Information Seeking Behavior of Legal Researcher Towards Use of Electronic Legal Resource: A Study

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Abstract

Law researchers often involve in various complex tasks of drafting, counseling and advocacy and experience considerable problems in satisfying the information need. The timely access of accurate information required is a major factor of performance as a researcher. Librarians understanding with researcher's subject practices are vital element for supporting scholarly research by collection development, research training and reference services. The advent of ICTs as research tool has solved the basic problem relating to gathering and collecting legal literature. The study seeks to examine the information seeking behavior of users of academic law libraries in digital environment. The study helps to understand the basic research habits of legal researchers, problems encounters while accessing digital law library.

Keywords: Information Seeking Behavior, Electronic Resources, Special Libraries, Law Libraries

1. Introduction

The Legal Research are in transformative shifts and embrace with many epistemological issues involving the shift form a print literature to electronic legal. Electronic legal resources resulted in revolutionary changes among legal research. It provided a different work in legal research through facts and pinpointed searching of information among universe of knowledge. Like medical professionals, law practitioners and researchers need to update regularly. Being a continuous development in case laws statutes, rules and regulations and other legal information, legal literature tends to grow at a faster rate. The faster growth of literature is the prime reason to diversion of print resources to online resources in the field of legal research. McClelland (2009) defines that the access of legal information as an essential ingredients for effective justice in a democratic society. The driving changes in the nature of information availability effects the information seeking activities of researches

2. Information Seeking for Construction of Multiple Problems in Electronic Environment

Information seeking is viewed as a process of construction of information, adding value and significant impact on system design to support interpretation suggests alternative approaches to understand the strategies of information seeking. Information seeking is important aspect for legal a researcher as they use multiple sources of information in different ways for effective construction of problem and preparation of cases, development of strategies. Otike (1999) examines the factors influences the information need and seeking habits of lawyers in England. The study notes that the new enrolled layers require more information support relatively experienced lawyers. Bintliff (2006) argues that in the era of computerized legal research, advocates make arguments on more facts bases system and judiciary stated relying on the results submitted from Google search and other electronic databases like Westlaw, Lexis and others.

Many Databases companies have attempts to incorporate the integration of multiple finding combination of two or more products like digest, most cited cases, key search features into electronic format. G Marchinini (2008) briefs the significance of computer and telecommunication technology as an ultimate support to electronic information researchers. He further suggests that there should be some changes in the architecture of information technology with alternative interface mechanisms as fast, accurate and many search options in computer assisted research which helps information seekers to develop their own skills and method according to requirement.

3. Changing Need of Legal Researcher

Legal research is a multi-faceted activity and legal research skills are essential requirement for lawyers and researcher regardless of the area of subject and practice. According to Legal Information Institute, The purpose of legal research is to find "authority" as an aid for finding solutions for legal problems. The researchers largely depend on the primary and secondary sources of law. The researchers generally create new patters of skills for locating the appropriate facts and apply in many ways. The development of computers and related technology has brought more dependency of researchers on various commercial and open access multimedia endeavors. The information seekers are using technology as a tool for effective results. A Komlodi and D. Soergel(2007) examines the usefulness of electronic search history based interface tools. The study resulted that automatically manually recorded history helps the information seekers for fast and accurate access of large tasks contexts findings proposed more user friendly design on research history information.

The new interface designs help the students to discover and apply multiple strategies for manipulating multilevel information management. Universities provide various research skills and learning methodology during the coursework through legal research skills programs. Sandra Meredith (2006) conducted a case study on legal research skill practices in oxford University Law Faculty. The study finds that there is an increase in the use of networked computers as information source and legal databases are used for searching cases, statute and articles. In another study Marshall et.al (2001) conducts a information seeking activity of law students participating on moot court competition. They found link or citation following technology is frequently used in legal searching. Marshall et. al. suggests more flexible organizations tools should be designed which provides immediate access of current legal material through wireless access and portal devices."

