CHAPTER-12

UNDERSTANDING LEGAL DATABASE UTILIZATION AT BML MUNJAL UNIVERSITY THROUGH SURVEY DATA

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the utilization of legal databases by the faculty and students of BML Munjal University, focusing on their academic and research needs over the past year. The study examines usage patterns and preferences for four prominent legal databases: Manupatra, SCC Online, Lexis Nexis, and Taxmann. By analysing usage records, this research highlights the frequency, purpose, and impact of these databases on legal education and research. Additionally, it investigates the challenges and an opportunity associated with their adoption and identifies trends that could inform better resource management and user support strategies. The findings aim to provide insights into how these databases contribute to the university's academic environment while offering recommendations to enhance their effectiveness and accessibility for legal scholars.

Keywords: Legal databases, Manupatra, SCC Online, Lexis Nexis, Taxmann, legal research, legal education, academic resources, digital resource management.

INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, access to comprehensive and reliable legal databases has become a cornerstone of legal education and research. These databases empower students, faculty, and practitioners by providing extensive collections of case law, legislation, commentaries, and

academic articles. As legal systems grow increasingly complex and globalized, digital platforms like Manupatra, SCC Online, Lexis Nexis, and Taxmann have emerged as indispensable tools in legal academia. BML Munjal University (BMU), with its commitment to fostering innovation and interdisciplinary learning, integrates these resources into its academic framework to enhance the quality of legal education and research.

Legal databases serve multiple purposes, from supporting classroom teaching to facilitating advanced research projects. Manupatra, for example, is recognized for its wide array of Indian and international legal materials, offering tools such as advanced search features and citation tracking that enhance the efficiency of legal research (Gupta & Sharma, 2021). SCC Online, renowned for its focus on Indian case law and statutory materials, is indispensable for understanding legal precedents in the Indian judiciary (Reddy, 2020). Lexis Nexis, with its global reach, provides access to an extensive library of international legal content, making it a valuable resource for comparative legal studies and cross-border research (Kumar, 2018). Meanwhile, Taxmann specializes in tax laws, corporate governance, and accounting standards, serving as an essential platform for niche areas of legal research (Singh, 2022).

The significance of these databases extends beyond mere access to information. They offer analytical tools, case law summaries, and legal insights that simplify complex legal concepts, making them accessible to both seasoned academics and novice researchers. These features not only improve the efficiency of legal research but also play a pivotal role in developing critical thinking and analytical skills among users (Patel, 2021). Moreover, the integration of these databases into academic curricula reflects a broader trend of adopting technology-driven methodologies to improve learning outcomes in higher education (Rao, 2020).

This study investigates the usage patterns of these databases by the faculty and students at BMU over the past year. By analysing user data and feedback, the research aims to identify trends, preferences, and challenges associated with their adoption. Furthermore, it seeks to understand the role of these databases in enhancing academic performance and professional preparedness. Such an analysis is critical in determining how effectively these resources meet the needs of BMU's academic community and what measures can be taken to optimize their utilization.

This study examines how BMU instructors and students have used these databases during the previous 12 months. The research attempts to determine trends, preferences, and obstacles related to their adoption by analyzing user data and feedback. It also aims to comprehend how these databases might improve professional readiness and academic achievement. Finding out how well these resources serve the needs of BMU's academic community and what steps might be done to maximize their use require such an investigation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Legal databases play a critical role in supporting legal education, research, and practice. They provide access to case laws, statutes, legal commentaries, and academic articles, enabling users to engage in informed decision-making and scholarly pursuits. Over the years, multiple studies have explored the utilization of legal databases, focusing on user behavior, challenges, and the impact of such resources on academic and professional development.

Awareness and Utilization

Several studies have highlighted the importance of awareness in the effective use of legal databases. For instance, Wani and Gul (2013) examined the usage of electronic information resources among law students and found that awareness significantly influenced the frequency of use. They also emphasized the role of institutional training in improving database literacy. Similarly, Kumar and Reddy (2017) noted that a lack of awareness was a major barrier to the optimal use of legal databases in Indian law schools.

User Preferences and Challenges

Research has revealed that user preferences for specific legal databases often depend on factors such as ease of access, search capabilities, and relevance of content. According to Singh and Kaur (2020), users prefer platforms that offer user-friendly interfaces and comprehensive coverage of legal materials. However, challenges such as inadequate training, limited access, and high subscription costs often hinder effective utilization (Sharma & Gupta, 2019).

