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Digital Literacy: A Faculty-Based Comparative Study of Research Scholars at the University of Rajasthan

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Abstract

This study explored how much "research scholars in the department of Social Science and Arts of the University of Rajasthan, Jaipur", understand and use digital technologies. The findings based on 84 questionnaires show that scholars of the Social Science faculty have a relatively high digital literacy compared to those in the Arts faculty. Most of the respondents indicated that they were skilled in using open-access sources. However, about a quarter (26%) of participants are comfortable with using video or audio sharing sites for academic or professional purposes. Correspondence via email and general web browsing became the most popular online activities among the scholars in both faculties. Social Science scholars preferred working on laptops as compared to Arts scholars, who mainly used smartphones to access the internet. The research also reports a series of challenges facing access to digital resources by scholars. Based on this, the authors suggest conducting regular review sessions and special capacity-building training to promote the successful use of digital tools and emerging technologies in research. The findings further highlight the importance of integrating digital literacy into research training programmes and encouraging the effective use of online academic databases, reference management software, collaborative platforms, and digital communication tools. Strengthening institutional digital infrastructure and providing continuous technical support can enhance research productivity, improve access to scholarly information, and enable researchers to adapt more effectively to evolving digital research environments. Based on these findings, the authors suggest conducting regular review sessions and special capacity-building training to promote the successful use of digital tools and emerging technologies in research.

Keywords: Digital literacy, e-resources, internet usage, ICT tools, web 2.0 technologies, open access.

INTRODUCTION

Today, information is growing very rapidly, and technology is transforming society. Most of the new ideas and inventions today are digital. It means that a digital document can now be readily disseminated in a matter of seconds for little cost, dramatically changing how people find and use information in almost every aspect of life [1].

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Yet ease of access also raises caution-it cannot be assumed that each digital information that is posted is reliable and truthful. People should possess sufficient technological literacy to perform internet-related tasks efficiently [2]. Many of them find it difficult to identify, evaluate, and use them due to the so-called digital divide in education and research [3].

To overcome such problems, researchers must understand and have command of digital technology. They require basic digital literacy and learn how to find information efficiently, correctly and promptly in the digital environment.

"Digital literacy is the knowledge of using digital tools to locate, use, manage, evaluate, and create digital information; it also means being able to produce content such as videos and communicate effectively with others in various situations". This helps citizens take action in society and think critically about their actions. It enables people to be full participants in the digital world [4].

Digital skills are crucial for doctoral students to find up-to-date resources relevant to their disciplines. These skills also enhance learners as they study, research, and interact with others in different parts of the world [5]. This research was conducted because no similar study had been conducted previously at the University of Rajasthan. This study aims to provide new insights and contribute to the existing understanding of digital literacy in the University of Rajasthan's academic environment.

Review of Literature

This study was a review of recent scholarly literature, arranged chronologically to see how the understanding of digital literacy has evolved.

Mulat and Natarajan surveyed the state of digital literacy among Jimma University librarians. They found that a form of moderated digital literacy, particularly in basic computer skills, has contributed significantly to enhancing library services [6]. The following problems were noted as inhibiting effective research support and hindering performance altogether: mediocre or generally poor internet connectivity; regular frequency of power disruptions; and variable educational backgrounds of the employees. Most librarians had learned digital skills through workshops and self-initiated online learning [7].

Inamdar has echoed the importance of libraries in skill-building processes for digital literacy in the 21st century. This study has pointed out that the role of libraries in the digital divide is first to aid people in gaining access to technologies and digital resources and getting the training needed. Furthermore, this is a space where users can experiment with technology, learn responsible digital citizenship, and improve their ability to critically use information [8]. Therefore, the libraries continue to explore lifelong learning and contribute to the preservation of a digital culture [9].