The holistic nature of research a law student, law lark, lawyer and judges performs largely relay on the information system supporting multiple retrieval applications at one command rather than the traditionally searching and managing files manually. The new generation integrated designs of information technology evolved many innovative users' support research tool for multitasking results. The study intends to determine the factors that affect the information seeking habits of users of academic law libraries in Delhi in digital environment.

4. Objectives of the Study

The present study has the following objectives:

- ♦ To find the Information seeking behavior of users of Academic Law Libraries in digital environment

- ♦ To identify the problems users of Academic Law Libraries face in accessing legal information

- ♦ To know the benefits of electronic databases for legal research

- ♦ To find the Library orientations programs facilitated for Users of Academic Law Libraries

- ♦ To suggest strategies to improve Information services by Academic Law Libraries.

5. Literature Review on Legal Information Seeking Behavior

Review of literature is an early step for conducting research. Studies on Information behavior of legal scholars provide overview of information skills, retrieving methodology and usage statistics of library resources. This helps law librarians to refine the design, promotional activities and assess the professional skills and implications for better collection development and services model development to fulfill the gap between scholars and law librarians in changing nature of legal scholarship. Borg & Gall (1979) defines "The literature in any field forms the foundation upon which all future work will be built. If we fail to build the foundation of knowledge provided by the review of literature our work is likely to be shallow and naïve, and will often duplicate work that has already been done better by someone else."

Howland and Lewis (1990) have made a survey to measure the electronic legal research skills of summer clerks and first-year associates from various law schools in America. The empirical data has been collected from the law firm libraries. The study shows that law school graduates have not learned the research skills needed in handling the cases in law firms. The summer clerks are not efficient users of databases like LexisNexis and Westlaw. The law schools should encourage the students and reexamine the legal research curriculum and strategies to deal with the problems effectively.

Kutlthau and Tama (2001) study information seeking behavior of lawyers as a particular group of information workers, and how they use information to accomplish their work. The finding reveals that the printed texts are preferred by lawyers over computer databases to accomplish the complex tasks of construction and interpretation of legal information. The major reason for the dissatisfaction are inadequacy in handling technological tools, as computer databases requires specified requests, and do not offer an option for examining wide range of information at one time. Suggested measures are improvement in the communication skills among the information providers and information seekers.

Callister (2003) outlines pedagogical models of legal research training and legal research education. It suggests that an appropriate pedagogical model should be designed and faculty should encourage students to frame the future problems and difficulties. The Librarians being legal research instructors teach and work with legal scholars while conducting legal research.

Kerins (2004) and others report the results of two studies which explore the information seeking habits of engineering and law students in Ireland. The findings illustrate that patterns of information seeking behavior students are based on G. J. Leckie model of information seeking of professionals. The studies suggest that students trained in information skills are needed to function effectively and efficiently to fulfill their professional engagements.

Wayne (2005) and J. P. Lomio summarize the findings of survey to online research habits of Stanford Law Students over the period (2002-2004). The survey revealed 80% of first year students performed well on online retrieval in 2002. The percentage grows upto 83% in 2003 and the percentage increased to 93% in the year 2004.

Lee F. Peoples (2005) assess and evaluate current position of electronic legal research over print resources. The study examines the existing scenario of research methods in finding rules from print digest by modern electronic legal researchers. It discusses the shortcomings of electronic research and suggests that the law library should provide orientation programs as part of curriculum. It advocate for integrated legal information literacy education.

Gallacher (2007) conducts a study to evaluate the reading, writing and research habits of first year law schools students. 740 students from seven different law schools responded. The survey designed to measure incoming law student's perceptions on information literacy skills programs and problem occurred.

The analysis suggests the following broad conclusions.

♦ The reading habits of first year law students are more than average.

♦ The incoming law students experiences some reading and writing problem.

