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Information Searching behaviour of Research Scholars in the Department of History, A.M.U., Aligarh: A Study

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Abstract

Purpose: The major aim of this paper is to present the findings of a survey of research scholars in the Department of History, AMU to assess information seeking on the web. **Methodology:** A questionnaire comprising of 15 questions was distributed to 60 research scholars. Total of 31 questionnaires were received over a period of two weeks. **Findings:** The major findings of the study revealed that most of the scholars had long experience of using web, but majority were not aware of Boolean operators and those who were aware did not use Boolean operators. Google was their favorite search engine. The main purpose for using web was for research and respondents spent more than one hour/day. They were unaware of leading databases. The sole problem was low speed, but almost all participants were satisfied with using web sources. **Practical Implications:** This article provides insight into research scholar's web searching behavior for fulfillment of academic needs.

Keywords: Information, Research Scholar, Sources, Web Searching, Web Sources

1. Introduction

The development of online databases, subject gateways, institutional repositories, digital libraries etc. have shifted the interest of researchers from print to web sources. It has also changed the information search behavior of researchers. Many academic institutions subscribe to web-based sources. Students and researchers are extensively accessing these sources using new tools and techniques. This study tries to examine the prevailing psychological behavior in searching web-based resources. Searching information on the web is something like visiting a shopping mall. Web provides a variety of information in several formats.

2. Methodology

The study was conducted using a structured questionnaire comprising of 15 questions that was circulated to 60 research scholars in the Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University. 31 questionnaires were returned over a period of two weeks, from 7th to 21st of November 2016. The collected data was analyzed using Microsoft Excel 10.

3. Objectives of the Study

The present study has following objectives:

- To find out major purpose of searching information on the web;
- To determine frequency of using web;
- To identify problems faced by researchers while using web; and
- To know their level of satisfaction.

4. Department of History, AMU: Brief Profile

The History Department of Aligarh Muslim University is one of the oldest departments in the country. It offers Undergraduate, Post-graduate, Ph.D. and PDF programs for students across the world. The Department of History in 1968 was upgraded as a Centre of Advanced Studies in History by the University Grants Commission (UGC) under its Special Assistance Program (SAP).

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5. Review of Related Studies

There is considerable amount of literature on web information seeking and searching. A few studies have been reviewed here. Bhatt (2014)[1] studied the information need, perception of faculty members in the Institute of Law, Nirma University. The results revealed that faculty members preferred web based sources over print sources of information and due to this their dependence on web based sources increased. Major purposes for seeking information were class lectures, presentations, and research in their respective fields. Another study by Sife (2016)[8] to examine web search behavior of post graduates students at Sokoine University of Agriculture, Tanzania found that PG students heavily relied on web sources of information. Sife further reports that majority of PG students made simple search and advanced search features were rarely used. The most preferred search engine was Google followed by yahoo. Further, finding pointed out that respondent had very positive attitude towards using web sources. E-journal databases usage was low. Slow speed of internet was major problem they faced.

A study carried out by Rani and Nagaraju (2014)[7] at Vikram Simhapuri University, Nellore reported that the respondents' major purposes for using web was class work/ projects/exam; for sending/receiving mails and for using social networking sites. The Google here too, was most preferred search engine by respondents. The participants reported that main problem they encountered while using Web was slow speed of connectivity and piles of irrelevant information. Majority were satisfied. The case study by Malik and Mahmood (2009)[6], explored student's web searching behavior at the University of Punjab, Lahore. 200 students from Faculties of Economics and Management Science were surveyed through questionnaire. The researchers received only 62 responses from among 200. The results indicated that majority sought information for educational tasks followed by entertainment and sports. Again, Google was first choice. Moreover, the findings indicated that students used both simple and advanced search. Overload of information, slow speed etc. were major problems reported by the students while using web.

In a case study of library users at Silcher Medical College, Bhattacharjee (2014)[2] randomly distributed 300 questionnaires and received 260 filled-in questionnaires. The findings indicated majority used smart phones and laptops and access information daily. Google was the most popular search engine. Over and over, the leading problems of web users ware quite similar to earlier studies, i.e., low bandwidth, difficult to retrieve relevant information, overloaded junk and irrelevant information etc. Repeatedly, the study of Fidel et al (1999)[3], was on web searching behavior of high school students for home work/assignments. Fidel found that students were satisfied with the searches they made and results they retrieved. Further, the investigator found that due to availability of information in variety of formats covering multitude of subjects and easy access to information, the students found this an enjoyable task. Fidel however, felt that participants were required to be better trained.

