

# Utilization Of University Research Division Websites In Supporting Research Activity Among Faculty Members: Research Realities At Machakos And Murangá Universities In Kenya

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## Abstract:

**Background:** Digital platforms such as institutional websites play crucial role in the current academic environment through dissemination of the universities' research output while facilitating academic collaborations. One of such platforms is the University research division websites, which are at the center of research coordination and provision of access to important resources and links to funding opportunities as well as ethical guidelines. The collective function of the research divisions' website is to enhance scholarly activities within the universities. However, the effectiveness of these websites in addressing faculty research needs is yet to receive adequate research focus, especially in Kenya where issues like outdated content and poor user interfaces are prevalent.

**Materials and Methods:** By incorporating quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the study adopted descriptive design that helped in achieving the above mentioned objective. The data was collected through structured questionnaires that were administered to 127 members of the faculty and interviews conducted to eight (8) Research Division administrators from Machakos and Murang'a Universities in Kenya. Whereas the qualitative data was subjected to thematic analysis through which main themes were identified descriptive statistics such as means, percentages and frequencies were used in the analysis of quantitative data.

**Results:** Key among the findings is that majority of faculty members were aware of the existence of research support services accessible via their universities' research division websites. The websites' contents on research funding opportunities were cited by majority of the research participants as the most used by members of the faculty.

**Conclusion:** The study highlights the need for the Universities' management to ensure clearer communication and regular user education about their research policies. These strategies are likely to increase awareness and empower faculty members into seamless navigation of the research landscape.

**Key Word:** Research Division, University, Website, Research Support, Faculty, Machakos, Murangá, Kenya.

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## I. Introduction

An institutional website has become a critical communication tool, especially in the current technological age where access to relevant information is a key differentiating factor. Scholars such as Miklosik et al. (2023) and Chugh et al. (2023) define websites as a collection of web pages that are interlinked within a single domain to host and disseminate relevant information about an entity while enabling the entity's ubiquitous presence over the internet. Universities as well as their departments and internal divisions have adopted these virtual platforms to leverage their effective communication and foster unrestricted academic developments including research activities among the stakeholders like members of faculty and students. The need for global collaborations, especially among researchers and academia necessitates the increasing use of virtual platforms such as websites among the universities research divisions for the purpose of transforming the global academic research landscape.

The significant evolution of websites in terms of the role they play in universities' operations is undeniably substantial (Sueldo, 2024). For instance, a number of universities have taken the technological advantage of websites to create virtual hubs for preserving and disseminating their research output among other research related updates. Some of the relevant contents of the websites include opportunities for research funding,

local and international research collaborations as well as policy alongside ethical guidelines for different kinds of research projects (Sueldo, 2024). It is equally notable that the universities have been concerned about increasing the level with which members of their faculty engage with their websites. Therefore, issues of the websites' design and enhancement of the user experience has been at the core of academic discussions about the websites' utilization (Jongmans et al., 2022). However, little research focus has been put on examining the utilization of these websites to facilitate research activities among the faculty. Few studies like Yap et al. (2023) took primary focus on aspects such as website usability, communication effectiveness, and marketing strategies.

The appreciation and adoption of websites as communication platforms among international academic institutions has been captured by different studies. For instance, Johnson and Williams (2020) highlighted the great potential of a well-structured research division websites for enhancing the level of research engagement among faculty members. They noted that such websites are critical in providing ubiquitous access to comprehensive research resources. However, the challenges such as user interfaces that are not quite friendly to the users and inclusion of outdated contents continue to inhibit their usage. In advocating for the need to overcome such challenges, Yap et al. (2023) noted the urgent need to examine the faculty members' perception on the usefulness of these websites for the purpose of their research needs and improving their levels of engagement with such platforms. Therefore, the attempts to understand the factors behind faculty members' utilization of these platforms was a critical precursor to optimizing their design and functionality.

A study by Atieno, Onyancha and Kwanya (2022) revealed similar trends in Africa, where higher education is increasingly integrating technology in almost all its operations. Specifically, they observed the increasing recognition of research division websites as important tools in fostering collaboration and research productivity by most universities in Kenya. However, there are limited empirical research that examine how faculty members utilize these resources. There has been biased focus on general usability and communication effectiveness by the existing literatures. A knowledge gap therefore remains and undermines adequate understanding of how these websites fulfill the unique needs of the faculty members (Wani, 2023).

Even though most universities in Kenya have adopted interactive websites for their research divisions, there is inadequate research on the effectiveness of such websites in supporting research activities among members of faculty according Sueldo (2024). A number of technological challenges have been noted as possible hindrances to effective usage of the research division websites. The challenges relate to the relevance of their content, accessibility and navigation of the platforms (Nakhumicha, 2024). The limited understanding of the websites' usefulness is compound by the lack of policy sensitization among the faculty members. A good number of faculty are not aware of relevant policies that govern the usage and management of these websites. Minimal research attention has been focused on specific metrics of website utilization due to the over concentration on the websites' usability by the previous studies (Chugh et al., 2023; Miklosik et al., 2023).

Therefore, the study was conceived to supplement the limited knowledge on the usefulness of university research division websites in supporting research activities among members of faculty in the Kenyan universities. The study makes invaluable contributions towards improving the efficiency of the digital platforms to provide robust research environment within the universities. The study had specific focus on the content of the research divisions' websites, faculty awareness of the research support services, and the policies governing such website usage.

## **II. Statement Of The Problem**

University research division websites are essential for disseminating research-related information, facilitating collaboration, and enhancing scholarly activities among faculty. These platforms serve various functions, such as promoting research opportunities and providing access to funding (Miklosik et al., 2023). However, their effectiveness in meeting the specific research needs of faculty, particularly in Kenya, is not adequately researched. The significance of user-centric design in improving website usability and engagement is well-documented (Chugh et al., 2023; Jongmans et al., 2022).