♦ The first year law students have strong self belief, and over confidence on their reading, writing and research skills.

♦ The survey reveals that there is not sufficient students develop strong legal information literacy skills in law schools.[1]

Stephann Makri et al. (2006) study information seeking behavior of academic and practicing lawyers. The study aims to integrate user centered legal information seeking support into digital law libraries. The result of study has shown that academic lawyers often face difficulties in accessing and retrieving information from digital law libraries. It finds that the group of academic lawyers uses electronic resources to conduct legal information seeking. Most to them primarily rely on commercial platform like LexisNexis or Westlaw. The study suggests that the students should need to learn and practice more about accessing the digital legal information.

Jayasuriya and Brilliantine (2007) elaborately discuss issues relating to the changing need of law students in a new technological advancements and legal publishing in electronic formats the information is a base for all development activities. The law libraries and information centers must create users awareness of changing

information era with its electronic facilities. The authors urge for improvement of the minimum standards for legal information literacy up to graduation.

Stephanie Davidson (2010) explores research scholar's information behavior, habits and services needed while conducting scholarly research. The countless changes and advancement in technology and publishing have been done in legal information and legal research. These developments affect research habits of legal scholars and their use of the library. The implications on law librarians are vital for analyzing the important aspects of information seeking behavior of legal researchers by virtue of their experience and developing new policies on collection development and personalized services.

Makri (2008) in his doctoral thesis examines the information behavior of academic and practicing lawyers leading to development of two novel Information behavior methods for evaluating electronic resources on the bases of functionality and usability. It concludes that increase in the need and access of digital library collection and the finding of research suggested that the users feel that the digital resources are useful, usable and easy to learn, and would continue to access them in future.

Tuhumwire and Okello-Obura (2010) examine the legal information needs and problems faced by lawyers and legal practitioner in Uganda. In a democratic society the legal information is important and essential for effective justice. IT notes that the performance of any legal officer is depends on the access of right kind of legal information at right time. The study proposes many strategies to improve the access of legal information in Uganda Libraries. It recommends that the legal information providers need to be proactive to anticipate the needs of the users and consults with them regarding availability of legal information.

6. Research Methodology

The survey was conducted as a part of Doctoral research to find the information seeking behavior of legal researcher of academic law libraries in Delhi. The methodology of study is being formulated on the basis of various groups of users (undergraduate, postgraduates, research scholars and faculty members) available under the clientele of the following academic law libraries of Delhi.

- ♦ Amity Law School Library (Affiliated to GGS IP University, Delhi), Noida, Delhi NCR Region.
- ♦ University of Delhi, North Campus, New Delhi, Campus Law Centre, Faculty of Law.
- ♦ Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, Centre for the Study of Law and Governance.
- ♦ Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Dwarka, New Delhi
- ♦ Indian Law Institute: Deemed University, Bhagwandas Road, New Delhi
- ♦ Jamia Milia Islamia University, Jamia Nagar, New Delhi
- ♦ University of Delhi, North Campus, New Delhi, Law Centre-I, Faculty of Law.
- ♦ University of Delhi, Law Centre-II, Faculty of Law.
- ♦ National Law University, Delhi, Dwarka, New Delhi
- ♦ Vivekananda Institute of Professional Studies, affiliated to Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, New Delhi

6.1 Data Analysis & Interpretation

A questionnaire was designed and circulated to among the selected population. Both open and closed question were asked. A total of 685 questions were distributed and 528 duly filled in questionnaires back resulting the response rate of 88 percent. The analytical presentations of data and findings have been presented with the help of SPSS software in tabular and graphical formats.

6.2 Use of Computer Based Services

The survey asked to identify the use computers in accessing legal information for legal research. Table 1 reveals the preference of computer based services for basic legal research. It is observed that 96.6 per cent user's use computer based legal research the basic legal research. It reveals that only 3.4 per cent users prefer print resources.