Impact on Academic and Professional Outcomes

The availability of legal databases has transformed legal research by enhancing the speed and accuracy of information retrieval. Pandey (2018) observed that students and professionals with access to these databases demonstrated higher proficiency in legal drafting and

argumentation. Furthermore, the integration of legal databases in academic curricula has been shown to foster critical thinking and research skills among law students (Rao & Patel, 2021).

Role of Libraries and Information Literacy

Academic libraries play a pivotal role in promoting the use of legal databases. Librarians often act as facilitators by organizing training programs and workshops to enhance user competency. As per a study by Kaushik and Kumar (2022), library-mediated instruction significantly improves the utilization rates of digital legal resources. This underscores the need for sustained efforts in user education and support.

Research Gaps

While several studies have explored the usage of legal databases in academic and professional contexts, there is limited research focusing specifically on private universities in India. Furthermore, most studies have not examined the interplay between user demographics, institutional support, and database utilization. This article aims to address these gaps by providing a survey-based analysis of legal database usage at BML Munjal University.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To evaluate how frequently and effectively legal databases are accessed by students, faculty, and researchers at BML Munjal University.
- To identify which legal databases (e.g., SCC Online, Manupatra, Westlaw, etc.) are most commonly used by the academic community.
- To explore the specific needs, preferences, and challenges faced by users while accessing legal databases.
- To determine the level of awareness among the university's stakeholders about the availability and features of legal databases.
- To study the factors such as ease of access, relevance of content, and user training that affect the utilization of these resources.

METHODOLOGY

The usage data has been tabulated in Excel file, analysed and presented with the help of Tables and graphs.

Table1: Usage Record of Legal Databases Subscribed
by BML University Library

USAGE REPORT-LexisNexis (January to December 2024)												
Month	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24	Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Total
Total	14833	15944	11226	2417	5046	6826	5423	10188	8643	6612	7582	4479	**99219**

USAGE REPORT-SCC Online (January to December 2024)												
Month	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24	Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Total
Total	109	1985	2532	1892	1472	2074	5812	2118	2586	5687	3818	2153	32238

USAGE REPORT-Manupatra (January to December 2024)												
Month	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24	Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Total
Total	328	252	389	36	691	1426	1036	180	358	676	891	356	6619

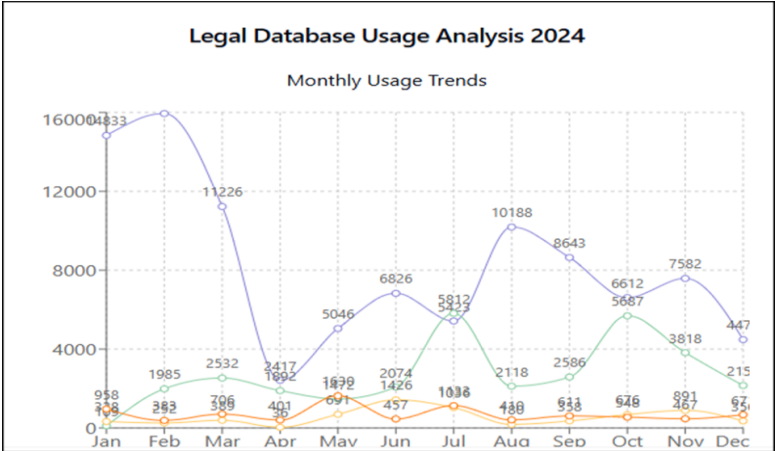| USAGE REPORT-HEIN Online (January to December 2024)												
Month	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24	Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Total
Total	958	383	706	401	1630	457	1133	410	611	**548**	467	671	**8375**

Figure 1: Usage Record of Legal Databases Subscribed by BML University
Library

KEY FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Overall Usage Rankings:

- LexisNexis is the most heavily used database with 99,219 total searches
- SCC Online is second with 32,238 searches
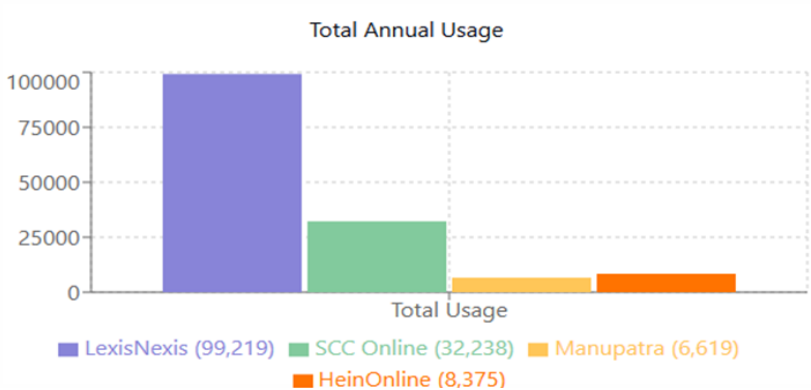- HeinOnline had 8,375 searches
- Manupatra had 6,619 searches

