Use and Perception of Sci-Hub by Library and Information Science (LIS) Professionals: From an Indian Perspective

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Abstract:

Sci-Hub a pirated website for scholarly articles have been heavily used in India and other parts of the world. Alexandra Elbakyan, a computer geek and a native of Kazakhstan has created this Sci-hub for providing free access to scholarly publications in 2011. India being one of the top countries in downloading research papers from this website, there was not much literature available on this site to understand its use and popularity. In this study, a survey has been conducted to understand the use and perception of Sci-hub from Indian librarians' perspective. Lack of institutional access to scholarly articles, journals escalating cost, and easy & free access to paywalled content were the primary reasons for using this site, the study found. Another interesting result was that 30% of the survey respondents opined that it was morally and legally wrong to download articles from Sci-Hub.

Keywords: Sci-Hub, LibGen, India, LIS Professional, Survey Pirated Websites, Open Access, Scientific Publications, Scholarly Communications

INTRODUCTION

Scholarly communication has seen rapid developments over the years. Technological advancements have simplified the access to scholarly communication through various channels. The Open Access movement is one notable example. However, there are still exist access barriers with regard to scientific publications. Study after study have found that still access to 75% of the scholarly documents are restricted under paywall system¹. Because of Paywalled content, developing or low-income countries are at a disadvantaged position in terms of access to scholarly literature. The ever escalating cost of journal subscriptions and dwindling budgets of libraries have also turned out to be burdensome for libraries/individuals of low income countries to access scientific publications. The emergence of shadow libraries such as LibGen, ResearchGate, academia.edu, Google Scholar and Sci-Hub have altered the dynamics of scholarly communications in a big way. Sci-Hub has been the most disruptive platform in scientific communications.

This survey provides a snapshot on how library and information science professionals have viewed Sci-Hub from an Indian perspective. India is also one of the top country in terms of number of articles downloaded from Sci-Hub. From 2011 to 2013 Indian have downloaded 229771 articles from Sci-Hub, next to Russia (1491679 downloaded articles), Ukraine (447660 downloaded articles) & Iran (433392 downloaded articles)². This statistics was for 2011-2013 when Sci-Hub was not much known in academic circle in India and elsewhere. But now this data might have tripled or even more. Major publishers Elsevier, Wiley and American Chemical Society (ACS) have filled a lawsuit in Delhi High Court for blocking Sci-hub site in India. In this context also this survey holds important to understand what Indian librarians think about Sci-Hub and why they access this site frequently.

DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

¹ <https://elifesciences.org/articles/32822>

² https://twitter.com/Sci_Hub/status/1221827163781058562

The data for this study was collected via online. Google Forms was used to design the survey. Google Forms is a cloud based data management tool mainly used for designing and developing web based questionnaires. This tool is provided by Google Inc., freely on the web to use and create web based questionnaires by anyone.

The survey was posted on social media platforms and LIS Forum for wide reach of the audience for participation. This survey was posted on December 5th 2019 on LIS forum and subsequently on the Facebook profile of the author. It was widely shared on the social media platforms and was up on the web up to 20th December 2019 for completing the survey. In all 86 library professionals working in academia, corporate library and in other field have participated in the survey. The survey data was analyzed and presented in the data analysis and results section

RESULTS

The survey results depicts the demographic analysis of the survey participants and use and perception of Sci-Hub. Almost 84% of the participants have known about Sci-hub website for downloading scholarly articles. When it was asked about downloading articles from Sci-hub for their own research or others, 58.8% of participants have responded that they have downloaded articles from Sci-Hub. Majority of the LIS professionals (80%) have used Sci-Hub for downloading articles a few times in a month. Almost 50% of the LIS professionals who have responded to the survey have pointed that lack of access to scholarly publications or articles was the primary reason for using Sci-Hub. Twenty-six percent of the respondents have said that easy access to find articles was the reason, the other reason that the remaining 25% of the respondents were cited was publishers' exorbitant price of scholarly articles. LibGen another pirated website which was used extensively by Indian LIS professionals (69.09%) for downloading the scholarly publications. It is ironic that three major publishers Elsevier, Wiley & American Chemical Society (ACS) have filled a lawsuit against both Sci-Hub and LibGen. #IcanhazPDF, academica.edu and Bookfi were the other social media platforms and sites which have been used by Indian LIS professionals to find scholarly materials. However, very less frequently. When it was asked to Indian LIS professionals about the perception of Sci-hub and other similar pirated sites, almost 38%

