

# Influence of the Internet on Health Seeking Behaviors of Youths in Ekiti State, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** The use of online resources to locate health-related information is known to be increasing among Nigeria youths; sadly, not enough studies that investigate the influence of the internet on health seeking behaviors of Nigeria youths have been done. This study therefore investigates the influence of the internet on health seeking behaviors of youths in Ekiti-state, Nigeria, examines the extent to which the internet provides answers to health related questions among the youths, determines the perception of Nigeria youths on internet's influence on health seeking among them, and ultimately, this study finds out whether the use of internet increases or decreases self-medication among Nigerian youths. A standardized nine-question survey on Internet use and health seeking behavior was given to 300 youths. A review of the literature is also included. It was discovered that out of 300 responses received, 203 youths (67.7%) reported ever consulting the internet to find health information. 194 (64.6%) youths consult the internet for answers to health problems before thinking of consulting a doctor or a caregiver. A large number of the youths (93.1%) follow the online physician advice more closely by practicing self-medication. A total of 191 (94%) youths submitted that the internet influences their behavior of health seeking. Conclusively, the tests of hypothesis show a significant relationship between the use of internet and health seeking behaviors of youths also between the use of internet and self-medication among youths in Ekiti- State, Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Internet, Youth, Health Seeking Behavior, Self-medication

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## 1. Introduction

The world has shifted drastically to the digital form of seeking information and this in no doubt has altered the view of health care, information pursuing and looking for the best way to healthiness amongst people specifically youths. The Internet is a universal set of connections that helps revolutionizing interpersonal relations with the accessibility and expanding recognition and reception of virtual social networks [1]. This allows the provision of sophisticated and resourceful platforms for diverse communication and broadcast of unswervingly and transparent information not minding the geographical location [2-3]. The Internet and World Wide Web have also helped individuals get necessary, fundamental and crucial information for persons trying to

acquire information about their healthiness and wellbeing. The worldwide intercommunication serves as a way of putting together information prior to, during and following an engagement with the physician to get predictable information such as prescriptions, self-diagnosis, and causes as well as care and side effect [4]. A similar study done by [5] stated that the utilization of the internet is predominantly noteworthy as having access to information is an essential management approach to taking charge of one's health and youths are not left out. Health information seeking pattern is principally troubled with taking pragmatic verdict to deal with health issues and seek out medical care and attention within the available resources from an individual viewpoint. Health information seeking is a familiarize fact, hence effort to sway individuals to investigate around precaution requires an indulgent of their zeal for such conduct.

Youth from diverse tribes, culture as well as country agrees to and access all sorts of information from the internet. There are also diverse patterns of the access and usage of the internet by the diverse groups of this populace depending on their biological developments that involves physical, emotional, social, and pubertal maturation, socialization as well as peer groups [6-7]. Similarly, recent exploration has piloted that the differences in the usage of internet amongst gender has become inconclusive as some stage in teenage years [8]. Some research has established boys (58%) to be more recurrent users of the internet compared with girls (44%), while other research observed no considerable sexual category dissimilarity in internet usage [9]. Data have also revealed that only 20% of African students reported staying an average of over 3 hours per day online compared with 42% and 40% of Chinese and US students correspondingly [10]. The rate at which information spread and the potential implications for humanity, individuals and the public are overwhelming. As such, some countries have argued in support of censoring and controlled access, and some countries have argued in support of uncontrolled and uncensored access [11].

Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that right to use of the internet is much more restricted than in either the United States or China, addiction to the use of internet is in fact more prevailing in Africa [12]. Consequently, studies on where youths acquire information pertaining to their healthiness and if they use resources and information gotten online have become the main study spotlight in recent epoch [13]. Furthermore, on all the online platforms, studies have shown that of all who access the internet daily, youths have a greater number of those seeking information and Nigerian youths are not left out [14]. Nigeria is the most populous African country and has a crawling populace of young people who have access and use mobile phones, with ever-increasing access to the internet [15]. Access to the Internet and its use in Nigeria are on the increase with the introduction of telecoms companies providing expanding and wide access through mobile phones [16]. This expansion comes with advanced coverage to diverse kinds of information which includes those involving to wellbeing, ailment and disease conditions [17].

