An Investigation into the 'I can Google it' Information Seeking Behaviour of the Academic Community and the Implications for the Delivery of Academic Library Services for Developing Countries

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RESEARCH STUDENT PROJECT SUMMARY

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An Investigation into the 'I can Google it' Information Seeking Behaviour of the Academic Community and the Implications for the Delivery of Academic Library Services for Developing Countries

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Research aim

Considerable research has been carried out on the use of Google as an information source in par with a library (e.g. Georgas, 2013; Jamali & Asadi, 2010), evaluating the relevancy of search results retrieved through Google compared to library sources (e.g. Agricola et al., 2013). The existing literature predominantly conclude that while library sources are superior in quality (e.g. Brophy & Bawden, 2005), Google has gained popularity because of its ease of use and reliability (Howland, Wright, Boughan, & Roberts, 2009). Moreover, with the Net generation's high reliance on online media, there are indications of an 'I can Google it' mind-set that results in users bypassing libraries as an information source (Nicholas & Clark, 2015; Rowlands et al., 2008). The simultaneous use of library search to supplement or complement 'googling' is an aspect that has not received extensive research.

The purpose of this research is therefore to: (1) understand the characteristics of the 'I can Google it' information seeking behaviour of university students and academics; (2) investigate if (and how) this phenomenon impacts the provision of academic library services; and (3) examine the extent of the Googling phenomenon across divergent economies.

Research methods

The research takes a phenomenological approach using two purposefully selected case studies of a developed country (Australia) and a developing country (Maldives). A tertiary education institution from Australia and two institutions from the Maldives were selected using a purposive sampling approach. The methods employed for data collection were in-depth interviews of a small purposive sample of academics and students from the Maldives and a survey of a larger random sample from Australia and the Maldives.

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The purpose of the interviews was to gather a detailed understanding of the use of Google vs. traditional library sources for information seeking from a developing country perspective, given the shortage of research in this area. The findings from these interviews and existing literature emanating from developed country settings guided the design of an online questionnaire for the survey that was used in both cases.

The first and second phases of data collection were the interviews completed in January 2015. Phase three of data collection, a survey of Maldives National University, Villa College and Curtin University using an online questionnaire, was completed in November 2016.

Outcomes

The emerging results indicate that Google is the starting point for discovery of information for academics and students regardless of whether they have access to a resource-rich library or not. The results also indicate that the participants from the sample Australian institution are more satisfied with both Google search results and library resources than their counterparts from the Maldives. Details about these findings and implications will be forthcoming in journal publications.

While this research is specific to 'googling', because it is based on the theoretical framework of 'information seeking behaviour' the findings will identify parallels as well as shifts in perception with existing body of literature on this topic. More importantly, in addition to the overall contribution in understanding the googling phenomenon, this research also focuses on information seeking behaviour of an academic community in a developing country with significantly inferior access to information resources. The number of similar studies is limited, and therefore it is anticipated that the research findings will be especially useful in shaping/reshaping the delivery of academic library services in developing countries.

Disclosure statement

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