Bassey and Ayeni conducted a study on Federal Polytechnic libraries in South-West Nigeria, realized that most of the library professionals had sufficient basic digital skills, which helped their attitude toward adopting newer technologies. However, the study noted that inadequate financial investment, poor ICT infrastructure, and lack of training opportunities hinder the acquisition of more advanced skills, which are really necessary for managing resources more efficiently and supporting research better [10].

Saini investigated the role of digital information literacy in managing a library effectively and underscored the fact that good digital skills result in quicker, more effective services [11]. The study by Onwubiko also showed that librarians who had better digital skills were better at user assistance and navigating through digital platforms. However, it showed barriers like a lack of training programs and generally limited awareness that continuous learning initiatives might substantially improve the quality of services and research facilitation [12]. On the other hand, the study by A. & Sinha revealed that there were a number of barriers such as a lack of formal training programs and insufficient awareness that sustained learning programs would significantly improve the quality of services and contribute to the research work [13].

Bagavathi, titled "Digital Literacy and Service Quality in Tamil Nādu University Libraries," clearly and positively related the digital skills of librarians to the quality of the services provided. While many librarians expressed confidence in handling routine online tasks, there remained a gap in advanced technical skills. The study therefore recommended that such higher-level abilities need to be

enhanced to strengthen academic and research support services [14].

The present research seeks to address this gap by focusing on a comparison of the levels of digital literacy among research scholars from the faculties of Social Science and Arts at the University of Rajasthan. The results of the present study are bound to provide useful insight into the existing status of digital literacy and to help plan and implement future digital skill development programmes at the university level.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study outlines the following specific objectives:

1. To determine the level of research scholars having familiarities with information resources available on the internet.
2. To investigate the purpose and frequency of using the software applications and web-based services by the research scholars.
3. To determine the specific digital literacy training requirements of the research scholars.
4. To examine the modes of digital devices that research scholars use to access the internet.
5. To explore the major challenges experienced by research scholars as they use digital resources.

METHODOLOGY

The research employed a descriptive survey methodology using a structured self-administered questionnaire and collected data from full-time "research scholars in the Social Science and Arts faculties at the University of Rajasthan, Jaipur." A systematic random sampling procedure was adopted to collect data from 88 research scholars (26% of the estimated population) representing equal distribution across both groups (Social Science: N=44; Arts: N=44). Duly-filled questionnaires were received from 84 respondents (95.45% response rate), comprising 41 from Social Science (93.18%) and 43 Arts scholars (97.72%).

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The questionnaires were delivered personally to the selected sample. The collected data were analysed using MS Excel. The responses from the Social Science and Arts research scholars are presented in the following table.

FACULTY-WISE DISTRIBUTION

The respondents were categorised into two faculties: Social Science and Arts. presents the faculty-wise distribution of the respondents.

Questionnaires were distributed to 88 research scholars across all faculties. The overall response rate was 95.45%, with research scholars from the Arts showing a slightly higher participation rate than those from the Social Science faculty (Table 1).

Familiarity with Internet Resources

Given the critical role of internet resources in learning and research, respondents' familiarity with key internet resources and search tools was assessed. Their responses are presented in Table 2.

Since the internet resources are playing a vital role in learning and research activities, the familiarity of the respondents with the internet resources and search tools is important. Thus, the respondents were asked to indicate the extent of their familiarity with the following internet resources and search tools: search engines, gateways, web portals, open access e-books/e-journals, digital libraries/archives, metasearch engines, online databases, Web OPACs, and directories. The data so obtained have been presented in Table 2.

About 88.64% of research scholars in Social Science and 95.45% in Arts faculties demonstrated familiarity with open-access e-books and e-journals. Following this, Social Science scholars

demonstrated a high degree of awareness of the digital libraries and archives (88.36%). Only 18.18% of the Social Science research scholars reported familiarity with metasearch engines, though this figure was slightly higher for Arts scholars at 27.27%. A quarter of Arts students (25.00%) and 40.91% of Social Science research scholars were familiar with Web OPACs (Table 2).

