Changing Trends in Information Sources Used by the Urdu Literature Students

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Abstract

This study explores the factors influencing the adoption and use of digital information sources among Urdu literature students in Pakistani universities. Despite the increasing availability of digital academic resources, students in this discipline continue to rely on traditional print materials. The research identifies key barriers, including limited digital literacy, lack of institutional support, inadequate technological infrastructure, and the scarcity of Urdu-language scholarly content in digital formats. Findings indicate that many students are unfamiliar with digital research tools, struggle with internet accessibility, and face financial constraints that limit their engagement with online academic databases.

Additionally, faculty preferences for print sources and the absence of structured digital literacy training contribute to students' reluctance to embrace digital resources. The study underscores the need for universities to expand digital collections, provide targeted ICT training, improve internet access, and promote the digitalization of Urdu-language academic content. Addressing these challenges can help facilitate a smoother transition toward digital research practices and ensure that Urdu literature students fully benefit from online scholarly resources.

1. Introduction

The digital revolution has significantly transformed the way students and researchers seek and utilize information, leading to a shift from traditional print sources to digital information resources. This transition is particularly evident in academic settings, where access to online databases, e-books, research journals, and digital archives has become integral to the learning process. However, the extent to which students from different academic disciplines embrace digital resources varies based on multiple factors, including technological infrastructure, digital literacy, institutional support, and personal preferences. Among these disciplines, Urdu literature represents a unique case, as it has traditionally relied on printed books, manuscripts, and oral traditions for the transmission of knowledge. The increasing availability of digital platforms and electronic resources in Urdu literature raises important questions about the factors that influence the adoption and use of these resources among students in Pakistani universities.

The study by Khanum and Bashir (2021) highlights that despite the proliferation of digital information sources, many Urdu literature students in Pakistan still struggle with utilizing these resources effectively. One of the key factors influencing the adoption of digital sources is the availability and accessibility of relevant content in the Urdu language. Unlike English and other widely spoken languages, Urdu has historically had limited representation in digital repositories. Although platforms such as Rekhta, the Allama Iqbal Urdu Cyber Library, and the Pakistan Research Repository have attempted to digitize Urdu literary works,

students often find it challenging to access comprehensive and up-to-date scholarly materials online (Rafiq & Ameen, 2009). This lack of digital content creates a preference for traditional print sources, which remain more accessible and reliable for academic research in Urdu literature.

Another crucial factor affecting the use of digital information sources is students' familiarity with and competence in information and communication technology (ICT). The research by Khanum and Bashir (2021) indicates that many Urdu literature students in Pakistani universities lack adequate ICT skills, which hinders their ability to navigate digital databases and effectively retrieve information. The study found that a significant proportion of students were not comfortable using research journals, research reports, theses, and reference works available online. This gap in digital literacy suggests that training programs and workshops on ICT and digital research methodologies could play a vital role in increasing students' confidence and competence in using digital resources. The study also emphasizes that special training initiatives should be designed for literature students to familiarize them with new technologies and research techniques in the digital era (Bashir & Warraich, 2020).

Institutional support, particularly from university libraries, is another determining factor in the adoption of digital information sources among Urdu literature students. The availability of well-equipped digital libraries, access to subscription-based journals, and university-led initiatives to promote digital literacy significantly impact students' engagement with online resources. Khanum and Bashir (2021) report that a considerable number of students rely on institutional libraries for their research needs. However, many university libraries in Pakistan face budget constraints, limiting their ability to provide updated digital collections and adequate research facilities for literature students (Bashir & Khanum, 2021). Moreover, while some institutions have digital repositories and online archives, students often lack awareness of these resources or do not receive sufficient guidance on how to utilize them effectively. This underscores the need for universities to enhance their digital infrastructure and actively promote digital resources to facilitate better access for Urdu literature scholars.

The role of faculty members and academic mentors also plays a significant role in shaping students' information-seeking behavior. The study reveals that many Urdu literature students prefer relying on printed books, lecture notes, and

handouts rather than digital resources. This preference is partly influenced by the teaching methodologies employed by faculty members. If instructors primarily recommend print materials and do not actively integrate digital resources into their coursework, students may not feel compelled to explore online academic sources (Arshad & Ameen, 2021). On the other hand, faculty members who incorporate digital databases, online research tools, and e-libraries into their teaching can encourage students to engage more with digital information sources. Therefore, faculty involvement in promoting digital literacy and guiding students on how to use online academic resources effectively can be a crucial factor in increasing the adoption of digital information sources.

