User Awareness survey on Turnitin: An Electronic Plagiarism Detection Tool

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ABSTRACT

Plagiarism, the method of taking credits for somebody else’s words or ideas (knowingly or unknowingly) is a threat to the research. To deal with this, institutions have to apply certain measures to detect the plagiarised material, and to create awareness among the users on the use of those measures to detect/identify the plagiarised data. One such way is purchasing anti-plagiarism software. Manipal University (MU) has purchased Turnitin.com, commercial software available for this purpose. The study was conducted to analyse the awareness and to evaluate the aspects of Turnitin- its document checking procedure, password requirement, and method of document checking preference by the faculty/researcher/students of Manipal Institute of Technology (MIT) and Manipal Centre for Natural Sciences (MCNS), Manipal University- Manipal. The data were collected using questionnaire given to faculty/researcher/students of MIT and MCNS. The results of the data analysis, major finding and recommendations for the increased awareness about the software are presented. The outcome of the study identified that there is a need to create awareness about the software among the users of both the libraries. The article makes an attempt to describe the plagiarism and Turnitin software.

Key Terms: Anti-Plagiarism Software, Plagiarism, Turnitin, Manipal Institute of Technology Central Library, Manipal Centre for Natural Sciences Library, User Awareness.

INTRODUCTION

Information Technology has given the easy availability and accessibility to the information, which has created a new threat to the society, the act of taking ownership of information created by someone else. Sometimes this happens knowingly and sometimes unknowingly, but plagiarism is a crime and crime does not have excuses. Secondly, somewhere the thought of having more number of publications on one’s name is also responsible for the increase of plagiarism. Vast amount of information is available on the net as open content, which can be easily copied. This concept of copying others inputs and projecting them as their views affect the authenticity of the information.

Today various electronic plagiarism detection tools are available to compare the write-ups with the already published materials on the net, to get the originality. This is helping the institutions to generate more scientific literature. The Library and Information Network (INFLIBNET), India has provided web based Anti-Plagiarism Software (iThenticate and Turnitin for one year) for 100 Indian universities, who have signed MOU with the Centre for "Shodhganga" for submitting their theses and dissertations.

WHAT IS PLAGIARISM?

The method of taking credit for a work, whose words, conversation or even idea was of someone else or in other words, the information copied from any medium (Books, journals, www,
plagiarized. Information. Whenever such case arises where we have taken someone else’s words, phrases or sentences, it’s a moral duty of us to cite them properly. It is not sufficient if that work is listed in the bibliography. Failing to properly quote, cite or acknowledge someone else’s words or ideas with an internal citation is plagiarism.

PLAGIARISM: DEFINITION

Plagiarizing, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, is “to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one’s own: use (another’s production) without crediting the source… present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source”[5].

Turnitin Software (www.Turnitin.com)

Turnitin is an internet-based commercial plagiarism detection service created by iParadigms, LLC. The institutions have to buy licenses to own the service. License holders can submit their write-ups to the Turnitin website, which checks the documents for unoriginal content. Turnitin checks for potential unoriginal content by comparing submitted papers to several databases using a proprietary algorithm. It scans its own databases, and also has licensing agreements with large academic proprietary databases. Academic work submitted to Turnitin is compared to millions of published papers found in databases the company has access to and then the company prepares reports containing the similarity index rate to indicate how much of a paper contains unoriginal work.

The software by default saves the scripts in its proprietary database. If the author doesn’t want his/her script to be saved in the Turnitin.com software, they can select submit reports to ‘no repository’. Even if the already submitted work gets submitted for the second time, users have the option to exclude the previous source[6].

Turnitin at Manipal University

MU has purchased Turnitin.com software for its constituent institutions. 100 licenses are purchased for the entire university. All libraries of the constituent colleges of MU are made responsible for the use of the software. Even the individual departments of the institutions can also have the license to access the software. MIT and MCNS being constituent institutes have been allotted some licenses. Both institutional libraries have a provision to use this software. The users of library are encouraged to use this software for checking the originality of their articles/dissertations/thesis, etc. Faculty members also use this software for originality check of their articles before publishing them in journals.

Manipal Institute of Technology, Central Library (MITCL)

The central library of Manipal Institute of Technology has a three-storied building occupying an area of about 70,000 square feet. It can accommodate 950 users at a time. The books both technical and general, journals, magazines and their back volumes, DVD’s, are available for the use of faculty and students of the institute. The library also extends its services to the neighboring institutes of MU on demand. The library also subscribes to many online journals and standards that are accessible throughout the campus through Wi-Fi.