Overall, Social Science faculty respondents indicated greater familiarity with most internet resources and search tools than their Arts counterparts.

Awareness of Information Archives/ Aggregators

The information archives store materials within the particular disciplines or interdisciplinary sectors and are useful tools in academic and scientific projects. In order to assess familiarity with primary information providers, participants were asked to indicate whether they were familiar with the following information archives or aggregators. The data obtained are discussed in Table 3.

A good percentage (75.00%) of the social-science research scholars were aware of Shodhganga, and then "JSTOR and Google Scholar" (both 72.73%) followed by the UGC Consortium (52.27%). Very few of them were aware about INIS and ScienceDirect (each 4.55%) and EBSCO at 6.82%. Arts research scholars, on the contrary, stated that they were not familiar with ScienceDirect. This may be because of the nature of the sources related with science stream (Table 3).

The UGC Consortium became the most identified resource among the researchers in the Arts field (59.09%), but Shodhganga and Google Scholar were both mentioned by 54.55%. In general, the awareness of the information providers related to the arts research scholars was lower than that of their social-science counterparts [15].

Data analysis indicated that 6.25% of the respondents mentioned other information providers who were not also listed. These sources included Biodiversity Heritage Library, EPW (Economic and Political Weekly), Google Books, Harvard Law Review, India Kanoon, the NIScPR Online Periodical Repository (NOPR), the Registry of Open Access Repositories (ROAR), Sage, Springer and the Social Science Research Network (SSRN). These results highlight the dynamics of the information resource situation and the appearance of discipline-specific providers [16].

Table 1. Faculty-wise distribution of respondents.

Faculty	Questionnaire Distributed	Questionnaire Received (N)	%
Social Science	44	41	93.18
Arts	44	43	97.73
Total	88	84	95.45

Table 2. Comparative familiarity with internet resources and search tools.

Internet Resources/Search Tools	Social Science (N=41)		Arts (N=43)	
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*
Digital Libraries/ Archives	38	86.36	30	68.18
Directories	17	38.64	13	29.55
Gateways	25	56.82	16	36.36
Metasearch Engines	8	18.18	12	27.27
Online Databases	28	63.64	23	52.27
Open Access E-Books/ E-Journals	39	88.64	42	95.45
Search Engines	37	84.09	33	75.00
Web OPAC	18	40.91	11	25.00

Web Portals	36	81.82	33	75.00

Table 3. Awareness of information archives and aggregators.

Information Archives/Aggregators	Social Science (N=41)		Arts (N=43)	
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*
Academia.Edu	7	15.91	6	13.64
DOAB	9	20.45	3	6.82
DOAJ	10	22.73	1	2.27
EBSCO	3	6.82	2	4.55
Google Scholar	32	72.73	24	54.55
INIS	2	4.55	2	4.55
JCCC	5	11.36	4	9.09
J-Gate Plus	19	43.18	4	9.09
JSTOR	32	72.73	11	25.00
LISA	10	22.73	2	4.55
ProQuest	6	13.64	3	6.82
PubMed	5	11.36	3	6.82
Research Gate	19	43.18	4	9.09
Science Direct	2	4.55	0	0.00
Scopus	7	15.91	4	9.09
Shodhganga	33	75.00	24	54.55
UGC Consortium	23	52.27	26	59.09

Purpose of Using Web 2.0 Based Services

The adoption of Web 2.0 technologies has revolutionized the way information is accessed, promoting greater interactivity, collaboration, easier service access, and the sharing of knowledge within the academic field [17].

Participants were asked to assess Web 2.0 applications and indicate their usage in various areas, such as studying, researching, socializing with friends, personal projects, and professional tasks, among others. The Web 2.0 applications evaluated included Audio/video sharing sites, e-learning/web page creation software tools, email services, and social networking platforms. The collected data have been compiled in Table 4.