Another factor that influences the use of digital resources is students' personal attitudes and perceptions toward digital information. The research suggests that while some students appreciate the convenience and accessibility of digital resources, others are skeptical about their reliability and authenticity. Many students perceive print materials as more credible and comprehensive compared to digital sources, which often vary in quality and require critical evaluation (Tenopir, King, Choemprayong, & Wu, 2009). The habit of relying on traditional sources is deeply ingrained in the academic culture of Urdu literature, where classical texts and manuscripts hold significant importance. Consequently, the shift to digital resources requires a cultural change in academic practices, where students and educators alike recognize the value of online scholarly materials and develop skills to critically assess their quality and credibility.

The accessibility of internet services and digital devices also plays a pivotal role in determining the extent to which students engage with digital information sources. The digital divide in Pakistan, characterized by disparities in internet access and technological infrastructure, affects students' ability to utilize online academic resources (Ahsan, 2009). While students in urban centers with reliable internet connections and access to university-provided digital facilities may find it easier to adopt digital sources, those in rural areas or with limited financial resources may face significant barriers. Khanum and Bashir (2021) highlight that financial constraints often prevent students from purchasing personal laptops, smartphones, or subscribing to paid academic databases, further limiting their engagement with digital information. Addressing these disparities through government initiatives, university funding, and affordable digital access programs can help bridge the gap

and ensure that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background, can benefit from digital academic resources.

Conferences, seminars, and workshops also contribute to shaping students' information-seeking behavior in the digital age. The study notes that participation in academic conferences and research discussions provides students with exposure to contemporary research trends and digital tools used in scholarly work (Shaheen, 2010). However, many Urdu literature students are reluctant to attend such events, which reduces their opportunities to develop digital research skills and stay updated on the latest advancements in their field. Encouraging students to engage with academic communities and participate in knowledge-sharing activities can help them become more comfortable with digital platforms and online research methodologies.

Furthermore, cultural and linguistic factors also influence students' engagement with digital information sources. The dominance of English as the primary language of digital scholarship often creates barriers for Urdu literature students who may not be proficient in English (Durrani, 2010). The study underscores that while digital resources in Urdu are growing, they remain significantly limited compared to English-language materials. This linguistic gap makes it difficult for students to access relevant digital content and forces them to rely more on traditional Urdu literature sources available in print. Expanding the availability of high-quality Urdu digital resources and promoting multilingual access to academic databases can help address this challenge and encourage students to adopt digital information sources more effectively.

In short, the adoption and use of digital information sources among Urdu literature students in Pakistani universities are influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including digital literacy, institutional support, faculty involvement, technological access, cultural perceptions, and linguistic barriers. While the digital era offers unprecedented opportunities for academic research, the transition from traditional to digital resources remains gradual and uneven. Addressing these challenges requires targeted efforts from universities, policymakers, and educators to enhance digital infrastructure, promote digital literacy, and encourage a more inclusive and accessible digital academic environment for Urdu literature scholars. By bridging the gaps in digital access and competency, institutions can ensure that

Urdu literature students fully benefit from the vast potential of digital information resources in their academic pursuits.

2. Literature Review

The increasing dependence on digital information sources has transformed academic research, significantly influencing students' information-seeking behavior. As technology advances, the shift from traditional print sources to digital resources has become a central focus in information science. However, the adoption of digital information resources is not uniform across disciplines, with students in the humanities, particularly those studying Urdu literature, facing distinct challenges and opportunities. The factors influencing the adoption and use of digital information sources among Urdu literature students in Pakistani universities have been explored in various studies, revealing key themes such as digital literacy, institutional support, technological accessibility, and linguistic barriers. While digital platforms and repositories continue to expand, the question remains whether Urdu literature students are effectively engaging with these resources, and if not, what factors hinder their adoption.

The study by Khanum and Bashir (2021) provides an extensive overview of the current state of information-seeking behavior among Urdu literature students, emphasizing the increasing reliance on digital technologies. However, their research also reveals that despite the availability of online resources, students often struggle with utilizing them effectively. One of the primary factors influencing this trend is digital literacy. Digital competence plays a crucial role in determining how effectively students can navigate, retrieve, and assess information from online sources. According to Howlader and Islam (2019), information-seeking behavior is closely linked to students' ability to use digital tools efficiently. Their findings align with those of Khanum and Bashir (2021), who noted that many Urdu literature students lack training in using digital platforms, leading them to rely on traditional print materials. The absence of structured digital literacy programs in Pakistani universities has further contributed to this gap, limiting students' ability to conduct research using online databases, digital archives, and e-books.