Table 1.1: Use of Computers for Legal Research

S.No.	Description	Percentage
1.	Use of Computer Search	96.6
2.	Do not use of Computer Search	3.4

6.3 Problem in Accessing Legal Information from Electronic Databases

Respondents were asked in five possible variables the difficulties faced in accessing legal information in digital environment. The analysis reveals that large number of users are using computer based legal research techniques.

Table 1.2 indicates that 32.9 per cent users face login problem, 44.12 per cent users find problem in pinpointed search and searching relevant information. 51.7 per cent of user population suffers due to slow connectivity of internet. Only 28.03 per cent of users have indicated that the problem is due to non-availability of trained library staff in guiding them in handling electronic databases. Majority of users have indicated that restricted access and slow connection are the two main problems in usage of electronic databases.

Table 1.2: Problem Experienced while Information Seeking form Electronic Databases

S.No.	Problems	Users	%
1	Login Problem	174(Yes) 354 (No)	32.90 67.10
2	Search Problem	233(Yes) 295 (No)	44.12 55.88
3	Restricted Access	278(Yes) 250 (No)	52.65 47.35
4	Slow Connection	273(Yes) 255 (No)	51.70 48.30
5	Non-Availability of Library Staff	148(Yes) 380 (No)	28.03 71.97

Figure 1 reflects a graphical presentation of problems faced by the users in information seeking while using electronic databases. The Bars show that the major factors in accessing electronic databases are restricted access and slow connection. 28.03 per cent users have opted for non-availability of library staff for electronic database search support.
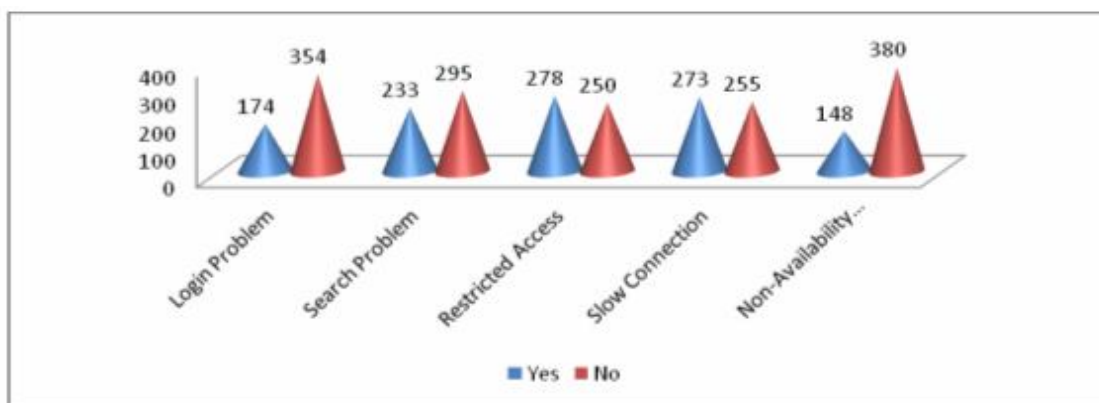

Figure 1.1: Problems Experiencing in Using Electronic Databases

6.4   Benefits of Using Electronic Databases

Users are asked to indicate six possible advantages of using electronic databases for legal research. Table 1.3 reveals that (79.16%) users agree that the electronic databases support easy to access literature. (65.90%) use email, save text, print result in support of legal research. (51.13%) users are satisfied with full text availability of information through electronic databases. It indicates that high percentage (70.26%) users find it beneficial to access electronic databases anytime even beyond library hours. Carrying of electronic data as benefit has been opted by least users i.e. (48.67%). Interestingly (56.43%) feel time saving is the main concern in use of electronic databases.