An overwhelming majority of researchers, both in Social Science and Arts (each 90.91%), reported using email services for their research activities, while personal work was also another common purpose, with 79.55% and 88.64% respectively. Social networking sites were primarily used by Social Science (72.73%) and Arts (86.36%) scholars for networking with friends, followed by study-related purposes among Social Science scholars (54.55%) and research-related activities among Arts scholars (77.27%) who used this tool for information searches (Table 4).

E-learning and webpage creation software were used for research work by 38.64% of Social Science scholars and 70.45% of Arts scholars, with study activities as the secondary purpose. Noticeably, these software tools were not used by any respondents for networking with friends.

Audio and visual aids were reportedly in use by 31 (70.45%) of the total respondents from both Social Science and Arts faculty for their study. Video-sharing websites were used by Social Science faculty for both study and research (70.45% each), followed by personal work (61.36%). On the other hand, use of audio and video-sharing websites by both faculties for their professional activities were

infrequent.

Frequency of Using Software and Web-based Services

This section presents an analysis of the frequency with which respondents used software and web-based resources.

Data in Table 5 shows that more than half of the Social Science faculty, or 53.66% of the respondents, used word processing software daily. This figure contrasts with the Arts faculty, where daily usage was considerably lower, at just over a quarter (27.91%). Email and internet browsing emerged as the most frequently used services among the Social Science faculty, with an equal proportion of respondents (95.12%) reporting daily use.

All the Social Science researchers used online information resources at least two to three times per month, while a small fraction (2.33%) of Arts researchers reported never accessing these resources. Over three-fourths of the Arts research scholars reported daily use of both email and internet browsing (79.07% and 75.61%, respectively).

The usage rates for blogging, video conferencing, computer games, and spreadsheet software were relatively low across both faculties. Most of the faculty use email services daily (Social Science 88.64% and Arts 70.45% (Table 5).

Table 4. Web 2.0 Service Utilization Patterns.

Web 2.0 Service	Faculty	Study		Research		Networking		Personal		Professional	
		N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
Audio/ Video Sharing	SS	31	70.45	31	70.45	21	47.73	27	61.36	11	25.00
	Arts	30	68.18	31	70.45	27	61.36	32	72.73	11	25.00
E-Learning/ Web Design	SS	16	36.36	17	38.64	0	0.00	5	11.36	4	9.09
	Arts	31	70.45	32	72.73	0	0.00	7	15.91	11	25.00
Email Service	SS	29	65.91	40	90.91	27	61.36	35	79.55	30	68.18
	Arts	35	79.55	40	90.91	33	75.00	39	88.64	32	72.73
Social Networking	SS	24	54.55	23	52.27	32	72.73	23	52.27	14	31.82
	Arts	27	61.36	34	77.27	38	86.36	28	63.64	23	25.00

Note: SS = Social Science (N=41); Arts (N=43)

Table 5. Frequency of Software and Web-Based Service Utilization.

Service/ Software	Faculty	Daily		4-5 Times/ Week		2-3 Times/ Month		Rarely		Never	
		N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
Blogging	SS	4	9.09	8	18.18	5	11.36	9	20.45	15	34.09
	Arts	2	4.55	7	15.91	8	18.18	9	20.45	17	38.64
Email Service	SS	39	88.64	0	0.00	1	2.27	1	2.27	0	0.00
	Arts	31	70.45	5	11.36	7	15.91	0	0.00	0	0.00
Internet Browsing	SS	39	88.64	1	2.27	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	2.27
	Arts	34	77.27	4	9.09	3	6.82	1	2.27	1	2.27
Online Resources	SS	32	72.73	8	18.18	1	2.27	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Arts	17	38.64	10	22.73	10	22.73	5	11.36	1	2.27
Video Conferencing	SS	2	4.55	3	6.82	8	18.18	12	27.27	16	36.36
	Arts	0	0.00	1	2.27	6	13.64	14	31.82	22	50.00
Word	SS	22	50.00	13	29.55	2	4.55	2	4.55	2	4.55

Processing	Arts	12	27.27	11	25.00	6	13.64	11	25.00	3	6.82

Opinion about the Need for Digital Literacy Training Programme

Table 6 presents an analysis of the types of digital literacy programmes deemed necessary by respondents from the social science and arts faculties. The research scholars were asked to express their opinions on the need for digital literacy programmes using a three-point scale: 'strongly agree', 'agree', and 'disagree'.