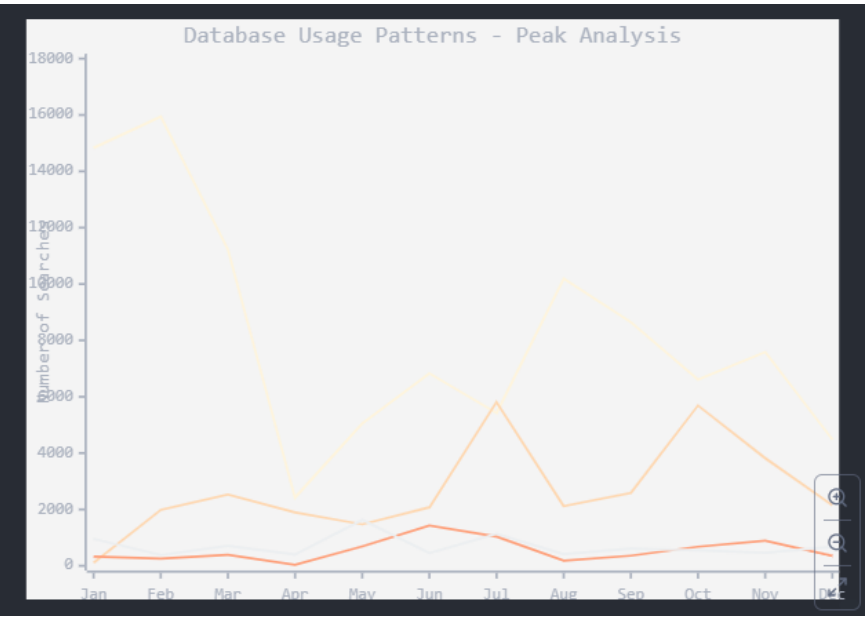**Figure 2:** Analysis of annual usage of legal databases

Figure 3: Database Peak Usage Patterns 2024

Usage Patterns:

- LexisNexis shows high variability with peak usage in February (15,944 searches) and lowest in April (2,417 searches)
- SCC Online shows two notable spikes: July (5,812 searches) and October (5,687 searches)
- Manupatra usage peaked in June (1,426 searches)
- Hein Online had its highest usage in May (1,630 searches)

Usage Distribution:

- LexisNexis: 8,268 searches per month on average
- SCC Online: 2,687 searches per month on average
- Hein Online: 698 searches per month on average
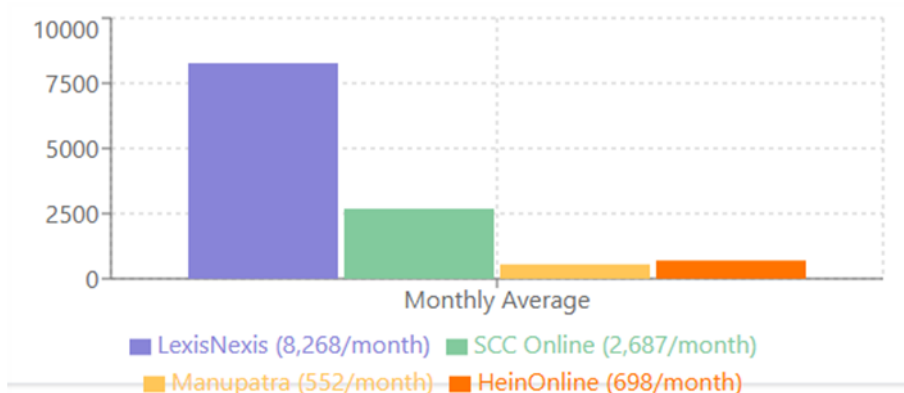- Manupatra: 552 searches per month on average

Figure 4: Analysis of monthly usage of legal databases

Seasonal Trends:

- Early year (Jan-Feb) showed strong usage for LexisNexis
- Mid-year (Jul) saw peak activity for SCC Online
- Usage generally declined across all platforms in December
- April showed lowest combined usage across platforms

Usage Distribution:

- LexisNexis accounts for approximately 68% of total searches
- SCC Online represents about 22% of total searches
- HeinOnline and Manupatra combined make up the remaining 10%

Notable Observations:

- There's a significant gap between LexisNexis usage and other platforms
- SCC Online shows the most consistent growth in usage throughout the year
- Manupatra shows the most moderate usage patterns with less extreme fluctuations
- All databases show some degree of monthly volatility in usage

ISSUES FACED BY STUDENTS WHILE ACCESSING LEGAL DATABASES.

