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Access, Use, and Attitudes of Academics toward Electronic Journals: A Case Study of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife

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Access, Use, and Attitudes of Academics toward Electronic Journals: A Case Study of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife

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Introduction

Studies show that journals are the most valued information communication channel for researchers. Their production dates back to the seventeenth century, and their importance has not diminished. With the advent of the Internet and electronic publishing, they have become more easily accessible. Print books may be around for a long time, but print journals are rapidly being supplanted by e-journals. It is important to study the use of electronic journals, scholars' attitudes, and future patterns of use, for library development, and because of the central role journals play in scientific communication (Kortelainen, 2004).

Academics in developing countries are fast adapting to the Internet as a source of information for teaching and research. Some research reveals use of the Internet for things like email (Ojedokun and Owolabi, 2003; Badu and Markwei 2005). Many studies have also been conducted to determine use of e-journals and other e-resources. Manda (2005) studied the use of electronic resources in Tanzania by academics. He found that use was low, due to inadequate end-user training, slow connectivity, limited access to PCs, poor search skills, and budget cuts. Smith (2007) looked at South Africa, finding that lack of bandwidth was a major problem, and the range of electronic journals in the respondents' field of interest fairly limited.

Ehikhamenon (2003) states even though 77.5 percent of Nigerian scientists rated electronic journals as "important" or "very important," their rating was based on expectation rather than actual use. Gbaje (2007), writing on Nigerian academic libraries, found that only 20 percent of those surveyed provide access to electronic resources. Azubogu and Madu (2007) observe that academic staff of the Imo State University, Owerri, Nigeria, have resorted to the use of computer and Internet technologies to search for information because the university library lacks funds to subscribe to scholarly and research journals.

These constraints and more have hindered libraries in developing countries from fully enjoying the benefits of the Internet and electronic publishing. Many academics in Africa rely on their university and research institute libraries to satisfy their information needs. The libraries also rely on government funding, which has been dwindling. The situation could have been more serious, but for some interventions from non-governmental organizations and agencies. These interventions include the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) initiative, through the Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information (PERI); African Journals Online (AJOL) initiative; AGORA, JSTOR, Journal Donation Project (JDP), HINARI, and others, which provide access to electronic journals by academics in developing countries. The scholarly Journal Archive (JSTOR) is a non-profit organization with a dual mission to create and maintain a trusted archive of important scholarly

journals and to provide access to these journals as widely as possible. The archive spans many disciplines. Teaching staff in developing countries have access to these journals if their university libraries are beneficiaries. (Ejimofo and Ohaji, 2008). It is an online initiative.

The Journal Donation Project (JDP) is another initiative. It builds archives of scholarly journals in developing countries. It began in 1990, and Nigeria amongst other countries is a beneficiary. It offers subscriptions to more than 2,000 journals from 238 publishers. The project sends donated journals from publishers to libraries, purchases journals for libraries at a discount (usually 50 percent) using grant funds, or passes on the discounts to libraries that can purchase journals through JDP. This initiative deals with print journals.

Background Information

Obafemi Awolowo University was founded in 1960. It was connected to the Internet in 1995, and since then has created Internet connections for all departments. Many staff now have personal computers, some purchased through the Computer Centre of the University and paid for over a period of time. ICT awareness is very high amongst the academic staff. Academic staff who are connected to the Internet pay monthly, and the money is deducted from their salary.

The University Library was connected to the Internet in 1998. It subscribes to online journals and databases such Infotrac One file database (which covers more than 6,000 periodicals), Ebscohost, Hinari, JSTOR, and WiderNet Digital Library. These databases are mostly electronic versions of print journals, some of which are passworded. The library had been having problem in subscribing to print journals due to dwindling funds; however, in 2007 it became a beneficiary of JDP and this has boosted the print journal acquisition.

The university library has enjoyed financial support from the Carnegie Corporation. The support has enabled it to embark on computerization projects. In July 2008, it opened its e-library to staff and students. Use has been high.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the research were to:

- Determine if academic staff of the Obafemi Awolowo University use electronic journals.
- Determine the purposes for which they use them.
- Determine how often the respondents use e-journals
- Identify their general attitudes to electronic journals in comparison to print journals
- Discover the problems they encounter.