Manipal Centre for Natural Sciences, Library (MCNSL)

The library started functional since 2013. Its motive is to create conducive environment for both education and research. The library currently offers a wide range of e-resources and services to assist fundamental research in the physical and earth sciences. It’s maintaining e-library, providing the wealthy resources, covering a wide variety of topics of Physics, Astronomy, and Earth Sciences. The Library has subscribed to 20 research journals (print) and provides access to over 370 journals in full text in e-form. The Library is a member of the UGC-INFONET Consortium and DELNET, New Delhi. The Library maintains the nature and popular science collection to ignite the young mind towards the natural sciences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gallant defines plagiarism as – using another’s words or ideas without appropriate attribution or without following citation conventions[7]. The word is generally defined as “literary theft” and “academic dishonesty” in the literature. The time constraints, lack of knowledge of plagiarism, difficulty of the assignment, understanding of the assignment, enough academic skills, etc. are the reasons that lead academicians to plagiarise[8]. Ali, Ismail and Cheat conducted a study consisting of 1565 students from the Bachelor of Education programme in University Putra, Malaysia to understand the extent students understand the plagiarism concept through the use of information technology and computer. His study resulted that only 61.5% of the concept of plagiarism is understood by the student’s and the perception of plagiarism as being generally understood is wrong[9]. The scope of making users/students aware about the plagiarism and plagiarism detection software always remain open.

Use of electronic tools in detecting the plagiarized material can help in reducing the cases of plagiarism. The use of Turnitin not only prevents plagiarism but also enhances academic writing skills. The role of supervisors/instructors is very crucial to make a significant impact on the use of Turnitin by the students. The regular usage of software will get affected, if they will not receive their supervisor’s feedbacks[10]. The Turnitin gives a significant impact in reducing the unoriginal writing in online class of writing. He has conducted a survey by collecting two cohorts of 111 graduate and 107 postgraduate students before and after the implementation of Turnitin reports in online classes at an accredited online university. Significant differences between the means of the two cohorts of similarity index rates of Turnitin were found[11]. Implementations of the techniques like syllabus content, peer review, lecture, and examples of good and bad acknowledgement practices, as well as the professor’s own use of the service, etc. can turn the submission of papers to Turnitin.com into a learning event, rather than into a presumption of guilt and possible punishment[12].

The librarians, as information experts have a strong role to play in detecting the plagiarism. They have a fair chance of creating the awareness about information and its ethical use. They should share the educational responsibility of students about the ethical
use of information\(^{10}\). In this age of information technology and considering more expenditure on higher education, the librarians should play the most important role in the prevention of plagiarism.

**Research Problem**

The problem is titled as “User awareness survey on Turnitin: An electronic plagiarism detection tool”. The research problem is framed to analyse the awareness about the anti-plagiarism software, Turnitin and other aspects—document checking procedure, method of document checking preference, password requirement (to have access to the software from their desktop) among the students, faculty, researcher scholars of MIT and MCNS.

**Objectives**

- To analyze the awareness about plagiarism and the electronic plagiarisms detection tool—Turnitin.
- To determine users views on plagiarism checking procedure in Turnitin.
- To evaluate the preferred method of document checking by the users.
- To find out the password distribution requirement.
- To check the user satisfaction on the role of librarian in helping the users in checking their write-ups.

**Need**

In the year 2013 the MU, Manipal has purchased the license of Turnitin. The libraries of constituent institutions have been given the username and password and made responsible for the usage of the software. No study has been undertaken to check awareness, requirements of users and to know whether users are satisfied with their library role in checking their write-ups. Hence this study is felt appropriate.

**Methodology**

The study is mainly to highlight the awareness about the plagiarism and Turnitin software among the faculty, researcher and students of two different institutions of MU. In MCNSL to check the originality of their write-ups the users have to visit the library personally or they can mail their work to the library, which will be checked in Turnitin. In the first case library staff will login the system by using the username and password and the users have to run the document by themselves. In the second case the library staff will check the work and mail the originality result to the concerned person.

In MIT Information Systems Department of MU has distributed the license of the software to all the major departments. This has given them the additional option of self-checking of the document from their desktop or even the library is always open for the help.