A study by Large et al (2002)[5] on much the same theme targeted elementary school students in Greater Montreal. A total of 53 students (30 boys and 23 girls and most of them aged 12 years old) were given questionnaires and received 43 in return. Large pointed out that large part of population used web in school (23) followed by home (22). Furthermore, the findings recorded that boys were better than girls in all using web. They spent more time than girls; they downloaded more information than girls; they went through more hypertext links than girls; they took less time to view individual page and found to be more active than girls while using internet and so on. Kumar and Shukla (2013)[4] presented the findings of a comparative study on information seeking pattern in electronic environment between Art and Science Research Scholars at Banaras Hindu University. They found that even in the era of e- resources some researchers in art disciplines relied on traditional print sources to meet their information needs. E-journals among all e-resources were extensively used by researchers in both categories. Both art and science researchers spent 6-10 hours/week on web searching.

6. Analyses, Interpretation and Findings

The collected data from the researchers tabulated and then interpreted.

The gender-wise distribution of respondents is shown in Figure 1. The respondents had some prior experience in using web-based resources, which varied from 1-3 years with only a few having more than 3 years of experience.

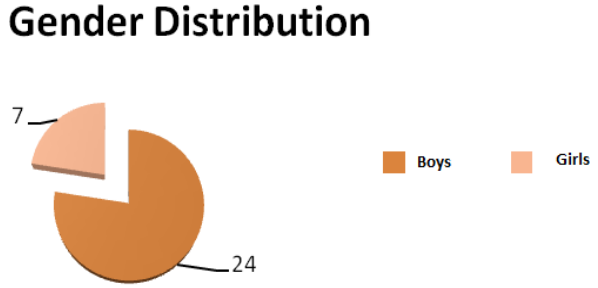

Figure 1. Respondent's gender-wise contribution.

6.1 Purpose of Information Searching

The data in Table 1 indicates that research work was the primary purpose for searching web resources.

6.2 Location of Using Web

The researcher can access information using web at any location convenient to them. The Aligarh Muslim University has campus-wide Wi-Fi and also provides Internet access to researchers through its Digital Resource Centre (DRC), MA library, Central Computer Lab, etc. Table 2 shows that hostel was the most convenient location for using web by 17 (70.43%) male respondents on the other hand seminar library was most convenient for 5 (71.43%) female respondents. The DRC was reported by one respondent in both categories equally.

6.3 Frequency of Accessing Web Sources

The data in Table 3 shows that majority of male respondents, i.e., 17(70.83%) accessed web many times a day. In case of female respondents, the results were quite similar to male respondents, i.e., 6(85.71%) of female respondent also used web many times a day. Collectively, the results again indicate that 23(74.19%) respondents searched information many times a day, followed by 7 (22.58%) once a day.

6.4 Approximate Time Spent in Browsing Information

The data in the Table 4 shows the time, respondents spend searching web to meet their academic needs. The collected data reveals that most respondents (67.74%) spent more than one hour per day.

Table 1. Purpose of information searching

Purpose	Male (n=24)	Percentage	Female (n=7)	Percentage	Total	Percentage (n=31)
Research work	15	44.12	6	60	21	47.73
Class assignment	1	2.94	-	-	1	2.27
Using social websites	4	11.76	1	10	5	11.36
Keeping yourself up to date	14	41.18	3	30	17	38.64

(Respondents ticked multiple answers)

Table 2. Location of using web

Locations	Male (n=24)	Percentage	Female (n=7)	Percentage	Total	Percentage (n=31)
Seminar Library	14	58.33	5	71.43	19	61.29
Hostel	17	70.83	2	28.57	19	61.29
Digital resource center MA, Library	1	4.17	1	14.29	2	6.45
Computer lab	4	16.67	1	14.29	5	16.13

("n" is over due to multiple answers)

Table 3. Frequency towards accessing web sources

Frequency	Male (n=24)	Percentage	Female (n=7)	Percentage	Total	Percentage (n=31)
Many times in a day	17	70.83	6	85.71	23	74.19
Once a day	6	25.00	1	14.29	7	22.58
Twice weekly	-	-	-	-	-	-
Weekly	1	4.17	-	-	1	3.23
Monthly	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 4. Approximate time spend in browsing information

App. Time	Male (n=24)	Percentage	Female (n=7)	Percentage	Total	Percentage (n=31)
Half an hour/day	3	12.50	1	14.29	4	12.90
One hour/day	5	20.83	1	14.29	6	19.35
More than one hour/day	16	66.67	5	71.43	21	67.74
One hour/two days	-	-	-	-	-	-
One hour/weekly	-	-	-	-	-	-

6.5 Preferred Time of Searching Information

The Table 5 shows that there was straight response regarding their preferred time of searching. Late night was the most preferred time for both males and females for searching the Web.

Most users accessed web resources using laptops and mobile devices.

6.6 Most Preferred Search Engine

The study found that Google was the most preferred search engine (Table 6).

6.7 Use of Boolean Operators "And, Or, Not"

Over two thirds of the users were not even aware of Boolean operators, a feature that is available for use in advanced searches. Only a small number of research scholars were aware of these and even a smaller number used them (Table 7).

