

INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOR OF UNDERGRADUATES AND THE USAGE OF E-RESOURCES: A CASE STUDY OF SOUTH EASTERN UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA

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Abstract

Electronic resources (e-Resources) can be defined as a kind of information sources that could be stored electronically and made accessible through a physical or cloud-based electronic system(s) or a computer network(s). It also provides access to current information as those are updated frequently. This study aims to evaluate the factors influencing the usage of e-resources and the challenges faced in accessing electronic resources in the library. The survey was conducted among the final year undergraduate students of the Management faculty using a closed-ended questionnaire with multiple-choice questions. The questionnaire was distributed among 50 final year Management undergraduate students. Thirty-five students (70%) out of fifty responded to this survey. Findings showed that 80% of users were satisfied with the activities of the library staff, searching facilities, and a quiet environment. Of which 50 respondents, 60% were happy with searching electronic resources, IT facilities and computer networks, Wi-Fi connection, and the availability of subscribed materials. This study identified challenges faced by the students with the inadequate number of computers (only 20 in number), internet connectivity, information overload, and malfunction of the internet. The competency level of the students, library facilities, and user education programs were the main factors that influenced the e-resources usage. This study has identified some suggestions for improving electronic resource facilities and services in the university library and approaches to solve problems. Further, this has given some recommendations to improve the electronic resources collection, accessibility, and customer care to fulfill the objectives of the university library.

Keywords: *e-Resources, Information Seeking Behavior, Search patterns of undergraduates*

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Introduction

Electronic resources are in which information sources that are stored electronically and made accessible through electronic systems and computer networks. It also provides access to current information as these are updated frequently (Kenchakkanavar, 2014). Through their various search techniques, electronic resources provide extensive links to explore additional resources or related content. According to Mashroofa, Jusoh, and Chinna (2019), e-resources are valuable resources for teaching, research, and learning. Thus, many libraries, including universities in the present day, provide electronic resources for higher education and research. These resources include OPAC, CD-ROMs, Online-Databases, E-journals, E-books, open educational resources, Internet resources, etc. Electronic resources provide access to information that might be restricted to the users because of licensing mode or finances. Geographical location will not affect access to e-resources unless there is a digital divide.

According to Bryant (2021), electronic resources (or e-resources) are materials in digital format accessible electronically in varied digital formats such as Adobe Acrobat documents (pdf) and webpages (HTML). E-resources also include newspaper articles, encyclopedia articles, dictionaries, images, and many other items.

The South Eastern University of Sri Lanka (SEUSL) libraries gives a conducive learning environment, excellent facilities, and effective and efficient services to the clients. Library provides various facilities and services such as borrowing, online renewal and reservation, document delivery, online information searches, WebOPAC, photocopying, and a range of e-resources.

Mashroofa (2012) stated, "Information commons are now widely accepted for designing physical spaces. Information commons consist of places for individual study, group work, multimedia production area, computer labs, and classrooms with reference services librarians. Usually, it is a collaborative effort of library and IT staff." Therefore, university libraries should redesign the usual study space into information common.

Statement of Problem

Identifying the factors influencing e-information seeking behavior of students will be helpful to the Library of the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka and the CONSAL administrators to decide the new subscription or renewing current subscription to e-resources. Additionally, it is also helpful to understand the challenges or barriers of using e-resources to propose some new strategies to overcome these barriers.

Reviewed literature shows that less research has been conducted in this area in Sri Lanka for undergraduate students. Also, no previous studies have been done at the SEUSL on undergraduates of the Faculty of Management and Commerce. The following research questions were formulated, based on this problem.

Research questions

1. What are the factors influencing the electronic information-seeking behavior of the students?
2. What are the challenges and barriers faced in accessing electronic resources by the students?

Objectives

The main objective of this survey was to examine the factors influencing the information-seeking behavior and challenges faced in using electronic information resources by the final year undergraduate management students of the Faculty of Management and Commerce of the SEUSL. Identifying the satisfactory level of students towards the library e-resources, level of user competency related to searching skills, Internet usability and self-efficacy, and exploring the library facilities and infrastructure to support the students were the specific objectives of this study.