So being a descriptive study the instrument used in this study is the questionnaire comprising of 15 questions. The questionnaire consists of questions on the concept of plagiarism. The population of this study was faculty, research scholar, graduate and postgraduate students of MIT and MCNS registered in MU. The suggestions to improve the service are also collected from the respondents. The collected data through questionnaire was analysed with a simple percentage using Microsoft excel. Only 19 responses were received, out of which 11 respondents are from MITCL and 8 from MCNSL.

**Data Analysis**

- **Awareness about Plagiarism**

  Table 1 shows that 100% users of MITCL and MCNSL are aware about the plagiarism. This indicates that the students, faculty and research scholars are well aware about the plagiarism and its implications.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness about Plagiarism</th>
<th>MITCL (%)</th>
<th>MCNSL (%)</th>
<th>Total Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11(100)</td>
<td>8(100)</td>
<td>19(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Institution Policy on the use of anti-plagiarism software**

  Table 2 shows that the respondents of both the libraries are very well aware that their institutions, MIT and MCNS have the policy on the use of anti-plagiarism. This has been calculated based on 100% “Yes” response to this question from both library respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness about Institution Policy</th>
<th>MITCL (%)</th>
<th>MCNSL (%)</th>
<th>Total Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11(100)</td>
<td>8(100)</td>
<td>19(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Awareness of Turnitin software for plagiarism detection**

  Table 3 shows that 36.36% respondents of MITCL are aware about Turnitin software, whereas 54.55% respondents are not aware about that software. 9.09% respondents mention that they are not completely aware about the software, means that they have the knowledge that there is such kind of software for plagiarism. The data from the MCNSL respondents is quite positive as 87.5% are aware about the availability of the software.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness about Turnitin Software</th>
<th>MITCL (%)</th>
<th>MCNSL (%)</th>
<th>Total Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4(36.36)</td>
<td>7(87.5)</td>
<td>11(57.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6(54.55)</td>
<td>1(12.5)</td>
<td>7(36.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure</td>
<td>1(9.09)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1(5.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Source of knowing the Turnitin software?**

  This question is to find out the medium/source, which helped the respondents in knowing the software. 36.36% and 18.18% respondents of MITCL have selected the option of through friends and library staff respectively, whereas 36.36% has given no response to question. In MCNSL 62.5% respondents learnt about the software from library and 25% from their friend, whereas 12.5% has given no response.
Procedure of Turnitin is easy

The Table 5 shows that 18.18% respondents of MITCL have agreed that the procedure to check the document in Turnitin is easy, 27.27% respondents said not completely and 54.55% has not given any response. The major respondents from MCNSL have said, it is not completely easy (62.5%), Where 25% agree that it is easy.

Table 5: Is Procedure of Turnitin Easy?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method of Checking</th>
<th>MITCL (%)</th>
<th>MCNSL (%)</th>
<th>Total Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Library staff should check document on your behalf</td>
<td>2(18.18)</td>
<td>3(27.27)</td>
<td>6(42.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yourself, by personally visiting the library</td>
<td>0(0)</td>
<td>0(0)</td>
<td>0(0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>6(54.55)</td>
<td>5(62.5)</td>
<td>11(73.6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Preferable Method for Document Checking

Table 6 revealed that the most preferred method by the respondents is checking by themselves. 36.36% and 75% respondents have given this option as their preferred one by MITCL and MCNSL respectively. 36.36% (MITCL) and 12.5% (MCNSL) respondents have not given any response.

Table 6: Preferable Method for Document Checking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method of Checking</th>
<th>MITCL (%)</th>
<th>MCNSL (%)</th>
<th>Total Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Library staff should check document on your behalf</td>
<td>3(27.27)</td>
<td>6(75)</td>
<td>10(52.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yourself, by personally visiting the library</td>
<td>4(36.36)</td>
<td>6(75)</td>
<td>11(68.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>6(54.55)</td>
<td>5(62.5)</td>
<td>11(73.6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Preference on password of the software to be given

As per the finding 63.64 % respondents of MITCL agreed that the password should be given to them. In MCNSL the percentage is equal for the preference on the password should be given or not i.e. 37.5, whereas 25% mention that the distribution of password is not required. This indicates that the respondents of MCNSL have mixed opinion on the distribution of the password.

