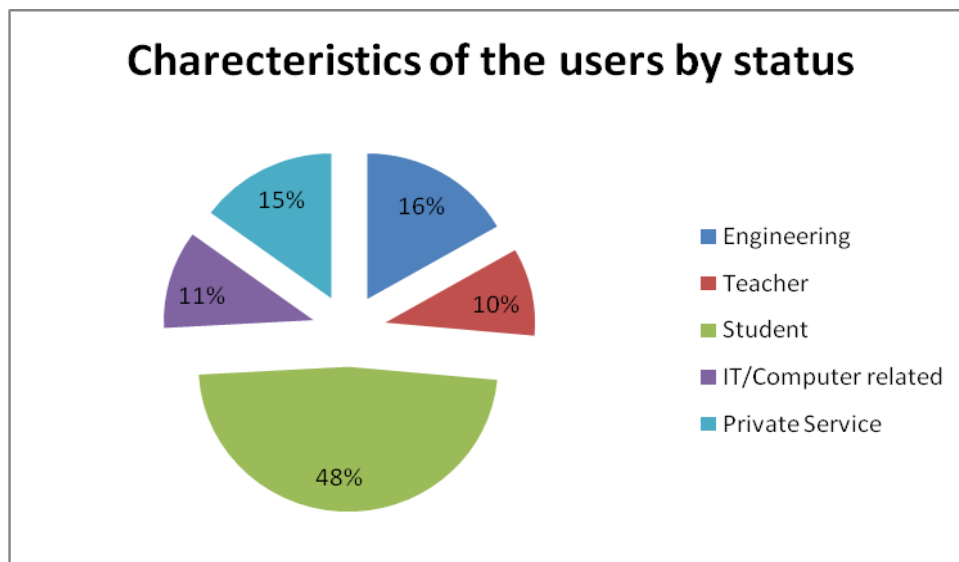


Figure-2
Category of users

Figure-2 shows that most of the cyber cafe users were students 83 (47.7%), followed by engineer 29 (16.67%) and private service 26 (14.94%). IT/Computer related 19 (10.91%) and rest 17(9.78%) are teachers.

Users synchronization with computer and Internet: Though this study is purely based on cybercafé users and their attitude towards cybercafé, but for background study some questionnaire were designed to reveal the users knowledge about computer and internet, their available resources, frequency of use internet and also their training and background related to use computer and internet, the answers of those questions are stated below:

Computer at home: Table 1 shows that a large proportion of respondents 101 (58.04%) had no computer at home while only 73 (41.96%) respondents have been using computers at their home.

Table-1
Computer at home

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	73	41.96
No	101	58.04
Total	174	100

Years of Internet use: The respondents were asked to indicate their experience of using internet. The results indicate that the largest group of 60(55.17%) respondents had less than 1 years of Internet experience, while 54 (31.04%) students had 1-2 years of experience of internet use. The analysis clearly indicates that the majority of the respondents had less than 1 year of experience in using the internet (see table 2).

Table-2
Years of Internet Use

	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 1 year	96	55.17
1-2 years	54	31.04
3-5 years	18	10.34
Over 5 years	6	3.45
Total	174	100

Training in the use of internet café: Table 3 shows that the maximum number of respondents 68.96% had no training while rest of the respondents had the training of using internet café.

Table-3
Training in the use of internet café

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	54	31.04
No	120	68.96
Total	174	100

Cybercafé dependency and Usages pattern: From observation it can sat that the city dwellers of Dhaka heavily depends on cybercafé in their day to day life. To reveal the reason of cyber cafés dependency and find out the usages pattern of the users some question were developed during the study and the findings of those questions are as follows:

Reason for using cyber café: The preferences given by the respondents reasons for using cyber cafés are as follows: More than 58% of the respondents used the cyber cafe as they have no computer and net connection at home, 13.22% for privacy, 20% for power backup, 7.48% Use internet very little, so prefer cyber cafe, 4.60% for expensive at home, 2.87% for Printing . It clearly indicates that a large number of respondents used the cyber café because they have no computer and net connection at home, while the lowest number used it for printing (table 4).

Table-4
Reason for using cyber café

	Frequency	Percentage
No computer and net connection at home	101	58.04
Cyber cafes has power backup	20	11.49
Provides technical assistance	4	2.30
Use internet very little, so prefer cyber café	13	7.48
Expensive at home	8	4.60
Printing	5	2.87
Privacy	23	13.22
Total	174	100

Frequency of visiting cyber café: In order to assess the frequency of visiting cyber café, the respondents were asked to indicate any one out of six categories of time lag. More than forty four percent of the respondents visit the cyber café 2-3 times in a week, with nearly 72 percent visiting a cafe regular, while 7.47% and 6.32% visit the café 4-6 times in a month and few times in a month (table 5).