Methodology

A survey questionnaire was used as the research instrument, and the collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. According to Sekeran and Bougie (2016), the questionnaires are proven to be the best research instrument in the world in survey researches, specifically in evaluating services of libraries. The survey questionnaire used in this study to collect data mainly consisted of closed-ended questions. The population frame was taken from the Assistant Registrar, Faculty of Commerce & Management, and questionnaires were distributed among the sample of students.

The questionnaire had questions to explore the purposes of the students' visits to the main library, the e-resources utilized, the e-information collection, the students' awareness level regarding e-resources, challenges/barriers they encountered, and the factors influencing e-information seeking behavior. The competency level of the students, library facilities, infrastructure, and user education program were the main factors considered.

Population - The population included males and females of final year undergraduate students (50) of the Faculty of Commerce & Management of the SEUSL. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table in Sekaran and Bougie (2011), if the population is 50, the sample size should be 44. We expected 44 responses (100%) from the survey participants but, usually researchers rarely receive 100% response rate. We also received 35 (70%) response rates to the survey.

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Variables - This study analyzed the usage of e-resources. Final-year undergraduate students were selected as participants for the study. Electronic information-seeking behavior was the dependent variable of this study and, there were some independent variables and sub-variables (Figure 1).

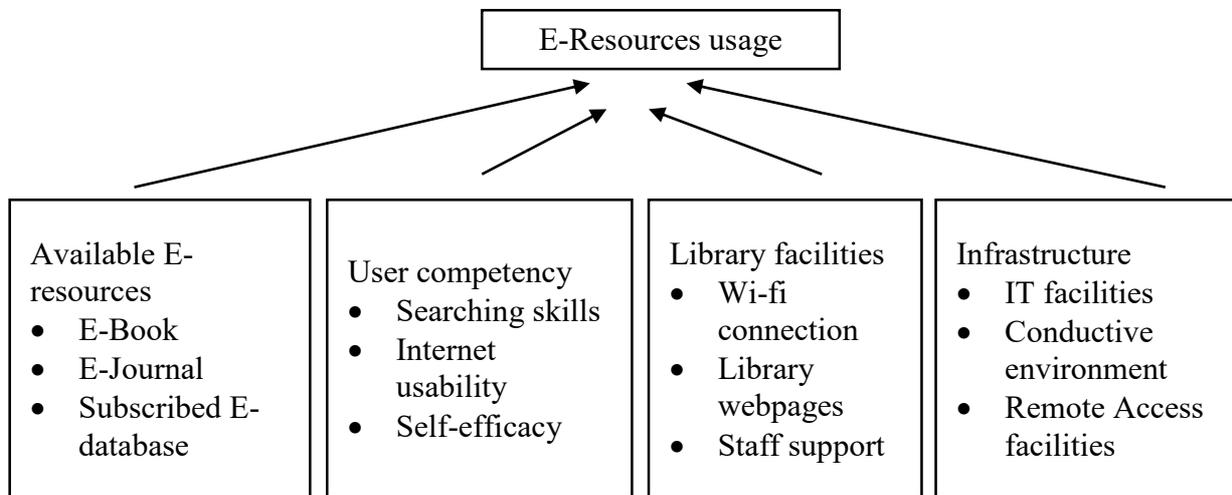


Figure 1 Identify independent (IV) and Dependent variables (DV)

Results and Discussion

The total population of this study consists of final year management students of the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka. Only 35(70%) participants out of 50 responded to the survey questionnaire. Of the 35 respondents, twenty-one (60%) were female students, and fourteen (40%) were male students.

Many factors influence the attitudes on e-resources utilization. Computer Literacy and lack of retrieval skills limit student’s ability to access electronic resources effectively. Also, issues such as difficulties faced in finding relevant information and limited facilities such as printing documents were taken into consideration.