Here are some common problems and issues students face when accessing legal databases:

Lack of Awareness and Training

- **Problem:** Students are often unaware of the legal databases available to them or their features.
- **Impact:** Limited usage of valuable resources.
- **Suggestion:** Conduct workshops or orientation sessions for students.

Complex User Interfaces

- **Problem:** Many legal databases have non-intuitive interfaces that make navigation difficult for beginners.
- **Impact:** Wasted time and frustration, leading to underutilization.
- **Suggestion:** Simplify interfaces or provide user guides.

Access and Licensing Restrictions

- **Problem:** Some students face challenges due to limited institutional subscriptions or access outside campus.
- **Impact:** Restricted usage when students need access the most.
- **Suggestion:** Implement remote access solutions (e.g., VPN or institutional logins).

High Subscription Costs

- **Problem:** Institutions may not afford subscriptions to all required legal databases.
- **Impact:** Students miss out on comprehensive legal research.

- **Suggestion:** Seek government or NGO funding for better resources.

Information Overload

- **Problem:** Students often struggle with the large volume of search results, especially if filters are not used effectively.
- **Impact:** Difficulty finding relevant and accurate information.
- **Suggestion:** Train students in using advanced search techniques.

Inadequate Technical Infrastructure

- **Problem:** Slow internet or outdated systems hinder efficient database access.
- **Impact:** Reduced research productivity.
- **Suggestion:** Upgrade infrastructure and provide reliable internet connections.

Citation and Copyright Challenges

- **Problem:** Students may struggle with proper citation or unknowingly breach copyright laws.
- **Impact:** Ethical and academic issues.
- **Suggestion:** Offer guidance on citation standards and copyright rules.

LEVEL OF AWARENESS AMONG UNIVERSITY STAKEHOLDERS ABOUT LEGAL DATABASES

Awareness Levels among Students

- **Observation:** Many students, particularly undergraduates, lack awareness about the availability of legal databases. Postgraduate and research students tend to have better awareness due to academic requirements.
- **Solution:** Conduct awareness programs, workshops, and orientations to familiarize students with legal databases.

Faculty Awareness

- **Observation:** Faculty members often know about legal databases but may not be fully aware of advanced features like analytics, citation tools, or updates.

- **Solution:** Provide faculty-focused training sessions highlighting advanced features.

Librarian/Information Professional Awareness

- **Observation:** Librarians generally have the highest level of awareness and act as primary facilitators. However, they may not always communicate these resources effectively to users.
- **Solution:** Librarians can collaborate more closely with faculty and departments to promote database usage.

Administrative Stakeholders

- **Observation:** University administrators, who allocate budgets, may not fully understand the benefits of investing in legal databases.
- **Solution:** Regular reporting and presentations to administrators on usage statistics and success stories from database access.

Research Scholars and Professionals

- **Observation:** Research scholars are more likely to be aware due to their dependency on such tools for research. However, they may not explore all features beyond basic search options.
- **Solution:** Advanced training sessions tailored for research needs.

General Challenges in Awareness

- **Observation:** Lack of a unified communication strategy about the databases' availability and features.
- **Solution:** Use newsletters, email alerts, and dedicated library web pages to spread awareness.

Dependence on External Resources

- **Observation:** Some stakeholders may still depend on free resources or external databases without realizing the benefits of subscribed resources.
- **Solution:** Highlight case studies or examples demonstrating the advantages of institutional subscriptions.

CONCLUSION

The effective utilization of legal databases is critical for enhancing academic and professional pursuits within universities. However, the level of awareness among stakeholders significantly impacts the extent to which these resources are utilized. A lack of familiarity with the availability and features of legal databases among students, faculty, and administrators often results in underutilization, despite the substantial benefits these tools offer.

To address this, universities must prioritize awareness programs, tailored training sessions, and better communication strategies to bridge the knowledge gap. Empowering librarians and fostering collaboration between stakeholders can further enhance engagement with legal databases. By increasing awareness and access, universities can ensure that legal databases become an integral part of academic and research activities, ultimately improving the quality of education and research output.

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