Methodology

The survey method was used for this study. A random sample of 500 academic staff of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria participated in the study. The questionnaire was the main data collection instrument, and was administered to all cadres of academic staff in all the eleven faculties as well as the university library, after it was pre-tested. Both open and closed-ended questions were used. Some of the questions were adopted from similar studies by Tomney and Burton (1998) and Sangowusi (2003).

A total of 245 (49 percent) completed questionnaires were retrieved, and all were found to be usable. The data was analysed using simple percentage. The study was carried out during the 2003/2004 academic year. The results are presented below.

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Finding and Discussion

Awareness of E-journals

It was important to find out from respondents if they were aware of e-journals. It is assumed that they had been using print journals. To use e-journals, they must be aware.

The findings revealed that all the respondents were aware of e-journals. E-journals are becoming popular amongst academics in developing countries.

Use of E-Journals

Awareness is not necessarily a proof of use. The findings show that all respondents have used e-journals.

Frequency of Use

The findings also reveal that even though all the respondents have used e-journals, the frequency of use ranged from daily to occasional use. A majority use e-journals monthly, as can be seen from Table I and Figure I.
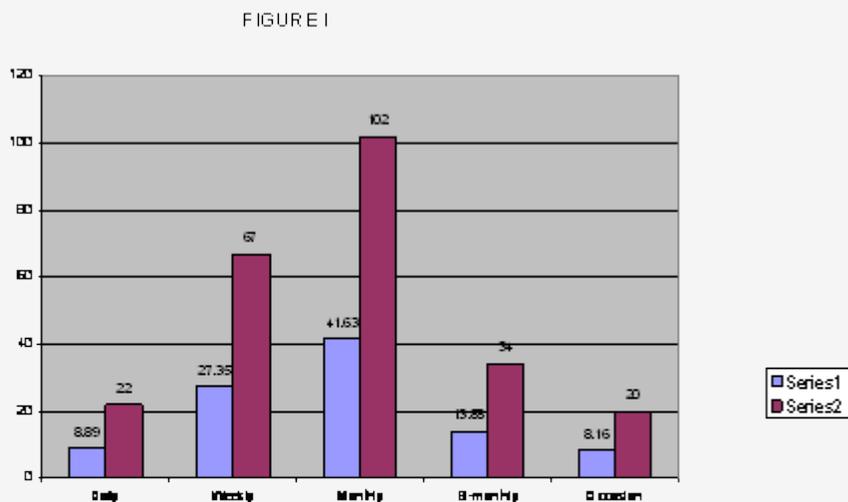

FIGURE I

Table 1: Frequency of Use

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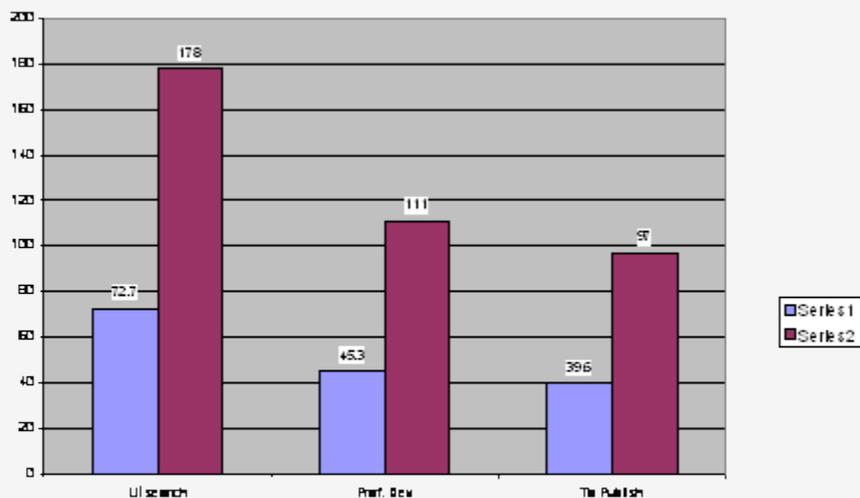| Visit	Frequency	Percent