Table-5
Frequency of visiting cyber café

	Frequency	Percentage
Every day	72	41.38
2-3 times in a week	78	44.83
4-6 times in a week	13	7.47
Few times in month	11	6.32
No fixed schedule	00	00
Rarely	00	00
Total	174	100

Check list for choosing cyber café: The results revealed that 31.04% percent felt it convenient to use cafés in terms of their location, 24.13 percent appreciated the Ac and power back up, while 21.83% visited cafés because of the cheap rate (table 6).

Purpose of using cyber café: Table- 7 exhibits that 37.93% of the respondents used the cyber café for downloading, 22.41 for reading newspapers, 15.52% for research purposes, while 13.79% and 10.35% of the respondents indicated that they also used the Internet for Browsing /surfing and Academic purpose. It suggests that the majority of the respondents used the Internet mainly for downloading, while the least number of respondents used the cyber café for academic purposes.

Table-6
Check list for using cyber café

	Frequency	Percentage
Near from home or work place	54	31.04
Cheap rate	38	21.83
Ac and power back up	42	24.13
Helpful It experts	34	19.55
Good hardware facilities	6	3.45
Total	174	100

Table-7
Purpose of using cyber café

	Frequency	Percentage
Browsing /surfing	24	13.79
Reading newspapers /magazines	39	22.41
Academic purpose	18	10.35
Research purpose	27	15.52
Downloading	66	37.93
Total	174	100

Problems encountered while using cyber café: It can be inferred from table 8 that use of cyber café is not free from problems. Respondents were allowed to indicate any problems they faced at these cafés. The problems encountered while using the Internet mainly come from five factors: slow access speed, cost associated with accessing Internet, Environment, Hardware and Technical Assistance. More than 4% reported that they had difficulties to bear the cost associated with accessing Internet, 20.67% said against the hardware problems, 17.24.% found difficulties while it takes a lot of their slot time to download the relevant information, and rest of the respondents faced lack of technical assistance i.e. 18(10.35%) and environmental problem i.e.6.90%.

Table-8
Problems encountered while using cyber cafés

	Frequency	Percentage
Speed	30	17.24
Cost	78	44.84
Environment	12	6.90
Hardware	36	20.67
Technical Assistance	18	10.35
Total	174	100

Discussions on Findings and Recommendations

The study uncovered that the great majority of café users of Dhaka City are males. The same result was shown by Furuholt, Kristiansen and Wahid (2008) and Batool and Mahmood (2010). Among the respondents almost half of the cyber café users were students. This was also exposed by Batool and Mahmood (2010). The respondents were asked to indicate their experiences of using Internet. The results indicate that the largest group of respondents had less than one year of Internet experience. In order to assess the frequency of visiting cyber café, a good number of users visiting a café regularly. The

results exposed that a immense number of respondents felt it convenient to use café in terms of their location, and nearly one fourth of the respondents appreciated the Air-condition and power back up facilities. A large number of respondents used the cyber café because they have no computer and net connection at home. The respondents were asked to indicate all the various cyber activities that they engaged in during their current visit in cyber café. Downloading, browsing are the trendiest activities for the café customers, while the least number of respondents used the cyber café for academic purposes. Respondents were allowed to point out any problems they faced at these cafés. The problems encountered while using the cafés and a great number of users reported that they had difficulties to bear the cost associated with accessing cyber café.

It is recommended that cyber cafés must be regularized under government laws to provide satisfactory standards of service and perk up the environment. The environment should also be made favorable for female users. Cyber cafés must be within reach of all urban and rural residents. Cyber café users should be made aware of the potentials the Internet could have. It is not for communication and entertainment only. Instead, it is a powerful and cheap resource that can be used for learning, education, research, commerce, employment, discussions, exploring the world and other cultures and above all, to make oneself heard. The users must have computer literacy in order to minimize unscrupulous situations and use café for educational purposes. The BTRC should intervene and impose a strict deadline for all ISPs to set up a national IXP. By doing so, local Internet bandwidth could be increased and can be offered much cheaper. These major benefits could provide and improve access to the Internet for reasonable costs, which could mean lower prices will be paid by cafés for Internet access and eventually users will be charged less for surfing. As a result the Internet could be used more frequently and moreover, more people could access it.

Conclusion

This study is based on a survey of cyber café users in Dhaka city, the capital city of Bangladesh. The main objective is to find out purposes for why people use cyber cafés and to investigate the problems of cafe users. Browsing, downloading, reading news papers are the most well-liked activities for the café users. Cafés usage for business purposes and computer games in these venues is uncommon. The majority of customers use cyber cafés mainly for downloading. The second largest group of users mainly goes to the cyber café because they have no computer and net connection at home. It is mourning that very few go to the cafés for educational purposes. Today the business of individual internet use in Bangladesh is neither dominated by the government nor large corporations.

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