



## *Evidence Summary*

### **Multiple Factors Influence Undergraduates' Intent to Use Online Library Resources**

#### **A Review of:**

Joo, S., & Choi, N. (2015). Factors affecting undergraduates' selection of online library resources in academic tasks. *Library Hi Tech*, 33(2), 272-291. doi: 10.1108/LHT-01-2015-0008

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**Received:** 20 Sep. 2015

**Accepted:** 19 Oct. 2015

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#### **Abstract**

**Objective** – To investigate multiple factors that may affect undergraduate students' selection of online library resources. Usefulness and ease of use, quality, and user differences were each explored as factors influencing undergraduates' use intention.

**Design** – Survey questionnaire.

**Setting** – A state university located in the United States of America.

**Subjects** – 332 randomly selected undergraduate students.

**Methods** – A survey designed to measure the intent to utilize online library resources was administered to an undergraduate population.

The results, including 11 factors of use intention, were analyzed quantitatively using inferential statistics such as structural equation modeling, multiple regression, t-tests, ANOVAs, and linear regression.

**Main Results** – The factors of usefulness and ease of use were reported to have a positive relationship with undergraduates' intent to use online library resources (regression weights = 0.473 and 0.408,  $p < 0.01$ ). Respondents who answered that they were "very or extremely familiar" with online library resources had higher use intention of these sources (mean = 6.17) than other groups moderately or not at all familiar (mean = 5.74 and 4.95, respectively). Experience in a library instruction program was not found to influence use intention ( $t = -0.368$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ).

**Conclusions** – The authors conclude that multiple factors influence online library resource selection behavior among undergraduates. The results indicate that usefulness and ease of use are important factors in use intention. The effect of “resource quality” factors, indicated by credibility, format, accessibility, currency, and coverage, suggested that all five factors positively impact use intention. Accessibility is most likely to increase the likelihood of online library resource selection while the credibility of a source has the weakest effect on selection. Familiarity with online library resources and self-reported strong search skills also positively influenced use intention.

### Commentary

As the selection and use of information sources continues to occur in online spaces, LIS researchers and practitioners in higher education settings investigate why users choose the resources that they do. A number of studies have found that convenience and ease of use contribute highly to undergraduate students’ selection of sources for their academic work, including Currie et al. (2010) and Connaway et al. (2011). The authors of the study at hand examine whether the self-reported intent to use online library resources can be explained by three groups of variables pertaining to usefulness and ease of use, resource quality, and individual differences.

Among the many strengths of this study is an extensive review of the literature that grounds the study’s findings in the context of other works examining student preferences in relation to online sources, and the clearly stated intent and outcomes of the research. The description of the data collection process and research participants lacks information for the findings to be fully evaluated. Details were omitted regarding how students were recruited for the study, how many students were initially invited to participate, the randomization process, whether the students invited and the students who participated in the study were representative of the undergraduate student population at that university, means of survey distribution, and

the name of the university at which the data was collected.

While very thorough in its design and methodological rigor, there are some aspects of the study to acknowledge when considering the results presented. Given that the data and findings are based upon survey results, which are necessarily self-reported behaviors, the use of another data collection method to achieve triangulation (such as a qualitative measure including in-depth interviews, focus groups, or observations of student behavior) would strongly bolster the findings’ validity. The study frequently uses causal language such as “influence” or “effect” when terms that describe relationships and correlations would be more appropriate and accurate. The inclusion of a survey instrument would allow for reader evaluation of the instrument and the possibility of replicating the study. Additionally, the discussion of the study’s limitations and of potential areas for future research could benefit from additional information.

This study confirms the findings of other research examining students’ preferences for online sources, including that undergraduates are likely to prioritize convenience, ease of use, and familiarity when seeking information. A number of practice implications are outlined, including: librarians could emphasize the suitability of library resources for academic tasks during information literacy instruction, design Google-like library search interfaces to increase ease of use, and develop library collections with varied and up to date information, all with the intent of encouraging undergraduates to use more reliable resources in their academic work. The practice recommendations are made in absolute language. However, when there is not always a direct relationship between a finding and practice, less directive language would be more appropriate.

As a suggestion for future studies in the area of the information seeking behavior of undergraduates, researchers and practitioners should attempt to move past the narrative of “digital natives” and, in particular, the

assumption that undergraduate students all share similar experiences and expertise. Studies that consider information use as a contextualized and local practice will encourage the understanding of learners as individuals with unique backgrounds, and allow for the profession to discard the idea of students as a monolithic construct.

## References

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