

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]. The ability to access and effectively use digital information is particularly important in education and research, where researchers are required to locate, evaluate, and use reliable scholarly information.

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 and ability to use digital tools to locate, access, manage, evaluate, and create digital information; it also involves communicating information effectively in digital environments [3]. These skills help individuals participate effectively in the digital world and think critically about the information they encounter.

Digital skills are crucial for doctoral students to find up-to-date resources relevant to their disciplines. These skills also enhance their ability to study, conduct research, and interact with others in different parts of the world [4]. The present study was undertaken to examine digital literacy among research scholars at the University of Rajasthan, with particular focus on scholars from the Social Science and Arts faculties.

Review of Literature

The present study reviewed scholarly literature on digital literacy, with particular emphasis on digital skills among library professionals and research-oriented users. The reviewed studies highlight the importance of digital competencies for effective access to, evaluation of, and use of digital information and services.

Emiri examined digital literacy skills among librarians in university libraries in Edo and Delta States, Nigeria. The study reported that electronic mailing, social networking, mobile devices, and internet use constituted important digital literacy skills among librarians. It also found that librarians acquired digital skills through colleagues, trial and error, information technology programmes, and formal education, highlighting the importance of developing digital competencies among library professionals [5].

Sambo, Imran, and Akanbi studied digital literacy skills among certified librarians in Nigerian libraries and highlighted the role of digital competencies in contemporary library services [6]. The study indicates the importance of continuous learning and professional development for librarians working in increasingly digital library environments.

Inamdar examined the role of libraries in promoting digital literacy in the twenty-first century. The study emphasized the role of libraries in providing access to technology and digital resources and in helping users develop the skills required to use digital information effectively and responsibly [7].

Agina-Obu and Okwu investigated the impact of digital literacy on university students' use of digital resources in Nigeria. Their findings emphasize the importance of digital literacy in enabling university students to effectively access and use digital resources for academic purposes [8].

Bassey and Ayeni examined the digital skills of library staff and their relationship with technology acceptance in Nigerian polytechnics. The study highlighted the importance of digital skills for library staff in adapting to technological developments and supporting the effective delivery of library services [9].

Saini examined the relevance of digital information literacy in library management and emphasized the importance of digital literacy skills for effective library services and operations [10].

Onwubiko examined meta-literacy for librarians and users in the era of emerging technologies and highlighted the need for librarians and users to continuously develop their digital and information-related competencies [11].

The reviewed literature collectively indicates that digital literacy is increasingly important for effective use of digital resources, technology-enabled library services, and research support. However, much of the available literature has focused on librarians or general university students, while comparatively less attention has been given to differences in digital literacy among research scholars from different academic faculties.

The present research therefore focuses on comparing the levels of digital literacy among research scholars from the faculties of Social Science and Arts at the University of Rajasthan. The findings are expected to provide useful insight into the existing status of digital literacy among research scholars and to support the planning of 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 random sampling procedure was adopted to collect data from 88 research scholars (26% of the estimated population), representing an 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 (97.73%).

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 tables.

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).

Table 1: Faculty-wise Distribution of Respondents

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

Table 1 presents the faculty-wise distribution of the respondents. Questionnaires were distributed to 88 research scholars across the two 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.

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.

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	92.68	30	69.77
Directories	17	41.46	13	30.23
Gateways	25	60.98	16	37.21
Metasearch Engines	8	19.51	12	27.91
Online Databases	28	68.29	23	53.49
Open Access E-Books/E-Journals	39	95.12	42	97.67
Search Engines	37	90.24	33	76.74
Web OPAC	18	43.90	11	25.58
Web Portals	36	87.80	33	76.74

About 95.12% of research scholars in Social Science and 97.67% 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 digital libraries and archives (92.68%). Only 19.51% of Social Science research scholars reported familiarity with metasearch engines, while this figure was 27.91% for Arts scholars. About 25.58% of Arts research scholars and 43.90% 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 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.