The behavior of seeking information concerning health online comes with its downsides as well as advantages. A bit of its advantage include aptness and an extensive array of information on precise and diverse aliment, wellbeing and disease conditions. With this process, health information becomes readily accessible and obtainable in a manner that patients' understanding becomes broadened and pertinent for more involvement in therapeutic and restorative relationships. It could also advance the creation of more knowledgeable decisions and conformity with medications. Nonetheless, access to online health information also raises debates regarding the superiority, dependability, and applicability of the vast capacity of health information amid unlike social groups [18].

This study therefore investigates the use of the internet among youths in Ekiti state. Particular focus is on the use of the internet as a source of health information, the extent to which the internet provides answers to health related questions among the youths, determines the perception of Nigeria youths on internet's influence on health information seeking among them. This study also finds out whether the use of internet for health information seeking increases or reduces self-medication among Nigerian youths.

## 2. Objectives

The general objective of this study is to investigate the influence of the internet on health seeking behaviors of youths while the specific objectives are:

To investigate the impact of internet on youth's decision to consult a physician when ill.

To find out whether the use of internet increases or decreases self-medication among youths in Ekiti - State.

### HYPOTHESIS 1.

Ho: there is no significant relationship between internet consultation and health seeking behaviors of youths in Ekiti-State, Nigeria.

H1: there is a significant relationship between internet consultation and health seeking behaviors of youths in Ekiti - State, Nigeria.

### HYPOTHESIS 2.

Ho: there is no significant relationship between internet consultation and self- medication among youths in Ekiti-State, Nigeria.

H1: there is a significant relationship between internet consultation and self-medication among youths in Ekiti - State, Nigeria.

## 3. Method

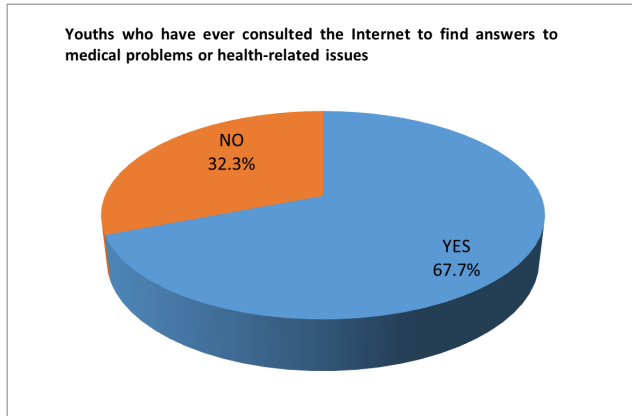
The study describes the relationship between internet use and health seeking behavior of youth (aged 14-24 years) in Ekiti-state. The study population of this study consists of 300 youths in Ekiti State, who fall between 14 and 24 years of age. Purposive sampling technique was utilized in this study because only the concerned age group were involved. Structured questionnaire was used for the study and consisted of both open and closed ended questions; with carefully constructed research questions titled 'the influence of internet on health seeking behavior of youths in Ekiti-State Nigeria'. The data generated from the respondents was utilised such that the research objectives for the study were addressed. The statistical method employed is descriptive in nature using simple percentage. The informed consent of the youths was obtained in writing. Completed Questionnaires were collected at the spot by the researchers. Correlation coefficient model was used to identify significant predictors with Level of significance taken at 0.01.

## 4. Result and Discussion

**Table 1.** Sex distribution of respondents.

Sex	Frequency	%
Male	150	50
Female	150	50
Total	300	100

Table 1 illustrates the percentage sex distribution of respondents. For this study, 50% of respondents were males while 50% were females.



