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Rubina Bhatti
Islamia University, Bahawalpur, dr.rubytariq@yahoo.com

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Internet Use among Faculty Members in the Changing Higher Education Environment at the Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan

Dr Rubina Bhatti
Assistant Professor
Department of Library & Information Science
Islamia University of Bahawalpur
South Punjab, Pakistan

Introduction

The Internet provides access to unlimited sources of information and search engines is continuously being advanced to provide efficient ways to help users to find what they want. The Internet eases and increases access to a large amount of data, saves time and money, and obtains an opportunity to consult several experts with a single request (via discussion groups), and greater independence from specific times and places for information seeking (Savolainen, 1999).

Limited access to up to date materials in libraries of universities in developing countries is a main problem that impedes research and teaching. Interlibrary loans and document delivery projects have been inadequate to resolve this problem by themselves. The Internet makes it possible for users to have access to large volumes of information irrespective of their geographical location (Gifty Adika, 2003). The development of new technology makes direct access to information easier for users that was previously impracticable. Internet use as an extension of the classroom or as a vehicle for higher education is becoming increasingly widespread (Begum, 1999).

Internet use in Pakistani academic institutions and their libraries is creating an environment that is continuously changing. Multimedia and the Internet have further made the teaching and research functions of faculty members more challenging. The important features that have affected the quality of information are accuracy, currency, comprehensiveness and time. As the academic community is becoming aware of potential uses of Internet, these are being put to more use; there is a need to evaluate the purpose of utilizing Internet sources in order to provide relevant services. Such studies on Internet information usage pattern also facilitate library professionals to provide effective services by modifying old information provision process by using electronic tools.

The quality of higher education in Pakistan requires ongoing changes and development in the teaching-learning process. Faculty members in universities need to let go the concept of merely text-book oriented lecturing system in the changing higher education environment (Khan 1994). The countries with advanced education systems developed extensive teaching learning

strategies, planned to train their students for a wider market place, through the ways of lectures, seminars, workshops, handouts, and Web-based tutorials. The faculty in Pakistan must identify and use new teaching strategies designed to support the teaching, learning, and research goals of the university. The further inducement for such a change have been the explosion and proliferation of information in various formats, changing patterns of information seeking and retrieving, hence the need for investigating Internet usage in this changing higher education environment. This is the first attempt to study the use of the Internet by the university faculty. Its findings should help the University in its plans and programmes related to e-learning and strengthen pertinent resources and services of its libraries.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

- To explore the extent of Internet usage by the faculty members in the changing environment of higher education.
- To solicit their purpose of seeking information on Internet.
- To investigate their purpose of using Internet services and resources.
- To find out their preferred place for Internet usage and time spent per week.
- To find out what problems are faced by faculty members in seeking information on Internet.

Research Design

The data for this study was acquired by using a survey questionnaire containing both open and closed ended questions. A thorough review of related literature on the Internet was conducted. Various types of literature on Internet; journal articles, abstracting services of journal papers (e.g. BUBL, JADE, ERIC), (b) doctoral theses, conference proceedings were consulted. The survey included faculty members from four faculties: Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Islamic Learning, Faculty of Education, and Faculty of Science. One hundred and fifty faculty members were requested to take part in the survey from the fifteen departments selected randomly. The responses received from one hundred faculty members with the repose rate of 66 percent. In order to ensure reliability and effectiveness of the instrument, the questionnaire was pilot tested on twenty faculty members from different departments.

Literature Review

A review of the related studies was conducted with the purpose that these studies would help the researcher in doing the present study into Pakistani context. It must be noted that present author found these studies by using Internet resources due to the unavailability and inadequacy of research material in printed format in the academic libraries of Pakistan. Journal articles and conference proceeding found on the Internet proved very useful.

A study in 2008 by Alshankity and Alshawi examined the gender differences in Internet usage among faculty members in Saudi Arabia. The study collected information from 504 faculty members in four Saudi Arabian higher education institutions regarding Internet usage for academic purposes. In the context of the gender-segregated higher education systems and the

relatively new advent of Internet in the region, the researchers did not see a significant gender difference in the overall Internet usage.

