

## **Use of Online Search Tools for Locating Information Sources: A Pilot Survey at the Faculty of Science, University of Ruhuna**

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In this information age, it is very much difficult to locate comprehensive, relevant and unbiased information. Selection of the search tool is an essential step in the search process for locating relevant research literature. Objective of this research was to assess the information-seeking patterns of academic staff members at the Faculty of Science, University of Ruhuna, with reference to their selection of online search tools. Study used a pre-tested structured survey questionnaire to collect data. Response ratio was 63%. Collected data were processed and analyzed using SPSS and Microsoft Excel.

According to the respondents, general search engines (80.6%) were more popular among academic staff members than journal databases (66.7%) and Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) (50 %). Only 5.6 % of the respondents were using Meta search engines and Subject gateways. Pearson Chi-Square test showed that there was a statistically significant association between use of search engines and online journal databases ( $\chi^2=0.355$ ,  $P=.551$ ); and between use of search engines and OPAC ( $\chi^2=0.177$ ,  $P=.674$ ). According to the results, there was no statistically significant association between teaching and research experience and selection of searching tools; online journal databases ( $\chi^2=3.112$ ,  $P=.375$ ); OPAC ( $\chi^2=1.267$ ,  $P=.737$ ); and search engines ( $\chi^2=4.026$ ,  $P=.259$ ). The survey showed that general search engine users were more likely to select databases and OPAC as a search tool. In conclusion, low use of online journal databases, subject gateways and OPAC for locating research and teaching information, demonstrates a need for meaningful promotion of online resources for locating reliable information and providing training to adapt to best utilize online information.

**Keywords:** Databases, Human computer interaction, Online searching, Search engines, Search process

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