Table 3: Awareness of Information Archives and Aggregators

Information Archives/ Aggregators	Social Science (N=41)		Arts (N=43)	
	N	%	N	%
Academia.edu	7	17.07	6	13.95
DOAB	9	21.95	3	6.98
DOAJ	10	24.39	1	2.33
EBSCO	3	7.32	2	4.65
Google Scholar	32	78.05	24	55.81
INIS	2	4.88	2	4.65
JCCC	5	12.20	4	9.30
J-Gate Plus	19	46.34	4	9.30
JSTOR	32	78.05	11	25.58
LISA	10	24.39	2	4.65
ProQuest	6	14.63	3	6.98
PubMed	5	12.20	3	6.98
ResearchGate	19	46.34	4	9.30
ScienceDirect	2	4.88	0	0.00
Scopus	7	17.07	4	9.30
Shodhganga	33	80.49	24	55.81
UGC Consortium	23	56.10	26	60.47

A good percentage (80.49%) of the Social Science research scholars were aware of Shodhganga, followed by JSTOR and Google Scholar (both 78.05%) and the UGC Consortium (56.10%). Very few of them were aware of INIS and ScienceDirect (each 4.88%) and EBSCO at 7.32%. Arts research scholars, on the contrary, reported no familiarity with ScienceDirect (Table 3).

The UGC Consortium became the most identified resource among the researchers in the Arts field (60.47%), while Shodhganga and Google Scholar were both mentioned by 55.81%. In general, the awareness of the information providers among Arts research scholars was lower than that of their Social Science counterparts.

Data analysis indicated that some respondents mentioned other information providers that were not listed in the questionnaire. 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 range of information providers identified by the respondents.

Web 2.0 Service Utilization Patterns

Participants were asked to assess Web 2.0 applications and indicate their usage in various areas, such as studying, researching, socialising 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.

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	75.61	31	75.61	21	51.22	27	65.85	11	26.83
	Arts	30	69.77	31	72.09	27	62.79	32	74.42	11	25.58
E-Learning/ Web Design	SS	16	39.02	17	41.46	0	0.00	5	12.20	4	9.76
	Arts	31	72.09	32	74.42	0	0.00	7	16.28	11	25.58
Email Service	SS	29	70.73	40	97.56	27	65.85	35	85.37	30	73.17
	Arts	35	81.40	40	93.02	33	76.74	39	90.70	32	74.42
Social Networking	SS	24	58.54	23	56.10	32	78.05	23	56.10	14	34.15
	Arts	27	62.79	34	79.07	38	88.37	28	65.12	23	53.49

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

An overwhelming majority of researchers in Social Science and Arts reported using email services for their research activities (97.56% and 93.02%, respectively), while personal work was also another common purpose, with 85.37% and 90.70%, respectively. Social networking sites were primarily used by Social Science (78.05%) and Arts (88.37%) scholars for networking with friends, followed by study-related purposes among Social Science scholars (58.54%) and research-related activities among Arts scholars (79.07%) (Table 4).

E-learning and webpage creation software were used for research work by 41.46% of Social Science scholars and 74.42% 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 61 respondents across the two faculties for study (31 Social Science and 30 Arts). Video-sharing websites were used by Social Science faculty for both study and research (75.61% each), followed by personal work (65.85%). On the other hand, use of audio and video-sharing websites by both faculties for their professional activities was 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.

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	9.76	8	19.51	5	12.20	9	21.95	15	36.59
	Arts	2	4.65	7	16.28	8	18.60	9	20.93	17	39.53
Email Service	SS	39	95.12	0	0.00	1	2.44	1	2.44	0	0.00
	Arts	31	72.09	5	11.63	7	16.28	0	0.00	0	0.00
Internet Browsing	SS	39	95.12	1	2.44	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	2.44
	Arts	34	79.07	4	9.30	3	6.98	1	2.33	1	2.33
Online Resources	SS	32	78.05	8	19.51	1	2.44	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Arts	17	39.53	10	23.26	10	23.26	5	11.63	1	2.33
Video Conferencing	SS	2	4.88	3	7.32	8	19.51	12	29.27	16	39.02
	Arts	0	0.00	1	2.33	6	13.95	14	32.56	22	51.16

Word Processing	SS	22	53.66	13	31.71	2	4.88	2	4.88	2	4.88
	Arts	12	27.91	11	25.58	6	13.95	11	25.58	3	6.98

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 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 two-thirds of the Arts research scholars reported daily use of both email and internet browsing (72.09% and 79.07%, respectively).