Available electronic resources and usage

The use of electronic resources is one of the main factors considered in this study. E-resources usage and having access to essential e-resources websites determine the quality of an organization. Out of all respondents, 37% prefer to use e-journals, while 28% of participants prefer to use e-databases. Among the rest, 25 % prefer to use e-books and the remaining 10% use e-thesis (Figure 2).

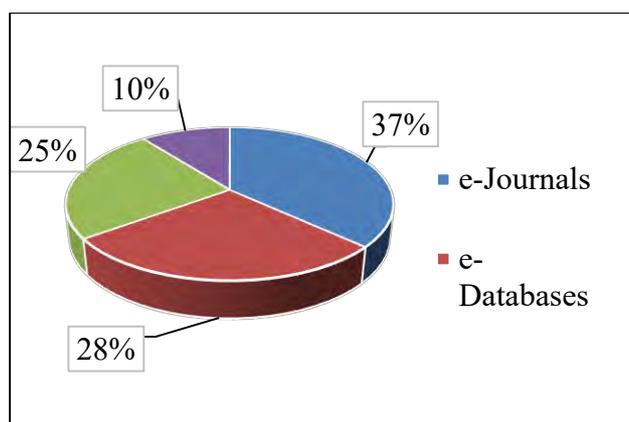


Figure 2 Using e-Resources

User competency

The searching skills of the students are shown in *Table 1*. Twenty-six participants (74%) indicated that they have either very good or excellent searching skills, while 20% (7) of students having sufficient skills. The remaining six percent answered that their skills were insufficient. However, some students need awareness on searching databases.

Table 1 Searching, Internet facilities and Corporation of the library staff

Variables	Excellent	Very good	Sufficient	Insufficient	No Response	Total
<i>Searching skills</i>	5	21	7	1	1	35
<i>Internet facilities</i>	3	21	7	3	1	35
<i>Corporation of the library staff</i>	10	18	4	3	0	35

Library facilities

Of participants, 24 (63%) rated that the library provides excellent and very good internet/Wi-fi facilities. Among the rest, 20% of students responded that the facilities are sufficient, while the others answered insufficiently. Students face difficulties when accessing the relevant e-resources. Of respondents, 28 students (80%) mentioned that they were well satisfied with the support given by the library staff for finding information. Only a few students (3) answered that their support was insufficient.

Infrastructure

The library has to provide adequate facilities and remote access for the benefit of students who seek e-information. According to this study, it was observed that the library has adequate IT facilities for those who use e-resources. More than 74% of the students were satisfied with the IT facilities and e-resources available in the library.

Conclusion

The majority of the users in their comments indicated that they were satisfied with the cleaning, opening, and closing time of the e-resources section. Creating a peaceful environment in which students can learn is one of the most important factors to be considered, and more than half of the students responded satisfactorily. Considering the comments based on satisfaction in printing, half of the students expressed that they were satisfied while others expressed less satisfaction. Furthermore, students were happy with the facilities available for copying, replicating downloadable research papers and articles. The majority of the students were satisfied with the facilities available in the e-resources section, such as internet connection, printing, and staff support. A few of them indicated that they had faced difficulties in searching and downloading research articles. They also mentioned that lacking IT knowledge, training for accessing e-resources, and language barrier were the challenges they faced when accessing e-resources. Many students indicated that they had visited the library Website.

Recommendations

Issues such as slow internet connectivity and problems associated with downloading documents, authentication/login problems, and difficulties occur in finding relevant information, should be corrected.

Administrative decisions should take for proper maintenance of IT facilities, upgrading software, and improving speedy internet connections.

It is necessary to upgrade the infrastructure facilities for accessing computer networks, e-resources covering all subject contents and, furniture.

The conducive learning environment for the e-resources section is crucial for the student's learning.

University should increase the budget for subscribing more electronic resources covering all subject content. The library should take feedback about e-resources at regular intervals. The library should take user feedback on e-resources collection at regular intervals. Also, the library should receive suggestions and recommendations from the faculty members and the students. It will help to strengthen the e-resources collection, update the web page, and enhance the user services.

Facilities should provide for students to have unrestricted access to print retrieved and download documents.

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