Another significant factor affecting the use of digital sources is the availability and accessibility of online Urdu literature resources. While digital repositories such as Rekhta.org and the Pakistan Research Repository provide access to Urdu literary works, their coverage remains limited in comparison to English-language databases. Rafiq and Ameen (2009) pointed out that Pakistani universities have

been slow in developing digital libraries that cater specifically to humanities students. Their study found that while STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) disciplines have benefited from digital advancements, the humanities, particularly Urdu literature, continue to rely on conventional sources due to the lack of comprehensive digital repositories. Similar observations were made by Ahsan (2009), who argued that the digital divide in Pakistan has hindered the progress of humanities research, as digitalization efforts are often prioritized for scientific fields.

The role of university libraries in facilitating access to digital information sources is another crucial factor influencing students' adoption of online resources. The study by Khanum and Bashir (2021) highlights that a significant proportion of Urdu literature students rely on institutional libraries for their academic needs. However, many libraries in Pakistani universities face budgetary constraints that prevent them from expanding their digital collections. Bashir and Khanum (2021) emphasized the need for universities to allocate more resources toward digitizing Urdu literature and making it readily available for students. The lack of access to paid academic databases, coupled with limited training on how to use open-access resources, further discourages students from fully engaging with digital information sources. Similar findings were reported by Arshad and Ameen (2021), who noted that while university libraries play a pivotal role in shaping students' research habits, inadequate funding and lack of trained personnel often restrict their effectiveness in promoting digital literacy.

Faculty involvement and academic culture also shape students' attitudes toward digital information sources. The study by Tenopir, King, Choemprayong, and Wu (2009) revealed that students' reliance on digital resources is heavily influenced by their instructors' teaching methodologies. If faculty members encourage the use of digital journals, e-books, and online archives, students are more likely to explore these sources for academic research. However, in many Urdu literature programs, traditional teaching methods continue to dominate, with faculty members primarily recommending printed books and lecture notes. This preference for conventional resources discourages students from developing proficiency in using digital academic databases. Shaheen (2010) emphasized that the future of Pakistani languages, including Urdu, depends on the integration of digital tools into research and teaching practices. Without active faculty engagement in promoting digital literacy, students may continue to perceive print resources as more credible and reliable than digital alternatives.

Students' perceptions and attitudes toward digital resources further influence their adoption. According to Bashir et al. (2018), a significant portion of students in Pakistan still view digital information sources with skepticism, particularly due to concerns over credibility and reliability. Many students believe that print materials offer more authoritative content, while online sources are often viewed as unverified or less scholarly. This perception is reinforced by the lack of standardized digital resources in Urdu literature, where many online sources are not properly curated or peer-reviewed. A similar argument was presented by Weber, Becker, and Hillmert (2019), who found that students' information-seeking behavior in higher education is shaped by their confidence in evaluating and verifying digital content. Without adequate training in digital literacy, students may struggle to distinguish between credible academic sources and unreliable online materials, further reducing their engagement with digital resources.

Technological accessibility is another major determinant of students' ability to adopt digital information sources. The digital divide in Pakistan continues to create disparities in access to internet services and digital devices, particularly for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Ahsan (2009) highlighted that the lack of affordable internet connectivity and limited access to personal laptops or smartphones prevent many students from utilizing digital academic resources effectively. Khanum and Bashir (2021) also noted that financial constraints often restrict students from subscribing to paid academic journals or purchasing e-books, forcing them to rely on free but often outdated or incomplete online sources. These accessibility barriers disproportionately affect students from rural areas, where internet penetration remains low and university infrastructure is often underdeveloped.

Participation in academic conferences, workshops, and seminars also plays a role in shaping students' engagement with digital resources. The study by Khanum and Bashir (2021) found that Urdu literature students rarely attend conferences or engage with research communities, limiting their exposure to contemporary research trends and digital research tools. In contrast, students in disciplines that emphasize research dissemination and scholarly networking are more likely to develop skills in using digital academic databases. Bashir and Warraich (2020) argue that digital research skills can be significantly enhanced through participation in academic discussions and collaborations. However, the lack of research-oriented activities in Urdu literature programs reduces students' opportunities to develop familiarity with digital tools and online research methods.