Table 7: Preference on the Password of the Software

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preference on Password</th>
<th>MITCL (%)</th>
<th>MCNSL (%)</th>
<th>Total Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>7(63.64)</td>
<td>3(37.5)</td>
<td>10(52.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2(18.18)</td>
<td>3(37.5)</td>
<td>5(26.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Required</td>
<td>1(9.09)</td>
<td>2(25)</td>
<td>3(15.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>1(9.09)</td>
<td>0(0)</td>
<td>1(5.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Satisfaction on the Library’s Role

Table 8 shows 54.55% respondents of MITCL are satisfied with the role of library, 27.27% respondents are partially satisfied and 18.18% have not responded. 87.5% respondents of MCNSL have shown their satisfaction in the role of the library. 12.5% respondents have chosen for the no response by leaving the question blank. This output met the objective of the study to check the user’s satisfaction on the role of librarian in helping the users to check their write-ups.

Table 8: Satisfaction on the Library’s Role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction on the Library’s Role</th>
<th>MITCL (%)</th>
<th>MCNSL (%)</th>
<th>Total Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6(54.55)</td>
<td>7(68.4)</td>
<td>13(68.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0(0)</td>
<td>0(0)</td>
<td>0(0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partially</td>
<td>3(27.27)</td>
<td>0(0)</td>
<td>3(15.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>2(18.18)</td>
<td>1(11.25)</td>
<td>3(15.8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Benefit towards the fundamental principles of education.

On the benefits of using Turnitin towards the fundamental principles of education, 100% opinion of MITCL respondents have been received. In view of MCNSL respondents, 62.5% believe that it has an impact on the fundamental principles of education and 37.5% said it may or may not have the impact.

Table 9: Is Turnitin Beneficial?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is Turnitin Beneficial?</th>
<th>MITCL (%)</th>
<th>MCNSL (%)</th>
<th>Total Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11(100)</td>
<td>5(62.5)</td>
<td>16(84.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0(0)</td>
<td>0(0)</td>
<td>0(0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May Be</td>
<td>0(0)</td>
<td>3(37.5)</td>
<td>3(15.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>0(0)</td>
<td>0(0)</td>
<td>0(0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FINDINGS

The following are the major findings based on the study:

- Users of both the institutions are very well aware about the plagiarism and their Institutional policy on the plagiarism.
- In MITCL the user awareness about the Turnitin has to be increased.
- The major source for knowing the software is through friends or library.
- The respondents believe that the document checking procedure of Turnitin is not completely easy to operate.
- The major respondents want the password of the software to be given to them. At MIT the departments already implemented this by taking the license of Turnitin for the departmental use. This can save users time to visit central library.
- The respondents are satisfied with the role of library in helping/ serving their users with the supply of originality reports.
- The highest percentage of respondents believes that anti plagiarism software will benefit towards the fundamental principles of education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations have been suggested based on the analyzed data:

- MITCL and MCNSL can conduct talks/seminar for the users, in order to make them understand the benefits of the Turnitin and adverse effects of plagiarism.
- Hands on training workshop/sessions on checking of documents in Turnitin can be conducted. This will make users comfortable in using the software.
- MCNSL can also think over having more licenses of the software for its users.
Library can come up with the self-explanatory brochure for the Turnitin to explain them the checking procedure.

Library staff can visit departments and can help the users in using the software.

**Further Research**

The future research should analyze the efforts taken by the libraries in order to understand the increase in the awareness about the Turnitin software. The other consideration would be division of sample as faculty, students and research scholars. Even further they can be divided according to the departments (for faculty), year wise (for students and researchers) etc. The personal improvement of the users in checking their document personally could be considered for the further study.

**Conclusion**

The outcome of this survey has highlighted the aspects of user’s awareness about the plagiarism and Turnitin, their requirement for a password, and role of librarians in providing them with the original reports. The study has shown a positive sign that the users are satisfied with the role of libraries, helping them in using the Turnitin, but there is a scope of increasing the users’ awareness about the software. The finding suggests that librarians need to continue the efforts in making users aware about the plagiarism and Turnitin, equipping them with self-help in running their documents. This will definitely prevent plagiarism in the institutional scientific outcome. To have an improved anti-plagiarised research, is an on-going effort and MITCL and MCNSL in this regards making their contribution. The librarians have to be proactive by asking their users “How can I help you?”

**References**

1. http://www.lib.usm.edu/legacy/plag/whatisplag.php (What is plagiarism)