Table 1.3: Benefits of Using Electronic Databases

S.No.	Benefits	Agree		Disagree	
1.	Easy to Access	418	79.16%	110	10.84%
2.	Allow Email, Save Text, Print Results	348	65.90%	180	34.1%
3.	Availability of Full text	270	51.13%	258	48.87%
4.	Access Any Time	371	70.26%	157	29.74%
5.	Data Portability	257	48.67%	271	51.33%
6.	Time Saving	298	56.43%	230	43.57%

Figure 1.2 shows users' views regarding benefits of using electronic databases in legal research. Blue colour bars show that they agree that electronic databases are beneficial to legal research in terms of access,

time management, data portability and time saving (79.16%) users' say "easy to access" is the real benefit of using databases. However (48.87%) of users are in disagreement with the benefit of 'availability of full text'.
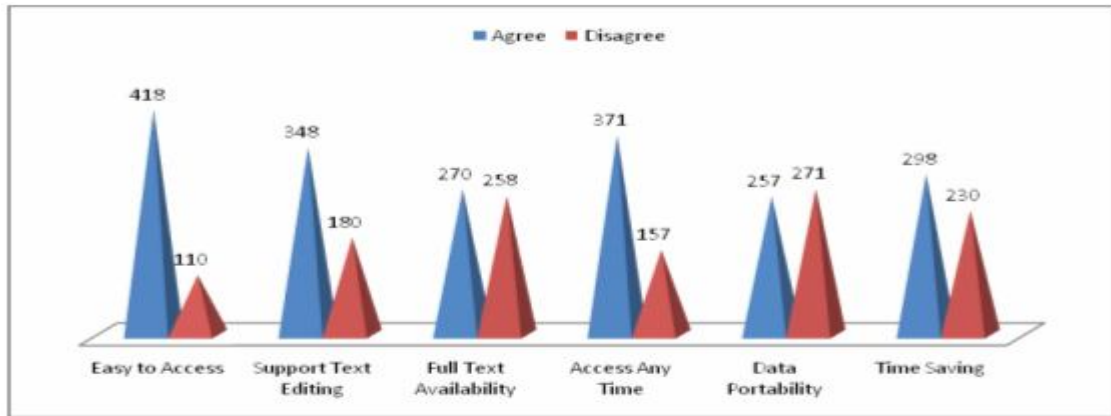

Figure 1.2: Benefits of Using Electronic Databases

6.5   Dependence Factors n Accessing Electronic Databases

Sample population was surveyed about the dependency factors of users for accessing the information form electronic databases. The study indicates that users support self accessing of information without taking help of any intermediary. Figure 1.3 highlights the user's dependency in handling electronic information. Very large percentage (89 per cent) users have opted for accessing electronic databases by their own. Only (10%) respondents have shown dependence over library staff and reference desk.   The figure shows positive trends in using electronic databases. Therefore users believe in self dependency in using electronic databases by their own efforts.
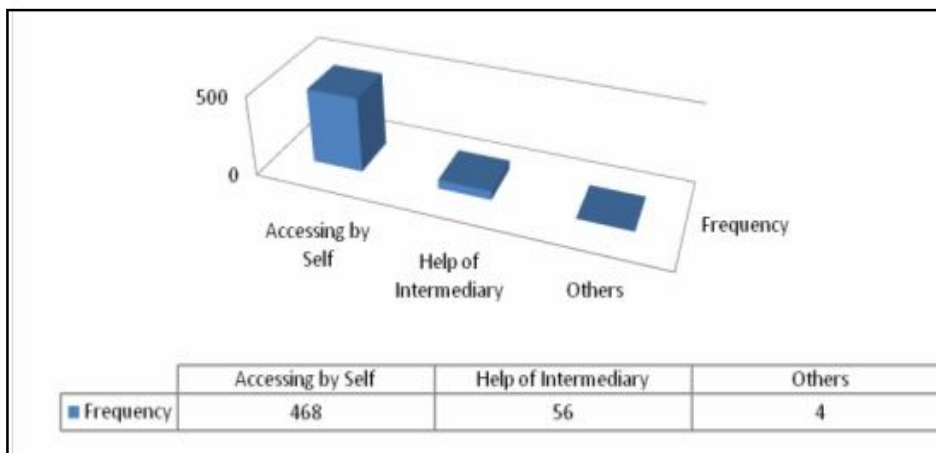