The usage rates for blogging and video conferencing were relatively low across both faculties. Most of the faculty use email services daily (Social Science 95.12% and Arts 72.09%) (Table 5).

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'.

Table 6: Assessment of 'Digital Literacy Training Programme' Necessity

Training Program	Faculty	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Digital Resource Evaluation	SS	21	51.22	18	43.90	2	4.88
	Arts	24	55.81	16	37.21	3	6.98
Discipline-Specific Training	SS	17	41.46	24	58.54	0	0.00
	Arts	23	53.49	17	39.53	3	6.98
Information Content Briefing	SS	15	36.59	19	46.34	7	17.07
	Arts	11	25.58	25	58.14	7	16.28
Information Retrieval Training	SS	20	48.78	17	41.46	4	9.76
	Arts	12	27.91	28	65.12	3	6.98
Institutional Repository Access	SS	18	43.90	21	51.22	2	4.88
	Arts	21	48.84	19	44.19	3	6.98
Junk Information Filtering	SS	21	51.22	18	43.90	2	4.88
	Arts	29	67.44	11	25.58	3	6.98
Online Resource Searching	SS	22	53.66	17	41.46	2	4.88
	Arts	28	65.12	12	27.91	3	6.98

Concerning discipline-specific training, none of the Social Science faculty respondents expressed disagreement, while a small proportion (6.98%) of Arts faculty respondents disagreed. A majority of Arts researchers (53.49%) strongly agreed with the need for discipline-specific training, whereas 41.46% of the Social Science researchers strongly agreed with this need (Table 6).

Device Utilization Among Research Scholars

This section presents an analysis of the device used by the research scholar for accessing internet.

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

Most Social Science scholars (95.12%) indicated that they use laptops for internet access, with a significant number of Arts scholars (86.05%) using smartphones. Additionally, 70.73% of researchers in the Social Science used smartphones to access information, while 65.85% used desktops. The use of iPads and notebook computers was relatively low among both groups (Table 7).

Constraints Faced in Accessing Digital Resources

The participants were asked to identify the barriers they encountered while using digital resources. The data obtained are presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Constraints Faced in Accessing Digital Resources

Impediments to Digital Resource Access	Social Science (N=41)		Arts (N=43)	
	N	%	N	%
Absence of Campus Network Infrastructure	9	21.95	43	100.00
Absence of Dedicated Computing Facilities	11	26.83	25	58.14
Difficulty in Information Discovery	30	73.17	28	65.12
Inadequate Technical Support Personnel	25	60.98	19	44.19
Insufficient Digital Resource Collections	18	43.90	30	69.77
Insufficient Information Technology Knowledge	12	29.27	22	51.16
Intellectual Property Rights Complications	28	68.29	32	74.42
Limited Institutional Operating Hours	19	46.34	22	51.16
Power Supply Instability	21	51.22	25	58.14
Slow Access Speed	35	85.37	36	83.72

The constraint analysis in Table 8 shows that slow access speed was a salient issue among the respondents, with 85.37% of Social Science and 83.72% of Arts respondents reporting this problem. Difficulty in information discovery was another significant constraint, reported by 73.17% of Social Science and 65.12% of Arts respondents. Intellectual property rights complications were reported by 68.29% of Social Science and 74.42% of Arts respondents (Table 8).

Furthermore, 60.98% of Social Science researchers and 44.19% of Arts researchers indicated inadequate technical support personnel as a constraint. Insufficient information technology knowledge was reported by 29.27% of Social Science and 51.16% of Arts researchers. The absence of campus network infrastructure was reported by 21.95% of Social Science respondents and 100.00% of Arts respondents.

Major Findings

Based on the survey and analysis, followings are the major findings of the study:

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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