**Figure 1.** Youths who have ever consulted the Internet to find answers to medical problems or health-related issues.

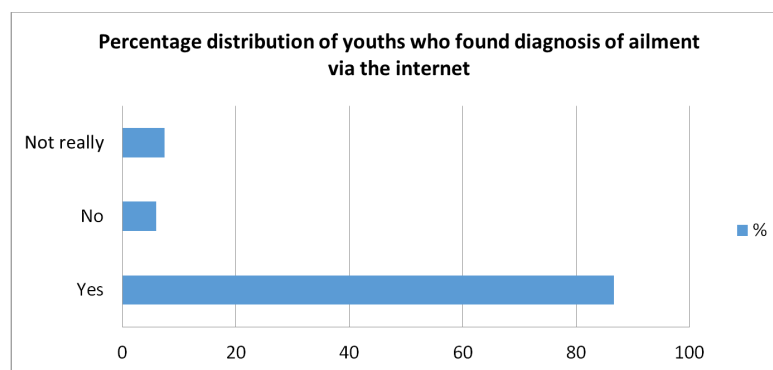
Figure 1 reveals that a large number of respondents (67.7%) have consulted the internet to find answers to medical problems or health related issues at one point or the other. 97 respondents (32.3%) have never consulted the internet to find answers to health related issues. This finding is similar to the study on youth's participation and active use of online health information

reflected in [19] in Ireland where about 66% of the youths use the internet to explore health information on a particular ailment, social health fitness, and nutrition information. A study from [20] also indicated that 43.4% of the students especially youths in Islamabad used the Internet in search for health information. On the contrary, a study in India by [21] points a low (14%) usage of the internet for health information seeking, in spite of the number of students especially youths using the platform for other things. Infrastructural developments, accessibility of excellent Internet service, and rights of the mobile as well as Computers with the Internet access accounted for momentous instability in terms of access. This is fundamental to improving Internet access, particularly amid rural dwellers. Beyond the structural barriers and advantages, the superiority of health information, competence, and dependability remains vital to the individual and the society.

**Table 2.** Percentage distribution of respondents who consulted the internet to find answers to medical problems by gender.

Sex	Response	Frequency	%
Male	Yes	96	64.0
	No	50	33.3
	Sometimes	4	2.7
Total		150	100
Female	Yes	107	71.3
	No	41	27.4
	Sometimes	2	1.3
Total		150	100

This study reveals in table 2 that more females (71.3%) consult the internet for health issues than males (64%). This implies that females are more likely to practice self-medication than males.



**Figure 2.** Percentage distribution of youths who found diagnosis of ailment via the internet.

**Table 3.** Percentage distribution of youths who found both prescriptions and treatment of ailment via the internet.

Response	Frequency	%
Yes	173	85.2
No	30	14.8
Total	203	100

Figure 2 illustrates that 86.7% of respondents found diagnosis of ailment through the internet while 5.9% of respondents did not find the correct diagnosis of their

ailments. 7.4% of respondent didn't get the clear diagnosis of their ailment via the internet because they found multiple possible ailments associated with the symptoms they had and they were unable to treat themselves until they later consulted a physician.

From the research findings in table 3, a total of 173 (85.2%) of respondents who have ever consulted the internet for health related issues found prescriptions and treatment of ailments on the internet. Only 30 (14.8%) respondents were unable to get prescriptions and treatment via the internet.

**Table 4.** Percentage distribution of youths who consult the internet for answers to health problems before consulting a doctor or a caregiver.

Response	Frequency	%
Yes	194	64.6
No	75	25.1
Not really	31	10.3
Total	300	100

Table 4 reveals that 64.6% of respondents prefer to consult the internet for health issues than consult a doctor or caregiver. 25.1% of respondents prefer to consult a doctor or caregiver than to consult the internet, while 10.3% are not sure of what they would do when they have health related issues.