6.8 Awareness of Major Databases

The study indicated that awareness about major databases was also of a low order. Only, 11 (35.48%) research scholars knew about Web of Science followed by, ScienceDirect and Shodsindhu 6 (19.35%) and EmeraldInsight, i.e., 9.68%. Just one respondent knew about J-Gate (Table 8).

6.9 Reaction after Searching

The researchers react differently, once they finish their

Table 5. Preferred time of searching information

Time	Male (n=24)	Percentage	Female (n=7)	Percentage	Total	Percentage (n=31)
Morning	10	41.67	1	14.29	11	35.48
Noon	5	20.83	2	28.57	7	22.58
Evening	5	20.83	2	28.57	7	22.58
Night	12	50.00	3	42.86	15	48.39

("n" is over due to multiple answers)

Table 6. Most preferred search engine

Search engines	Male (n=24)	Percentage	Female (n=7)	Percentage	Total	Percentage (n=31)
Google	24	100.00	6	85.71	30	96.77
Yahoo	4	16.67	2	28.57	6	19.35
Ask.com	-	-	-	-	-	-
AOL	-	-	-	-	-	-
Any other	-	-	-	-	-	-

("n" is over due to multiple answers)

Table 7. Use of boolean operators "And, Or, Not"

Statement	Male (n=24)	Percentage	Female (n=7)	Percentage	Total	Percentage (n=31)
Yes, I know and use them	4	16.67	2	28.57	6	19.35
Yes, I know but don't use them	2	8.33	2	28.57	4	12.90
No, I don't know these operators	18	75.00	3	42.86	21	67.74

Table 8. Awareness of major databases

Databases	Male (n=24)	Percentage	Female (n=7)	Percentage	Total	Percentage (n=31)
Web of science	7	29.17	4	57.14	11	35.48
ScienceDirect	4	16.67	2	28.57	6	19.35
EmeraldInsight	3	12.50	-	-	3	9.68
J-Gate	1	4.17	-	-	1	3.23
Shodhsindu	5	20.83	1	14.29	6	19.35
Not mentioned	8	33.33	1	14.29	9	29.03
None of these	1	4.17	-	-	1	3.23

searches on the Web. As shown in Table 9 a total of 22 (70.97%) including 3 (42.86%) females intended to download and print the resources. On the other hand, 9 (29.03%) respondents involving 1 (14.29%) female preferred to read online. Three males and females used bookmarks.

6.10 Problems Encountered using Searching Web Source

The major concerns of respondents are (Table 10):

- Time consumed in searching information on the web; and
- Irrelevant and overload of information.

6.11 Helping Hands

Surprisingly barring one respondent none sought help from librarians; almost all of them depended on their colleagues for help in web searching (Table 11).

6.12 Adequacy of Web Sources of Information

Finding regarding the adequacy of web sources for research works indicates that not all agreed on the adequacy of web resources for their work. This is understandable in view of the fact that the study was limited to research scholars in History in which print resources are important. Again, nearly a quarter of those surveyed were not satisfied with the resources that web searching retrieved (Table 12).

Table 9. Reaction after getting relevant information

Reaction	Male (n=24)	Percentage	Female (n=7)	Percentage	Total	Percentage (n=31)
Read online	8	33.33	1	14.29	9	29.03
Bookmark	3	12.50	3	42.86	6	19.35
Download and take print of that document	19	79.17	3	42.86	22	70.97

Table 10. Problems encountered using searching web source

Problems	Male (n=24)	Percentage	Female (n=7)	Percentage	Total	Percentage (n=31)
Slow speed	17	70.83	4	57.14	21	67.74
Irrelevant and overload of information	3	12.50	1	14.29	4	12.90
Time consuming	5	20.83	-	-	5	16.13
Lack of awareness of important databases websites etc.	1	4.17	2	28.57	3	9.68
Lack of skills for using web	-	-	-	-	-	-

("n" is over due to multiple answers)

Table 11. Helping hands

Helping hands	Male (n=24)	Percentage	Female (n=7)	Percentage	Total	Percentage (n=31)
Colleagues	23	95.83	7	100.00%	30	96.77
Seminar librarian	1	4.17	-	-	1	3.23
Help desk of MA library	-	-	-	-	-	-
Use "Ask a Librarian"	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 12. Adequateness of web sources of information

Adequacy	Male (n=24)	Percentage	Female (n=7)	Percentage	Total	Percentage (n=31)
Strongly Agree	10	41.67	5	71.43	15	48.39
Neither Agree nor Agree	10	41.67	-	-	10	32.26
Disagree	3	12.50	2	28.57	5	16.13
Strongly disagree	1	4.17	-	-	1	3.23

7. Conclusion

Web is a huge and rich store of knowledge resources. Lack of awareness and lack of searching skills are major factors that need to be addressed in enabling research scholars to make effective use of these resources. Librarians should introduce and conduct information literacy programs at regular intervals and one such program especially for novice researcher at the beginning of every academic session.

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