In 2006, Al-Ansari conducted a study on “Internet use by the faculty members of Kuwait University ”. This study was designed to investigate the patterns of Internet use by the faculty including purposes for use, its impact on teaching and research, Internet resources used, and the problems faced while using the Internet.
A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from the faculty coming from four colleges of Kuwait University, i.e. Arts, Social Sciences, Sciences, and Engineering. The study revealed that the Internet is mostly used for communication, research, and publication by saving time, find up to date information, and cooperate with their colleagues. Slow speed, lack of time, and lack of access from home are the major problems.

Aldojan (2006) investigated the Internet use among Education faculty members in Jordanian Public Universities. The population of this study included the entire education faculty members (309) in seven Jordanian public universities, ranking instructor/lecturer, assistant, associate, and full professors. The study explored how often, what types of Internet tool is used on a daily basis, and the degree of satisfaction of education faculty members in Jordanian public universities using the Internet in their academic work. The purpose of this study was to collect and to analyze the data to determine the patterns of Internet use and to identify the faculty's concerns and their overall satisfaction degree of its services.

Gifty Adika (2003) analysed Internet use among faculty members of universities in Ghana. Research results show that in spite of the benefits of the Internet, its use among faculty is still very low. The main reasons for this are lack of access to the Internet and the need for training. It suggested that university authorities must take immediate steps to provide general access points for faculty through computer laboratories. Here librarians, information professionals and computer scientists have vital role to play for organising training and refresher sessions for faculty to get up to date information via Internet for teaching and research.

A doctoral study by Fortin (2000) explored faculty members' use of and their information seeking behaviors and activities on the Internet at Angelo State University. Using both a quantitative and qualitative methodology, differences were found between tenured and tenure-track faculty members on the perceived value of the Internet to meet their research and classroom information needs. Similar differences were also found among faculty members in the broad discipline areas of the humanities, social sciences, and sciences. Tenure-track faculty members reported a higher average Internet use per week than tenured faculty members.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Demographics of respondents

The responses received from one hundred potential faculty members. The population consisted of forty lecturers, forty Assistant professors, ten Associate professors and ten professors. The data shows that seventy members of academic staff hold Masters Degree, fifteen of them possess M.Phil, and ten has got the Doctorate. The list of the departments included in the study is as follows: Urdu, English, Political Science, Economics, History, Geography, Islamic Learning, Arabic, Education, Commerce, Mass Communication, Chemistry, Physics, Pharmacy and Library & Information Science.

Internet Use by faculty members at the University

The aim of the present survey was to study the extent of use of the Internet by the faculty members from the four faculties of the Islamia University of Bahawalpur —Faculty of Arts, Islamic Learning, Education and Faculty of Science, so as to determine its impact on their academic practices.

Purposes for seeking information on Internet:

Table 1. Purposes of seeking information on Internet by faculty members	Responses
Teaching purpose	57 percent
Research purpose	64 percent
For doing M.Phil and PhD	46 percent
Guiding researcher students	
Developing up-to-date knowledge	
For writing a research paper for a journal or conference	39 percent
For submitting research papers to journals online	18 percent
Recreational purpose	22 percent
Personal purposes	32 percent
Others	35 percent

The faculty members from all the faculties showed enthusiastic attitude towards use of Internet for teaching and research purposes. Though respondents from the Faculty of Science were more positive about the use of Internet and its impact on their educational experience, all found to be consulting Internet for seeking information for the purposes mentioned above with different percentage. This increased use of Internet may be because of unavailability and inadequacy of latest reading material from the university library. This high rate may also be interpreted as the establishment of new departments and the inclusion of new disciplines and insufficient provision of reading material by the University Library. The University Library appears unable to cope with the ever-increasing demands for the latest material (in printed formats) by its users.

Sources of information used on Internet

Table 2. Sources of information on Internet	Responses
E-journals	22 percent
E-books	14 percent
E-encyclopedias	18 percent
E-dictionaries	21 percent
Online abstracting & indexing services	28 percent
Online bibliographical services	11 percent
Online Workshops	02 percent

Discussion groups	24 percent
Databases	22 percent
Others	05 percents

The data shows that 22 percent of the faculty members have gone online to find information from the e-journals that are available through the Pakistan Higher Education Digital Library. Again, the respondents from Science Faculty were more positive about the use of e-journals, e-.books, e-encyclopedias, e-dictionaries, abstracting and indexing services and databases. However, such tendency among faculty members from other faculties was found to be low mainly due to inadequacy of such Internet information sources related to their disciplines.