**Table 5.** Percentage distribution showing how frequently respondents consult doctor or caregiver when ill before the Internet became available.

Response	Frequency	%
Very often	69	34.0
Often	117	57.6
Not often	17	8.4
Total	203	100

Table 5 illustrates that before the internet became available

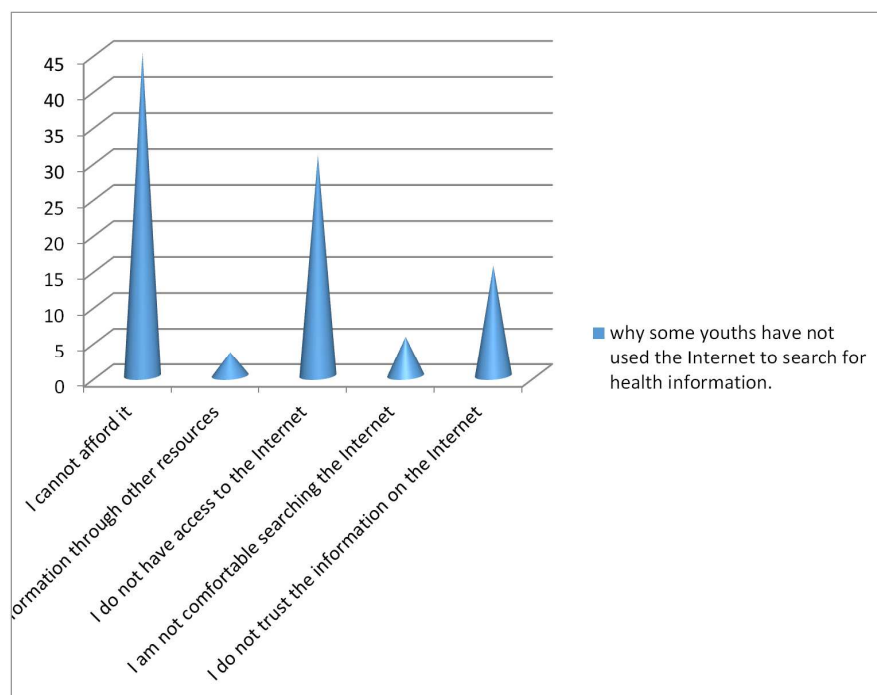
**Figure 3.** Percentage distribution of why some youths have not used the Internet to search for health information.

Figure 3 reveals that (45%) of respondent who have never consulted the internet for health information did so because they could not afford it, 3.3% get health related information through sources, 30.8% do not have access to the internet, 5.5% are not comfortable searching the internet for information about their health, while 15.4% do not trust the information on the internet. On the contrary, health-care-seeking behavior among young people in Lebanon is partially affected by their socioeconomic status fee of health services, accessibility to health services which include concerns about privacy, humiliation in disclosing health issues, nonexistence of medical cover, low understanding of accessible services as

to the 203 respondent who have ever consulted the internet for health related issues, 34% visited the doctor or caregiver very often, 57.6% of respondents often consulted the physicians while only 8.4% of respondents didn't visit the hospital often.

**Table 6.** Percentage distribution of youths who practice self-medication after getting online medical prescriptions.

Response	Frequency	%
Yes	189	93.1
No	5	2.5
Not really	9	4.4
Total	203	100

Table 6 reveals that 93.1% of respondents who have ever consulted the internet for health related issues, practice self-medication. 2.5% of respondents do not practice self-medication at all while 4.4% of respondents sometimes practice self-medication. This is similar to a study by [22] which proved that the use of the internet has increased Self-Medication amongst youths especially in Lebanon.

well as lack of confidence in health practitioners [22].