Daily	22	8.98
Weekly	67	37.35
Monthly	102	41.63
B-Monthly	34	13.88
Occasionally	20	8.16
Total	245	100

The high rate of use confirms the findings of Azubogu and Madu (2007) that academics in Nigeria are embracing online resources since the libraries cannot satisfy their information needs. The frequency of use mighyt have been better if other factors were favourable, for example, power supply, as can be seen from further analysis. (Table 2).

Purpose	Frequency	Percent
Literature search	178	72.7
Professional development	111	45.4
Publishing articles	97	39.6

Literature search was the main purpose for using e-library journals. This supports the findings of Manda (2005) and Renwick (2005), who found that most faculty used e-resources for research and professional growth. .

FIGURE II

The sample population indicated whether they read only online or prefer to download and read later. The preference for hard copy is evident, as 89.8 percent of the respondents would rather download, print, and read later. Reading on-screen can be tedious and is not always good for the eyes. Ajayi and Akindojutimi (2005) found that eyestrain through reading and use of computers can lead to poor vision. Also, many people derive intrinsic pleasure in reading print.

Advantages over print journals

Accessibility to current journals, better international connections to up-to-date information, and speed in accepting and publishing articles were perceived to be the major advantages of electronic journals over print journals.

Table 3: Perceived Advantages of E-Journals

Advantages	Frequency	Percent
Accessibility	240	98
International connection to up-to-date information	221	90.4
Speed in accepting and publishing articles	221	86
Enhanced dialogue among scholarly community	202	82.4
Power retrieval capability	122	50
International audience	122	50
Read material from desktop	100	41
Opportunity to publish formatted or materials difficult to print	90	37
Prestigious nature of e-publication	10	4.1

Many academics in developing countries linked to the Internet use it to send their articles via e-mail and this makes for faster communication with editors in developed countries. These findings show that they do not believe that e-journals are prestigious.

Problems with E-journals

Table 4: Problems with e-journals

Problems	Frequency	Percent
Power failure	245	100
System breakdown	245	100
Slow server	245	100
E-journals less prestigious	200	82
Web browsing is time-wasting	192	78
Copyright concerns	190	76
Citation problems	181	74

Even though all respondents use e-journals, the use is not without some challenges. This study confirms previous studies' findings that power failure, systems breakdown, and slowness of server due to bandwidth problems were major constraints.

Attitudes of Academics to E-Journals

The majority (150) of respondents prefer electronic journals, while ninety-five (39 percent) prefer print. Those who prefer print gave reasons including slowness of the Internet, server downtime, and power failure. Those who prefer the electronic version stated that since they pay for Internet connectivity monthly, they must make best use of it by getting all the advantages it offers. Since the library offers access to electronic journals online, they get quicker access than going physically to the library to look for print journals. They plead for the library to subscribe to more online journals.

Two hundred and thirty (94 percent) of respondents believed that they would use e-journals in the future. All respondents were of the opinion that use will continue to increase. Further analysis showed that only eighty-five (35 percent) of the respondents had published in totally electronic journals (journals with no print version). Reasons for this low percentage included fear of acceptance by university authorities. This corroborates the findings of Smith (2007), which indicates that her respondents did not really use e-journals as a venue for research findings.

A total of 235 (96 percent) thought that the university library should pay for subscriptions to e-journals since it had been paying for subscriptions to print journals.

Recommendations

The university library should increase bandwidth and online journal subscriptions, seeking more funds to do so. More bandwidth will also improve access time as the systems will work faster. Subscriptions to print journals should be maintained.

The government, as a matter of urgency, should work on the supply of electricity.

Conclusion

Academic staff at Obafemi Awolowo University have embraced electronic journals but have not been publishing in them. Enough funds should be released to the university library in order for it to be able to sustain the databases it is subscribing to and even subscribe to more. This will no doubt help academics in their research output and teaching.

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