of the respondents have mentioned that Sci-hub and other pirated sites would increase the immediate open access to scientific literature, 28% of the revealed that it has provided them easy access to paywalled content in developing countries. Thirty percent of the respondents have said that it was legally and morally wrong to use Sci-hub and other pirated sites for downloading articles on the Internet. Though 30% of the LIS professionals were of against using Sci-Hub and other similar sites to access research content, because of copyright and IPR laws librarians do have their own restrictions with regard to copyright infringement and violations in an institutional set up. That might have reflected here. Otherwise, in an individual capacity librarians being spearheading the open access movement in India and elsewhere extend their support to provide access to knowledge without any restrictions.

DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1
Demographic Variables

	Demographic Variables	Responses	Percentage
	Gender (N*=86)		
	Male	70	81.40%
	Female	16	18.60%
	Age (N=85)		
	21-30	24	28.24%
	31-40	36	42.35%
	41-50	21	24.71
	50 & Above	04	4.71%
	Educational Qualification (N=86)		
	MLISc	45	52.33%
	MLISc, PhD.	21	24.42%
	MLISc, M.Phil.	11	12.79%
	MA, MLISc	04	4.65%
	MLISc, PGDLAN, DCA	04	4.65%
	BLISc	01	1.16%
	Designation(N=85)		
	Librarian	45	52.94%
	Assistant Librarian	13	15.29%
	Library Assistant/Library Project Assistant (LPA)	10	11.76%
	Professor/Assistant Professor/Teacher	07	8.24%
	Research Scholars/Students	06	7.06%
	Deputy Librarian/Senior Librarian	03	3.53%
	Digital Library Analyst	01	1.18%
	Field of Employment (N=85)		
	Academic Library	77	90.59%
	Research Library	07	8.24%
	Corporate Library	01	1.18%
	Publication of Research Article (N=84)		
	Yes	68	80.95%
	No	16	19.05%

* Number of Responses

1. Do You Know what is Sci-Hub and what it does?

meta-chart.com

Knowledge of Sci-Hub	Responses (N=84)	Percentage
Yes	72	83.72
No	14	16.28
Total	86	100%

2. Have you Obtained/downloaded Pirated Research Articles through Sci-Hub for Supporting Your Own Research or Others?

meta-chart.com

Downloading Research Article from Sci-hub	Responses (N=85)	Percentage
Yes	50	58.82%
No	35	41.18%
Total	85	100%

3. If Yes, How often have you Used Sci-Hub for Obtaining/Downloading Pirated Research Articles?

■ Daily
 ■ Few Times in a Week
 ■ Few Times in a Month

meta-chart.com

Frequency of Downloading Article from Sci-hub	Responses (N=50)	Percentage
Few Times in a Month	40	80.00%
Few Times in a Week	09	18.00%
Daily	01	02.00%

4. What are the Primary Reason for Using Sci-Hub for Downloading Research Articles?

Primary Reason for Using Sci-hub	Responses (N=68)	Percentage
My Institution/Library Doesn't Have Access to the Article	33	48.53%
Easy to Use ((Convenience) Articles are Few Clicks Away)	18	26.47%
Difficult to Purchase Article on My Own Because of Exorbitant Publishers Price	17	25.00%
Total	68	100%

5. Have You Used Other Repositories of Pirated Papers to Obtain Research Articles and other Scholarly Materials?

meta-chart.com

Use of Other Repositories of Pirated papers	Responses (N=55)*	Percentage
LibGen (Library Genesis)	38	69.09%
#Icanhazpdf	04	7.27%
Academia.edu	02	3.64%
Bookfi	01	1.82%
No	10	18.18%

6. Being a Library Professional, What Do You think of Sci-Hub and Other Repositories of Pirated Papers?

Librarians Perception on Sci-hub and Other Pirated Sites	Responses (N=79)	Percentage
It will Increase Immediate Open Access to Scientific Literature	30	37.97%
It has Provided Easy Access to Paywalled Content in Developing Countries	22	27.85%
It is Legally and Morally Wrong to Use Sci-Hub and Other Pirated Sources for Downloading Research Articles	24	30.38%
Others (Education should be free of cost so as knowledge, Fair to use for academic purpose, a movement against the publishers dominance)	03	3.80%

Supplementary Materials

1. Respondents Data Submitted via Google Forms