Concerning discipline-specific training, none of the Social Science faculty respondents expressed disagreement, while a small proportion (6.82%) of Arts faculty respondents disagreed. A majority of Arts researchers (52.27%) concurred with the need for discipline-specific training, whereas 38.64% of the Social Science researchers strongly agreed with this need (Table 6).

Device Utilization Among Research Scholars

Most Social Science scholars (95.12%) indicated that they use laptops for internet access, with a significant number of Arts scholars (86.05%) preferring smartphones. Additionally, 70.73% of researchers in the Social Science used smartphones to access information, while 65.85% used desktops. The data also indicate a low use of iPads and notebooks, which can probably be explained by the increased price of these products and the fact that their functions are redundant (Table 7).

Constraints Faced While Using Digital Resources

The participants have been asked to list the barriers they have encountered in the process of using the digital resources. The obtained data are reported in Table 8.

The constraint analysis in Table 8 shows that slow access speed was a salient issue to most of the respondents, with 79.55% agree in Social Science and 81.82% in Arts reporting such problems. Another significant percentage of respondents from the Social Science (68.188 %) also reported challenges in finding relevant information, and copyright issues seemed to prevail among Arts researchers (72.73 %) (Table 8).

Furthermore, 56.82% of Social Science Researchers and 43.18% of Arts researchers indicated that they received insufficient assistance from information technology staff, which seemed a significant challenge for library professionals to acquire such knowledge and support researchers. Notably, approximately one-fourth of respondents (27.27%) from the Social Science faculty indicated that they had insufficient IT knowledge.

Table 6. Assessment of "Digital Literacy Training Programme" Necessity.

Training Program	Faculty	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree	
		N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
Digital Resource Evaluation	SS	21	47.73	18	40.91	2	4.55
	Arts	24	54.55	16	36.36	3	6.82
Discipline-Specific Training	SS	17	38.64	24	54.55	0	0.00
	Arts	23	52.27	17	38.64	3	6.82
Information Content Briefing	SS	15	34.09	19	43.18	7	15.91
	Arts	11	25.00	25	56.82	7	15.91
Information Retrieval Training	SS	20	45.45	17	38.64	4	9.09
	Arts	12	27.27	28	63.64	3	6.82
Institutional Repository Access	SS	18	40.91	21	47.73	2	4.55
	Arts	21	47.73	19	43.18	3	6.82
Junk Information Filtering	SS	21	47.73	18	40.91	2	4.55
	Arts	29	65.91	11	25.00	3	6.82
Online Resource	SS	22	50.00	17	38.64	2	4.55

Searching	Arts	28	63.64	12	27.27	3	6.82

Table 7. Internet Access Device Utilization Among Research Scholars.

Internet Access Device	Social Science (N=41)		Arts (N=43)	
	N	***%***	***N***	***%***
Desktop Computer	27	65.85	30	69.77
iPad	3	7.32	6	13.95
Laptop	39	95.12	35	81.40
Notebook Computer	0	0.00	7	16.28
Smartphone	29	70.73	37	86.05

Table 8. Taxonomy of Barriers Limiting Digital Resource Utilization.