	Accessing by Self	Help of Intermediary	Others
■ Frequency	468	56	4

Figure 1.3: Dependence Factor in Accessing Electronic Databases

## 6.6   Information Literacy Programmes for Users of Library

Various orientations and information literacy programmes have been adopted by the libraries to solve the information seeking problems of the users of academic law library. It is found that maximum users have not attended library orientation programme for using any of the electronic database.

Table 1.4 identify that (24.25%) users agree regarding induction of commercial databases during library orientation programme while (14.60%) users give responses of explaining about public domain resources in user orientation programmes. Responses in explaining about CD-ROM databases during induction programmes are least upto 9.84 per cent only. Statistical data shows that libraries lack in educating users in both commercial as well as public domain resources.

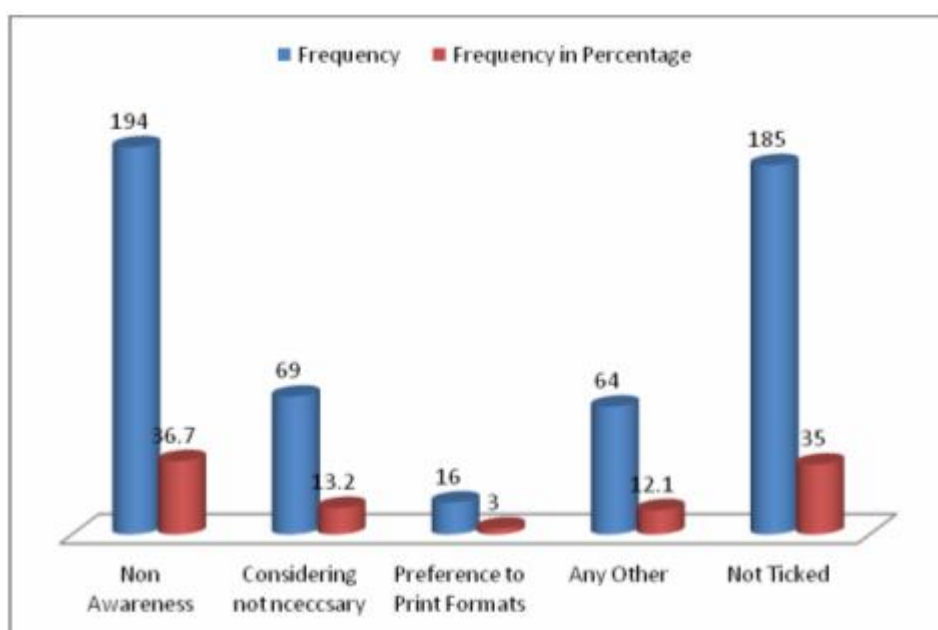**Table 1.4: Library Orientation Programme**

S.No.	Description	Commercial Database		Public Domain Resources		CD-ROM	
1	Library Orientation Attended/ Facilitated	128	24.25%	77	14.60%	52	9.84%
2	Library Orientation Not Attended/ Facilitated	400	75.75%	451	85.40%	476	90.16%

Figure 1.4 shows that (31%) users have given their consent about availing of library orientation programmes for using electronic databases. 69 per cent users have shown an unawareness of library orientation program given by the Library.

