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Awareness and Attitude towards Open Access in India's National Agricultural Research System

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Awareness and Attitude towards Open Access in India’s National Agricultural Research System

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ABSTRACT

An online survey was carried out on attitude and awareness on open access was carried out among the NARS researchers in India using questions from American Society for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T) on Open Knowledge Society’s server. The survey revealed that they search at Google Scholar (82%) for scholarly literature akin to general public and have very poor access to the scholarly literature. Nearly 50% of the researchers were not aware of open access; however, ~60% of them were in support for open access. Nearly 80% of them know that their research is publicly funded and are aware of about open access Institutional Repositories and they would deposit revised articles sent for publications to make publicly funded research open. More advocacies on open access, capacity building and infrastructure establishment would definitely help the researchers to share and access the required literature.

Key words: open access, attitude, awareness, advocacy, NARS

INTRODUCTION

Apropos to the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI) in 2002, the seeds of movement of open access – unrestricted sharing and communication of scholarly literature via internet were sown in India during the year 2004. Various institutes/organisations have had established nearly 76 repositories of scholarly research till 2012 in India. The India’s National Agricultural Research System (NARS) is the largest system of the world having establishments of agricultural universities & research institutes involving in education, research and extension. However, the open access repositories related to agriculture field in NARS are only few viz., Eprints@IARI, Eprints@CMFRI, E–Repository@IIHR, Dspice@IISR, OpenAgri, RKMP etc. When agriculture is a way of life in India and ~70% of its people depend on agriculture, the access to agriculture information and data is crucial. With this background, a survey was carried out to understand the awareness and attitude of researchers in NARS system towards open access and public sharing of research outputs using open access repositories.

METHODS AND RESULTS

The survey with title 'NARS Open Access Survey’ was carried out during 2009–10 to find out the level of awareness of NARS researchers on open access and their attitude on sharing research outputs publicly. We had used questions from the 'Scholarly Publishing Questionnaire’ with kind permission from the American Society for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T). The survey was set up using Lime Survey software on Open Knowledge Society, Bangalore server (now not in use) and was sent to a mailing list formed of randomly selected researchers in NARS. The survey link was also posted on various research & social networking sites. However, the survey received only 100 submissions with full responses from NARS researchers and results as mentioned below.

The profile of the respondents results showed that majority of the responders were male (91%), 85% are of less than 45 years age and 77% have earned Ph.D. As per the designation, Assistant Professors constituted 47% and Professors 21%. The majority of the respondents belong to four disciplines viz., Animal Sciences, Genetics & Plant Breeding, Horticulture and Plant Physiology. It is interesting to note that 98% all of them authored various
publications and 57% had reviewed manuscripts whereas, 53% had published at least five papers in the last three years. Their top five favourite journals are Indian Journal of Agricultural Sciences, Current Science, Indian Journal of Horticulture, Indian Journal of Genetics & Plant Breeding and Indian Journal of Animal Sciences.

When responders were asked what is attractive when they consider while submitting a paper to a journal? About 61% have responded that speed of reviewing is very attractive (and important) followed by impact factor (47%), coverage by abstracting services (38%) and availability of the journal in an electronic version (37%). It was found that 75% had difficulty to access the scholarly journal literature whereas, only 10% of the respondents expressed that they had excellent access to the literature and 82% would search for literature in Google scholar. The responders were asked if they have personal or official website, what kinds of materials they would like to post on website? 57% of them responded that they would post revised texts of papers that have been submitted for publication and 52% technical reports.

About 49% of the respondents are not aware about what is open access and 66% had not published in any open access journals. Whereas, 30% of them know quite a lot however, 62% while knowing about Institutional Repositories had not deposited their papers but may like to deposit in future. The 81% of them know that their research is funded by public funds. With respect to the open access journal’s characteristics, 37% had agreed that they are well indexed and 9% strongly agreed attributed them as radicals and 8% as ephemerals. The 35% had strongly agreed with the statement on open access that authors would publish more, 33% with quality would improve, 42% with easier to get hold of papers.

The following comments were made by the respondents of the survey.

1. Open access journal brings freedom to researchers and one can know what is happening in their area of research.
2. Open access journals would help in sharing valuable scientific information/data among scientists which would help in better understanding of research.
3. Open access system will definitely change the concepts of publishing research articles and its accessibility on a much broader scale
4. The awareness about open access journals among NARS scientists is quite poor.
5. The open access journals are the need of hour and I strongly recommend them for many reasons viz., saving of paper, time and money, better peer reviewing and easier management of published work.

CONCLUSIONS

The responders of survey had given a mixed response for majority of the questions. Majority of the NARS researchers have less access to the scholarly research and the 50% of the NARS researchers are not aware of what is open access and 66% had not published in open access journals. However, most of them favoured it when they were explained about open access and 62% responders stated that they would deposit their papers in institutional repositories. As per the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI) call, the scholarly societies which are formed for taking forward the research on not–for–profit should launch more open access journals and institutes in NARS should establish open access repositories. These followed by an advocacies and capacity building would definitely enable the researchers in NARS to showcase & share their research for public good.

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