Impact of Information Technology on Reading Habits of Social Scientists: A Case Study

Meena Jatana* and Sukhwinder Randhawa**


ABSTRACT
The paper examines the Reading Habits of Social Scientists at a leading social science research institute and Panjab University. The introduction of new technology, especially computer and the Internet have posed a threat to reading habits. Information Technology becomes the time eating machines especially social media and mass media. Reading helps in all-round development of a person from his birth to death. It adds new sight to eyes and new wisdom to mind. The reading habit is an essential and important aspect for creating the literate society in this world. Children, youth and adults alike are more inclined towards new technology for information, entertainment and pleasure. Now to keep balance in the use of old and new technology, the librarians have to attract new generation towards reading.

Key Terms: Information Technology, Reading Habits, Social Scientists

INTRODUCTION
Reading in the present era of society is not only confined to printing sources, but its scope has been extended to the online resources which has changed the traditional reading culture of the readers. The Information Technology is an electronic medium of storage of powerful tools in a networked society. There is a direct link between the IT resources and reading habits of the social scientist. The researchers all over the world have discussed the impact of Internet and related technologies on the reading habits of the readers. Researchers believe that the Internet has not only affected the reading practices, but reading choices as well. Researchers now-a-days tend to rely more on computer based resources than paper based resources.

OBJECTIVES
- Investigate the effect of IT on reading habits of the research faculty
- Determine the reading culture of the faculty members with the advent of Internet
- Determine how long faculty members stay with Internet
- Determine the preferences of the faculty members regarding different access options

METHODOLOGY
The study was conducted through a pre-structured schedule among 60 faculty members (mainly representing a national level Research Institute and Panjab University). The responses were very encouraging for such a study as the filled in questionnaire were received from professors, associate professors, assistant professors and research assistants/investigators and scholars.

DATA ANALYSIS
- Academic Background

Fig. 1 Indicates the collection of data from the respondents, 43% respondents were Economists, 13% from Sociology and Geography each, 7% from Political Science and History each and 3% from Education, Statistics, Public Administration, Population Studies and Rural Development each.
Academic Positions
As is evident from the Fig. 2 that 17% of the respondents were Professors, 20% Associate Professors, 23% Assistant Professors and Research Assistants each and 17% were Research Scholars.

Educational Qualifications
Fig. 3 indicates 50% respondents have completed their Ph.Ds, 7% M.Phil, and 43% respondents were Post Graduates.

Preference of Printed Information Resources
From the survey, it was found that 70% of the faculty members read research journals and newspapers for their academic purposes, 63% Government publications, 60% read academic related books, 57% reference sources, 53% monographs/working papers, and 53% magazines.

Non-Academic Activities
All respondents check their emails regularly for their academic as well as non-academic purposes. 80% read news from different sources, 70% are engaged in social networking sites, 63% seek health related information, 60% of the respondents get online reservation of tickets, 40% spend time on chatting and employment seeking, 27% interested in sports, 23% listen to music, 20% are interested in food and movies, 10% in stories and only negligible 7% are interested in games.

Use of Internet for Academic Activities
From the Fig. 6, it is clear that 97% of the respondents use various search engines for their academic work, 93% consult government publications, 87% respondents consult publications of the international organizations for their academic related work, 73% are engaged in the identification of experts in their related field, 73% search for material in academic libraries, 67% read book reviews, 53% search for fellowships/scholarships in India and abroad and 33% search for bibliographic tool for their academic work.

Ranking of Online Academic Information Resources
Fig. 7 regarding the ranking of academic related preferences for online information indicates that 85.1% preferred research articles as their first preference for searching online information followed by statistical data (60%), e-journals (60%), Census publications (51.8%), and reference sources (46.6%). Nearly one-fourth of the respondents gave higher preference to conferences, seminars, ebook reading, online reading, magazines and business and economy.
LOCATION OF ACCESS TO ONLINE RESOURCES

Regarding the Location of Accessing Online Resources, it is found that 87% access Information from the Office, followed by 73% from Home, 20% from Libraries, and only 17% from Mobile Phones and 7% from Internet Café.

Fig. 8: Location of Access to Online Resources

Major Drawbacks Encountered by Social Scientists in Online Usage of Information

- Cost Factor: Cost of some paid journals are so high that it is not possible for an individual researcher to get those articles because it is beyond their reach. Some of the host sites ask for a membership fee.

- Reliability Issue: Some of the online resources are not reliable because websites are not updated from time to time. Sometimes there is inadequate and irrelevant information available on the website.

- Lack of IT training: Some of the faculty members are unable to explore the information because of the lack of orientation in the use of information technology.

- Credibility of information/originality, particularly in online journals: With the start of API after the 6th UGC Pay Commission scales, there is a tremendous demand for publications and numerous publishers have emerged to bring newer journals which are non-authentic, non-refereed, and even some of them ask money from the authors to publish their articles.

- Lack of Willingness: There is a lack of willingness on the part of the social scientists to explore the resources from the internet.

- Access to information: Most of the online resources are confined to the institution only within the campus.

SUGGESTIONS

The majority of the social scientists feel that all social science libraries should be interconnected so that catalogue can be accessed by using a login and password before going to a specific library. Some feel that information should also be available in different regional languages. Social scientists feel that regular updates should be done. The researchers should also be provided orientation programme to make maximum utilization of various applications in information technology. Few faculty members feel that old documents should be available online. Work on social sciences is of technical and social nature and while using IT in social sciences, the analysis part must be taken care of. Data in all departments (Government and non-Government) should be regularly updated on the internet. Soft copies of all the research projects completed by different institutions should be uploaded on their respective websites. This will keep a track on the research already completed.

CONCLUSION

The introduction of new technology, especially the advent of computers and the internet has resulted in change dynamics in the reading habits of all groups of readers including social scientists. Information technology, though useful has also become a time eating machine especially the irritating blogs/messages and social media. All segments of the society including social scientists are more inclined towards new technology. Now to keep the balance in the use of old and new technology, the librarians can play a major role in this venture. Academic institutions can also provide linkages through Facebook and social networking sites so that researchers will come to know the latest in their respective fields and it will also create interest in their subject. The information about the new conferences/seminars related to their subjects should be made available through the social networking sites in order to create more interest. Efforts must be made to bring forth readers in the library by promoting reading habits and dissemination of available resources. It is good to periodically bring forth list of new material in the library. E-readers and digital copies of the publications should be installed in the library to promote reading with latest technology and latest material. The present cataloguing system can also be modified and newer classification and search engines giving different choices may be provided to researchers. The study also found that the researchers spend more time on online resources than paper based material. How do educators, teachers and administrators cope with this change to improve the reading habits of the researchers if reading online information is the trend? To what extent can educators, publishers play an important role in developing sound reading material online? Researchers will benefit more if educational publishers and instructors cooperate with each other on developing reading material and publishing on the internet for use of the researchers for maximum utilization of the resources.

REFERENCES