	Library Orientation Attended	Library Orientation not Attended
Column1	166	362
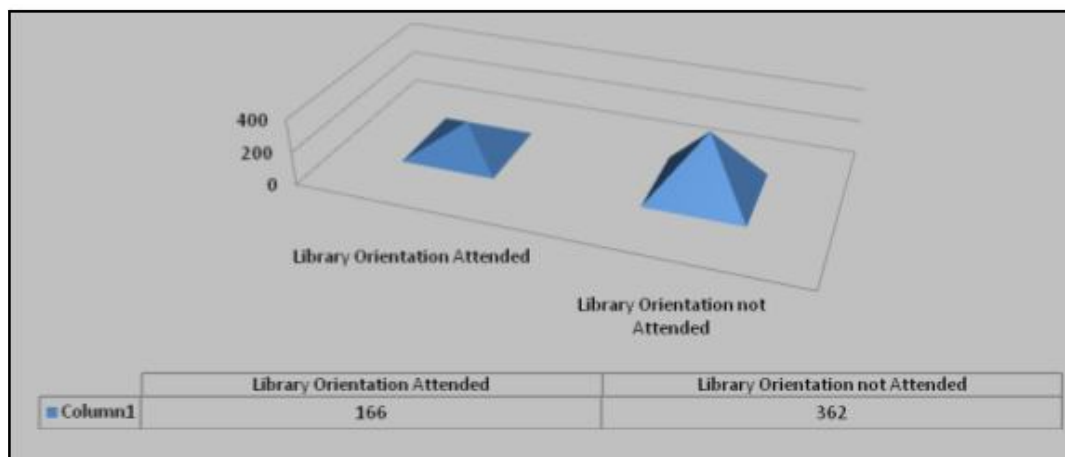
Figure 1.4: Library Orientation Attended

Figure 1.4 shows user responses for lacking of library orientation programmes. 36.7 per cent users are not aware about user orientation programme conducted by libraries. 13.2 per cent respondents do not consider it necessary, while 35 per cent users have not chosen any option.

Figure1.5: Reasons for Lacking of Library Orientation Programme

The data reflects that libraries are not providing user orientation programmes in the best and effective manner. Most supervising, users are not aware about such induction programmes and training being provided by library for both commercial as well as public domain databases.

7.   Findings and Suggestions

The following findings and suggestions have been extracted out with the need of the hours to improvise and better services to the clienteles on the part of librarians in the present scenario of information society.

♦   Users of the academic law libraries considered electronic databases as most useful sources of information 96.6% users identify that the computer assisted legal research as the most preferred way to fulfill the Information seeking need.

♦   It is observed that the users often faces problems while access the information in digital libraries. Librarians must adopt a proactive approach towards making the access process effective and less restrictions in accessing. The study finds that 67.1% users face login problem whereas 71.97% users of academic law libraries mentioned the lack in the library support services.

♦   The study identified the benefits of full integration of ICTs in accessing information; majority (79.6%) users agree that electronic databases support easy access of literature beyond the library hours.

♦   The study indicates that there is urgent need of library orientation and online information search skill programs to increase users' awareness, supporting to achieve information seeking behavior in digital environment.

The above points supports immediate shifting of libraries towards adopting of electronic databases to support computer assisted legal research. Librarians must follow Second Law of Library Science in the same manner with electronic resources to provide login access in a very convenient way to legal researchers; however majority of library users understand that finding relevant information through electronic mode is much easier as compare to print media. Librarians must provide a ready reference manual facilitating guidelines to access databases along with periodical library orientation programme to support user awareness in digitally oriented environment.

8.   Conclusion

The issues relating to information seeking behavior and ICT usage of legal researchers has become more paramount especially when information communication technologies have become the means of harnessing legal information in law libraries worldwide. This has posed serious challenges to law librarians. The paper reviewed literature on the information seeking behavior of law researcher, how they satisfy the information need and significant role of digital law libraries in information seeking process. The literature revealed various factors and implications on law researcher information seeking behavior and habits and the vital role a law librarian plays to fulfill the gap through better understanding of information seeking process and implementing effective outreach methodologies. The study finds that the librarians having adequate knowledge on subject matter and competency of electronic databases in the field are the only solution in improvising better library services to fulfill the information seeking need of research scholar.

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