Impediments to Digital Resource Access	Social Science (N=41)		Arts (N=43)	
	N	***%***	***N***	***%***
Absence of Campus Network Infrastructure	9	20.45	43	97.73
Absence of Dedicated Computing Facilities	11	25.00	25	56.82
Difficulty in Information Discovery	30	68.18	28	63.64
Inadequate Technical Support Personnel	25	56.82	19	43.18
Insufficient Digital Resource Collections	18	40.91	30	68.18
Insufficient Information Technology Knowledge	12	27.27	22	50.00
Intellectual Property Rights Complications	28	63.64	32	72.73
Limited Institutional Operating Hours	19	43.18	22	50.00
Power Supply Instability	21	47.73	25	56.82
Slow Access Speed	35	79.55	36	81.82

Major Findings

Digital Literacy Levels

- A higher proportion of research scholars from the social science faculty demonstrated digital literacy compared to their counterparts in the arts faculty.

Resource Awareness

- Most of the research scholars in both faculties indicated that they are acquainted with the open-access e-books and e-journals (Social Science: 88.64%, Arts: 95.45%).
- The respondents of the Social Science faculty were more acquainted with a wider range of internet resources and search tools than the respondents of the Arts faculty.
- Shodhganga was widely known among the scholars of Social Science research (75.00%); the UGC Consortium was the best-known source of information among Arts scholars (59.09%).
- Overall, the Arts faculty seemed to be less aware of the majority of information providers.

Web Usage and Practices

- Research scholars showed strong familiarity with Web 2.0 based services.
- Email was the most frequently used service.
- Social networking sites were mainly used for personal communication.
- Limited use of audio and video sharing platforms was observed for academic purposes.
- Daily use of email and internet browsing was higher among Social Science scholars (88.64% each) than Arts scholars (70.45% and 77.27%).
- Social Science scholars reported more frequent daily use of software and web-based services than Arts scholars.

Devices for Internet Access

- Laptops were the most preferred device for internet access among social science research scholars

(95.12%).
- Smartphones were favoured by arts scholars (86.05%).
- The use of iPads and notebooks was relatively low among both groups.

Constraints and Training Needs
- Arts faculty respondents generally experienced most of the listed infrastructural and technical constraints.
- Only a small number of respondents disagreed with the necessity of digital literacy training programmes, indicating that the majority of scholars acknowledged their importance.

Suggestions and Recommendations

Based on the various findings of this study, a few practical recommendations have been given to improve digital literacy among research scholars:
- A higher proportion of research scholars from the social science faculty demonstrated digital literacy compared to their counterparts in the arts faculty.
- Training sessions on the use of discovery services would enable scholars to access academic material from a variety of sources more efficiently and with greater confidence.

There is a need for frequent workshops and hands-on seminars to expose scholars to practical searching, location, and retrieval of information from various electronic databases. These activities will strengthen their ability to use digital platforms more effectively and productively in their academic work.

CONCLUSION

In this study, the researcher assesses digital literacy competencies of "research scholars in the Faculty of Social Science and Arts of the University of Rajasthan, Jaipur." The results show that scholars in the Faculty of Social Science tend to have better-developed digital skills than those in the Faculty of Arts.

Besides, the research reports a dramatic rise in the adoption of Web 2.0 tools amongst research scholars. These are among the tools that are regularly utilized in the virtual world, thus resulting in interaction, collaborative work and the process of experiential knowledge exchange amongst colleagues. These virtual milieus have thus become part of the modern scholarly activities.

Considering these findings, the university and its respective departments should consider adopting systemization orientation programmes, online training programmes, workshops, and seminars to help the students utilize the available digital resources and technologies in their research efforts.

The library staff can also be key in creating organized digital literacy courses and trainings, particularly for the research scholars and their supervising guides, in order to close the gap in the digital skills gap found between them. Such initiatives would supplement the research experience in general.

Lastly, the programmes and contents must be assessed and updated systematically to be in harmony with the current changes in technology and the changing needs of the research communities within the university. The long-term adherence to the cause of promoting digital literacy will maintain the level of competency and develop a research environment that will see more scholars and their mentors become more competent in using digital technologies.

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