Use of Internet services

Table 3. Use of Internet services	Responses
E.mail	78 percent
Academically-oriented mailing lists	34 percent
Listservs	08 percent
Newsgroup	39 percent
The World Wide Web	66 percent
Document Delivery services	0.00 percent
Electronic translation services	0.00 percent
Seeking job online	05.00 percent
Online Chatting	46 percent

The faculty members from all the faculties in the study show good response towards various services on Internet i.e. e-mail, the WWW, academically oriented mailing list, newsgroups and on-line chatting. Document delivery services and electronic translation services are never used by any respondent; the reason that may be postulated for such a situation is lack of awareness of these services and cost factor (as such services are expensive, when British Pound and US Dollar is being converted into Pakistani Rupees).

Time spent on Internet per week

Table 4. Time per week	Responses
20-15 hours per week	15 percent
15-10 hours per week	20 percent
10-8 hours per week	32 percent
8-6 hours per week	11 percent
6-4 hours per week	12 percent
4-2 hours per week	10 percent
None	0.00

The question regarding percentage of time exploring information sources on Internet revealed that majority (32 percent) spend ten to eight hours per week. Again this ratio was higher among faculty members from Science. The faculty members from Islamic Learning were found to give six to two hours per week for Internet usage; this is may be because the Islamia University Library has got rich collection relating to Islamic Learning.

Preferred places

Table 5. Preferred places	Responses
University Library	17 percent
Workplace	28 percent
Computer Lab	22 percent
Home	25 percent
Cybercafés	07 percent
Other	0.00 percent

More than one-quarter of the faculty members use the Internet facility at their workplaces (in their respective departments), whereas only 17 percent visit their university library. A significant number of faculty members use the Internet at their home; this includes the female respondents who may be due to cultural factor use this facility at homes. Only 07 percent go to Cybercafés to have an access of Internet.

Search engines used

Table 5. Search engines used	Responses
Google	67 percent
Yahoo	54 percent
MSN	40 percent
Other	0.00

A majority of faculty members who use Internet for acquiring information use search engines such as Yahoo, Google, and MSN. Some described the use of Infoseek, and Altavista.

Difficulties encountered

The study attempted to identify difficulties while seeking information on Internet with the hope that the findings will support in providing recommendations to improve the current state of the use of the Internet by faculty members.

Table. 7: Difficulties encountered	Responses
Subscription of latest e-journals is expensive	64 percent
English language material	52 percent

Lack of awareness of the availability of material	44 percent
Shortage of latest e-books	61 percent
Information scattered in too many sources	55 percent
Lack of time (Overworked)	63 percent
Slow speed	71 percent
Lack of knowledge about Internet information retrieving techniques	30 percent
Unavailability of Internet facility in the departments	47 percent
Shortage of computers	76 percent
Others (Please specify)	0.00 percent

Shortage of computers and slow speed of Internet was mentioned by majority (70 percent) of faculty members. A vast majority described the shortage of e-books and subscription to e-journals is expensive. Lack of time and inadequate knowledge about information retrieving techniques from Internet was found to be the problem for some faculty members. This pointed out for the needs of provision of training for faculty members for searching online information for whatever purpose.

Conclusion

The study showed that Internet has radical impact on the changing higher education environment. It is interesting that Internet use among faculty members at the Islamia University of Bahawalpur is much higher than expected. It is broadly used for teaching and research purposes. The faculty members in the Faculty of Science are making most use of the Internet facility; however, faculty members from other faculties also showed an increased interest into Internet resources. Academic resources offered online in their disciplines are reported to be inadequate (as compared to online academic resources in Sciences) and mostly in English language. The other issue was lack any formal training about how to locate these resources by saving time and efforts. Slow speed, lack of computers, lack of time, and lack of access from home are found to be the major problems. For this purpose, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur needs to improve its IT infrastructure, including providing distance access. The use of electronic information sources for study and research purposes must be encouraged and proper training should be provided.

This is the first comprehensive study of the use of the Internet by the University faculty. It is hoped that its findings would help the University and its libraries in its policies and programmes related to e-learning to facilitate teaching and research.

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