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Introduction

The convergence of information and communication technologies as embodied in the Internet has transformed the present day society into a knowledge society. Earlier, information and knowledge were passed by word of mouth or through manuscripts, and communication was a slow process. Today it is passed from one individual to an infinite number of other users through a number of media and formats which makes rapid and widespread dissemination of information possible. New technologies bring us an unparalleled flood of information. Along with word processing, the Internet is considered to be the most valuable of the many computer technologies available to the society today.

Panjab University, Chandigarh

The Punjab University Chandigarh (Established in 1882 at Lahore) has been incorporated for imparting education in Arts, Letters, Science and the learned professions, and for advancement of learning and original research. It has 55 teaching and research departments on the main campus located at Chandigarh, 122 affiliated colleges spread over Punjab and Chandigarh. It has a long tradition of teaching and research in science and technology, humanities, social sciences, performing arts and sports. It has been accorded a five star status by the NAAC, which was set up by the University Grants Commission. By virtue of its age, experience, achievements, and philosophy, Panjab University is a university of national character and stature, in so far as it has drawn both its faculty and students from all over the country. Aided by the well-equipped laboratories, specialized reference libraries, and sophisticated equipment, faculty and students are engaged in research in several frontline areas. They a're also engaged in national and international collaboration in research.

The university has adapted to this age of information technology. Panjab University has been identified as a Level-III National High Performance Computing Centre under the ICOSER project of TIFAC, Department of Science and Technology. It is among the seven such centres being setup around the country and is the only one in northern India. The University is interconnected with the help of an ATM network with a fibre optic backbone cable allowing data rates of 155 Mbps. Central switches and servers provide high speed computing as well as Internet and email facilities. Departmental switches in each of these buildings provide users access to Central Computing and the Internet. The university library also offers an Internet connection to allow students to search for resources easily. It is the first digital library in the region. The library has been recognized as one of the six national centres for data-information-distribution in the UGC's INFLIBNET programme.

Internet Use by Researchers at the University

The aim of the present survey was to study the use of the Internet by the researchers at Panjab University, Chandigarh in all the three fields of knowledge—sciences, social sciences and humanities, so as to determine its impact on their academic routine. For this purpose, 200 questionnaires were distributed, 80 to researchers in sciences, 80 to researchers in social sciences, and 40 to researchers in humanities. This was in proportion to the total number of researchers working in these fields. The results of the survey indicate:

1. The researchers in Sciences are more positive about the use of Internet and its impact on their educational experience. All of them (100%) have a positive attitude toward the Internet and feel comfortable gaining information through it for academic and personal purposes. About 70% of researchers in social sciences and 20% of the researchers in humanities also agree with them on the importance of Internet's information resources.

2. 80% of the researchers in sciences use the Internet facility provided in their respective departments, whereas only 20% go to cybercafes to have an access of Internet. 90% of the researchers who use Internet in social sciences use Internet in their respective departments whereas 10% of them use cybercafes. A majority of the researchers who use Internet in humanities go to cybercafes.

3. 90% of the Internet use is for academic purposes by the researchers in science, whereas only 30% in social sciences and 5% in humanities use it for academic purposes.

4. 80% of researchers in sciences use the Internet for 3-4 hours per week whereas about 20% use it for about 8-10 hours per week. In the social sciences, 85% of the researchers use it for 2-3 hours per week and 15% for about an hour per week. The use of the Internet by the majority of the researchers in humanities is only 1-2 hours per week.

5. 100% of the researchers in the sciences have gone online to find information from the ejournals that are available through the university library whereas only 40% in the social sciences and 5% in humanities are using such a facility.

6. 100% of researchers in the sciences frequently look for emails whereas 62 % researchers in the social sciences and 20% researchers in humanities have email accounts.

7. 40% of researchers in the sciences subscribe to academically-oriented mailing lists , whereas 6% of social science researchers are doing so. No researcher in the humanities is aware of any such lists.

8. Online chatting is done by 20% of researchers in sciences, 5% in social sciences and none in humanities.

9. Researchers use electronic resources more than paper resources, as they feel that it is easier to find resources using the Internet, an observation echoed by educators and librarians who worry that students are less adept at recognizing credible academic sources when conducting research. Nearly 90% of the researchers in the sciences use Internet more than the library whereas it is reverse in case of social sciences and humanities. About 80% of researchers in the social sciences and only a negligible percent of researchers in humanities depend on the printed resources available in the library.

10. Only 20% of the researchers in the sciences have published their papers in ejournals, whereas no researcher in social sciences or in humanities has any epublication to their credit.

11. 70% of researchers in the sciences also use the Internet for seeking jobs online, with 5% in the case of researchers in social sciences and none in humanities.

12. About 80% of the researchers in the sciences, 10% in the social sciences, and none in humanities use document delivery services provided by various information/documentation centers. The researchers in humanities are not aware of such a facility.

13. Most of the researchers in sciences (80%), social sciences (85%), and humanities (70%) started using Internet only after joining the university.

14. 99% of the researchers in sciences who use the Internet agreed that Internet use had a positive impact on their study and research. 50% of the researchers in social sciences agree with them. The researchers in humanities did not agree with this statement.

15. It was interesting to note that no researcher in any area uses electronic translation services.

16. The Majority of researchers in sciences, social sciences, andthe humanities who use Internet for acquiring information use search engines such as Yahoo, Google, Infoseek, and Altavista.

Conclusion

It is evident from the results that Internet has had a great impact on the academic environment. The researchers in the sciences are making maximum use of the Internet facility provided by the university; however, researchers in other fields still rely on bibliographies and printed journals. Researchers in social sciences and humanities consider their institutional libraries as the last resort for obtaining information. Although academic resources are offered online in their fields also, it may be that researchers have not been taught, or have not yet figured out, how to locate these resources. For this purpose, firstly the academic staff should encourage the use of electronic information sources for study and research. Secondly, the librarians should provide proper training in the use of online information sources.