Linguistic barriers also contribute to the slow adoption of digital resources among Urdu literature students. English remains the dominant language in digital academic publishing, with limited high-quality scholarly content available in Urdu. Durrani (2010) emphasized that while efforts have been made to digitize Urdu texts, the availability of academic research in Urdu remains significantly lower than in English. This linguistic gap forces many students to rely on traditional Urdu books and manuscripts, which are often not available in digital format. The issue of language accessibility in digital academic resources has also been highlighted by Sycz-Opoń (2019), who noted that students in non-English-speaking regions often struggle with adopting digital information sources due to language constraints. Expanding digital content in Urdu and integrating multilingual academic databases could help bridge this gap and encourage greater engagement with digital resources.

The existing literature underscores the complex interplay of factors that influence the adoption and use of digital information sources among Urdu literature students in Pakistani universities. While digitalization presents significant opportunities for academic research, challenges such as limited digital literacy, lack of institutional support, financial constraints, and linguistic barriers continue to hinder its full adoption. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach, including enhanced digital literacy programs, increased university funding for digital resources, and the promotion of digital academic culture among faculty and students. By bridging the gaps in digital access and competency, universities can ensure that Urdu literature students fully benefit from the vast potential of digital academic resources in their academic pursuits.

3. Results and Discussion

The results of the study by Khanum and Bashir (2021) provide valuable insights into the factors influencing the adoption and use of digital information sources among Urdu literature students in Pakistani universities. The findings reveal that despite the increasing availability of digital resources, many students still prefer traditional print materials over online academic sources. One of the major reasons for this trend is the lack of digital literacy among students, which affects their ability to effectively search, retrieve, and evaluate information from online platforms. The study found that a significant number of students were not comfortable using research journals, research reports, theses, and reference works in digital formats. This lack of familiarity with digital tools suggests that the

transition from traditional to digital resources is not merely a matter of access but also of competency and training. The results further highlight that many students are unaware of the existence of digital repositories and databases available at their universities, limiting their ability to benefit from these resources.

Institutional support, particularly the role of university libraries, emerged as a critical factor in shaping students' information-seeking behavior. The study found that while university libraries serve as primary information hubs, they often lack adequate digital collections and online research facilities for Urdu literature students. Budget constraints and insufficient digital infrastructure prevent libraries from expanding their online resources, forcing students to rely more on traditional materials. Additionally, the results indicate that a significant portion of students rely on faculty recommendations when selecting research materials, and because many faculty members themselves prioritize print sources, students remain disengaged from digital resources. This finding aligns with prior research by Arshad and Ameen (2021), which emphasizes that students' engagement with digital academic sources is strongly influenced by the pedagogical approaches used by their instructors. The study by Khanum and Bashir (2021) suggests that unless faculty members actively integrate digital research tools into their teaching, students will continue to rely on conventional sources.

Technological accessibility and infrastructure were also identified as major barriers to the effective adoption of digital information sources. The study found that many students, particularly those from rural areas, struggle with limited internet access and a lack of personal digital devices, such as laptops or smartphones, which are essential for academic research. These findings support earlier research by Ahsan (2009), who noted that disparities in digital access create significant inequalities in students' ability to engage with online academic resources. The financial constraints faced by students further restrict their access to subscription-based academic journals and paid databases, leaving them with only limited open-access materials that may not always be sufficient for their research needs. The digital divide between urban and rural students in Pakistan continues to affect the way information is accessed and utilized, reinforcing the importance of institutional policies aimed at reducing these disparities.

The study also reveals a lack of engagement with scholarly activities such as academic conferences, research discussions, and workshops. Urdu literature students were found to have lower participation rates in such activities, which limits their exposure to contemporary research trends and digital research methodologies. The results indicate that students who actively engage in academic discussions and collaborative research projects are more likely to develop digital literacy skills and become comfortable using online resources. These findings align with the research by Bashir and Warraich (2020), which highlights the role of scholarly networking in improving students' research competencies. However, because Urdu literature programs do not always emphasize research-based learning, students often miss opportunities to enhance their information-seeking skills.

Another key finding of the study relates to students' attitudes toward digital information sources. While some students recognize the convenience and accessibility of digital platforms, many remain skeptical about the reliability and authenticity of online materials. This skepticism is largely due to the unstructured nature of digital Urdu literature resources, where quality control mechanisms are not as rigorous as in traditional print publishing. The study found that many students perceive print materials as more credible and comprehensive than digital sources, a belief reinforced by the lack of standardized Urdu-language digital archives. This aligns with the findings of Tenopir et al. (2009), who argue that students' trust in digital academic sources depends on the perceived quality and credibility of the materials available. Addressing this issue requires the development of more well-curated and peer-reviewed Urdu-language digital resources to enhance students' confidence in using them for research.