**Table 7.** Who should be first consulted among the following when you need medical attention.

Place	Frequency	%
Health Centre	33	11.0
Hospitals	17	5.7
Pharmacy store	53	17.7
Internet	197	65.6
Total	300	100

Table 7 indicates that only 11% of respondents feel that the health centers should be the first point of call whenever they

need medical attention, 5.7% of respondents feel the hospital should be the first point of call whenever they need medical attention, 17.7% feel that pharmacy stores should be the first point of call whenever they need medical attention, while majority (65.6%) of the respondents feel that the internet should be the first point of call whenever they need medical attention.

Table 8 reveals that almost all the respondents (94.0%) admitted that the internet has influenced their health seeking behaviors. This may indicate great dependence on internet for diagnosis and prescriptions among the youths. This calls

for urgent attention in order to reduce the prevalence of self-medication among youths.

**Table 8.** Internet influence on of health seeking behavior of youth.

Response	Frequency	%
Yes	191	94.0
No	7	3.5
Uncertain	5	2.5
Total	203	100

## 5. Test of Hypothesis

**Table 9.** Correlations.

			Youths who practice self-medication after getting online medical prescriptions	Youths who have ever consulted the Internet to find answers to medical problems or health-related issues
Kendall's tau_b	Youths who practice self-medication after getting online medical prescriptions	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.250**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	202	202
	Youths who have ever consulted the Internet to find answers to medical problems or health-related issues	Correlation Coefficient	-.250**	1.000
Spearman's rho		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	202	300
	Youths who practice self-medication after getting online medical prescriptions	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.252**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
Spearman's rho		N	202	202
	Youths who have ever consulted the Internet to find answers to medical problems or health-related issues	Correlation Coefficient	-.252**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	202	300

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 9 illustrates that there is a significant relationship between internet consultation and self-medication among youths in Ekiti- State, Nigeria. We therefore reject null hypothesis.

**Table 10.** Correlations.

			Youths who consult the internet for answers to health problems before consulting a doctor or a caregiver	Youths who have ever consulted the Internet to find answers to medical problems or health-related issues
Kendall's tau_b	Youths who consult the internet for answers to health problems before consulting a doctor or a caregiver	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.906**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	300	300
	Youths who have ever consulted the Internet to find answers to medical problems or health-related issues	Correlation Coefficient	.906**	1.000
Spearman's rho		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	300	300
	Youths who consult the internet for answers to health problems before consulting a doctor or a caregiver	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.933**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
Spearman's rho		N	300	300
	Youths who have ever consulted the Internet to find answers to medical problems or health-related issues	Correlation Coefficient	.933**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	300	300

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 10 illustrates that there is a significant relationship between internet consultation and health seeking behaviors of youths in Ekiti-state, Nigeria. We therefore reject null hypothesis.

## 6. Conclusion

This study found that access to online health information

is prevalent among youths in Ekiti-state. Even though getting medical information from the internet may attract some benefits for youths, internet use among them evidently results to an alarming increase in self-medication; which could in turn put a burden on physicians and other caregivers or increase youth mortality when the situation goes out of hand. Studies have shown that self-medication

is a global phenomenon and it is a common behavior amongst youth. One major risk of self-medication is the advent of the struggle with microorganisms in human pathogens in countries that are under development all over the world where the use of antibiotics is frequent used and accessible with no proper and adequate recommendation. Another risk of self-medication is serious reaction; which is coupled with irrational, absurd and unreasonable use of medication because the human system may develop resistance to specific medicines. Other risks attached to self-medication include hypersensitivity of drug, withdrawal signs, reaction to some components and impermanent cloaking of ailment, which can interrupt right finding and diagnosis. In addition, the risk of self-medication can also result to death from overdose of medication, as well as impending health challenge [23].

## 7. Recommendation

It is recommended that more studies should be carried out to further investigate the influence of Internet on health seeking behaviors of youths in Nigeria. An urgent sensitization/orientation programme which would serve as a positive intervention should be put in places in schools, youths' recreation centers and public places in other to improve the understanding of the impact of this mode of information-seeking behavior on health outcomes of young people.

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