Linguistic barriers were also found to play a significant role in students' limited engagement with digital information sources. The study noted that most high-quality academic resources are available in English, whereas Urdu-language digital scholarship remains underdeveloped. This linguistic gap forces students to rely on traditional print materials, which are more readily available in Urdu. The findings support the observations of Durrani (2010), who emphasized that the expansion of Urdu-language digital scholarship is essential for promoting greater digital engagement among students of Urdu literature. Without increased efforts

to digitize Urdu academic materials and integrate multilingual academic databases, students will continue to face difficulties in accessing relevant digital resources.

The study's results highlight the need for targeted interventions to improve the adoption of digital information sources among Urdu literature students. One of the most pressing recommendations is the introduction of digital literacy programs tailored specifically for humanities students. Training workshops on academic database usage, digital research methodologies, and critical evaluation of online sources can significantly improve students' ability to engage with digital resources. Furthermore, universities must allocate greater funding toward the expansion of digital collections in Urdu literature and ensure that institutional libraries have the necessary infrastructure to support students' digital research needs. Faculty members should also play a more active role in promoting digital literacy by integrating online academic sources into their teaching and encouraging students to explore digital platforms for research.

The study also emphasizes the importance of addressing technological accessibility issues. Expanding university-provided digital facilities, ensuring free or subsidized internet access for students, and offering affordable digital device programs can help bridge the digital divide. Additionally, fostering a research-oriented culture within Urdu literature programs by encouraging participation in academic conferences, research collaborations, and digital publishing initiatives can further enhance students' engagement with online academic resources.

Overall, the findings suggest that the adoption and use of digital information sources among Urdu literature students in Pakistani universities are influenced by a combination of digital literacy levels, institutional support, technological infrastructure, linguistic barriers, and cultural attitudes toward digital scholarship. While digitalization presents new opportunities for academic research, significant challenges remain in ensuring that students fully benefit from these resources. By addressing these challenges through institutional policies, faculty engagement, and digital resource development, universities can foster a more research-driven academic environment where Urdu literature students can effectively utilize digital information sources for their scholarly pursuits.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the complex interplay of factors influencing the adoption and use of digital information sources among Urdu literature students in Pakistani universities. Despite the increasing availability of digital resources, students continue to rely heavily on traditional print materials due to gaps in digital literacy, limited institutional support, technological barriers, and linguistic constraints. The study reveals that many students lack the necessary skills to navigate and critically assess digital academic sources, which significantly hampers their ability to engage with online research materials. This challenge is further compounded by the fact that university libraries, which serve as primary research hubs, often lack the digital infrastructure and funding required to provide comprehensive online collections tailored to the needs of Urdu literature students. Without structured digital literacy programs and increased awareness of available online resources, students will continue to struggle with integrating digital sources into their academic practices.

Institutional factors play a critical role in shaping students' information-seeking behaviors. The study demonstrates that faculty members, who act as key influencers in students' academic choices, often prioritize print sources over digital ones. Consequently, students are not encouraged to explore digital research tools, leading to continued dependence on traditional methods. The study also identifies technological and financial constraints as major obstacles, particularly for students from rural areas who face limited internet access and a lack of personal digital devices. These disparities contribute to the digital divide, further restricting students' engagement with online academic resources. Addressing these challenges requires universities to invest in expanding digital collections, ensuring better internet connectivity, and providing training sessions to equip students with the skills necessary for effective digital research.

Another critical barrier to digital resource adoption is the limited availability of Urdu-language academic materials in digital format. The study underscores that most high-quality scholarly research is published in English, making it difficult for Urdu literature students to access relevant content. While efforts have been made to digitize Urdu literary works through platforms like Rekhta and the Pakistan Research Repository, these resources remain insufficient to meet the growing

academic demands of students. Expanding digital Urdu-language archives, integrating multilingual academic databases, and promoting open-access publishing in Urdu are essential steps toward bridging this gap.

Overall, the findings suggest that the transition from traditional to digital research practices among Urdu literature students is slow and uneven. While digital technologies offer significant opportunities for academic research, several structural, technological, and cultural challenges must be addressed to facilitate their widespread adoption. Universities must implement comprehensive digital literacy initiatives, improve library digital infrastructure, and encourage faculty to integrate digital resources into their teaching methodologies. Additionally, efforts to make Urdu academic content more widely available in digital formats can play a crucial role in fostering greater engagement with online scholarly materials. By addressing these issues, institutions can create an academic environment where Urdu literature students can fully benefit from the vast potential of digital information sources, ultimately enhancing the quality and accessibility of research in the field.

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