Despite extensive research on usability and communication strategies, there is a notable gap in understanding how these websites function as dedicated research support tools (Yap et al., 2023; Kisiolek et al., 2021). Challenges like outdated content and poor user interfaces continue to hinder faculty engagement, and perceptions of website usefulness are critical for determining utilization (Yap et al., 2023). In Kenya, while many universities have established research division websites, their effectiveness is not fully explored. Limited information is available on how the faculty navigate and use the contents of their respective research divisions' websites in terms of accessibility and even relevance of the content (Nakhumicha, 2024). Additionally, much is yet to be established about the universities' policies on data sharing and intellectual property.

Therefore, this study sought to address these gaps by assessing the usefulness of university research division websites as research support tools among faculty in Machakos and Muranga Universities in Kenya. By examining available content, faculty awareness of research services, and governing policies, the research provides

insights to enhance these digital platforms, ultimately supporting faculty research efforts and fostering a stronger research culture in Kenyan higher education.

### **III. Theoretical Framework**

This study employed the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory as its theoretical framework, which was originally developed by Blumler and Katz in 1974 and further refined by Mairaru et al. (2019). This theory seeks to explain why individuals actively seek out specific media and how these choices fulfill their personal needs. In the context of this research, the U&G theory is relevant as it helps to understand how faculty members in selected Kenyan universities perceive and utilize research division websites as research support tools.

The framework helped in guiding the assessment of the key aspects that the university research division websites serve as effective research support tools among faculty members. By understanding the motivations behind the websites usage and the factors influencing engagement, the study provides insights that can enhance the design and functionality of these digital platforms, ultimately fostering a robust research culture within Kenyan universities.

### **IV. Literature Review**

University research division websites are vital for faculty to access research information, funding opportunities, collaborations, and event updates. The usage of these websites among faculty members is often influenced by various factors that also shape their adoption and usage of technology. The technological underpinnings of faculty engagement with digital platforms are further unpacked by Lun et al. (2024), who draw on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) in examining different factors responsible for one's intention to use or interact with any particular website. The primary factors identified by the researchers included interactivity of the websites, ease of using it and their perceived usefulness. The contextualization of this model to the environment of a university research division website demands remodeling of the Universities' research portals beyond mere functionality. They need to be more intuitive, interactive, and responsive to the needs of faculty members.

In emphasizing the need research empowerment among members of faculty, Falola et al. (2022) observed that university research divisions need to undertake regular trainings to their faculty as way of promoting utilization of their research support services. They noted that the research division websites are at the centre of the universities research support and culture. The usage of such services have significant impact on faculty members' research activity (Falola et al., 2022). They also observed training and regular tutorials as critical ingredients in the improvement of faculty members' awareness and use of the website contents.

Similarly, researchers such as Chugh et al. (2023) and Sueldo (2024) undertook two different studies on effective ways to implement usable technological solutions in institutions of higher education. Their studies implied that university research division websites are important tools that be used in different ways such as enhancing dissemination of research information to the faculty. However, some challenges like difficulty in locating relevant information, website usability, accessibility, slow loading times due to complex designs, and lack of personalized content may inhibit their full utilization (Sueldo, 2024). Faculty's digital literacy and familiarity with digital tools also affect their ability to use these websites (Nakhumicha, 2024). Language barriers, especially for non-English speakers, can pose difficulties. Faculty's perception of the website's value, such as access to funding and research updates, influences their motivation to use the platform.

### **V. Methodology**

The study employed a descriptive research design to examine the usefulness of university research division websites in supporting research activities among faculty members in two Kenyan universities. Specifically, the research was conducted in Machakos and Murang'a Universities, chosen for their recent establishment and implementation of research division websites. This design allowed for the collection of quantitative and qualitative data to assess the usefulness of these platforms in enhancing research activities among members of the faculty as recommended by Ghanad (2023).

**Study Duration:** November 2024 to November 2025.

**Sample size:** 135 respondents.

**Sample size calculation:** From a total population of 184 faculty members from the two universities in Kenya, the researcher used Slovin's formula to get the most appropriate sample as computed in the following section.

To determine the sample size, this study used the Slovin's formula:

$$n = N / (1 + N(e^2)),$$

Where; n- sample size, N- total population, e- error

Applying the Formula for Faculty Members:

$$n = 184 / (1 + 184(0.05^2))$$

$$n = 184 / (1 + 184 * 0.0025)$$

$$n = 184 / 1.46$$

$$n = 126.027 = 127$$

Faculty sample size is 127 faculty members

**Table no 1: Summary of sample size**

| Respondent                       | Population N | Sample (n) | Percentages % | Sampling Technique     |
|----------------------------------|--------------|------------|---------------|------------------------|
| Research division administrators | 8            | 8          | 100%          | Purposive Sampling     |
| Faculty Members                  | 184          | 127        | 69.02%        | Simple Random Sampling |
| Total                            | 192          | 135        | 70.31%        |                        |

### Data Collection

Data was collected using questionnaires and interview schedules. The researcher began by seeking permission from each of the two universities before proceeding to book appointments with the sampled respondents. The faculty were then provided with either physical copies of the questionnaires or a link to a Google form depending on their preferred option while a one-on-one interview sessions were conducted to the research division administrators. All the interview sessions were recorded through the audio recording feature of the researcher's mobile phone, with prior permission from the interviewees. The completed copies of the print questionnaires were collected from the faculty after a period of one week for proper analysis.

## VI. Result

### Response rate

A commendable 84.89% rate of response was recorded by the study, representing 120 participants out of 142 administrators and faculty who were sampled from Machakos and Muranga Universities as presented in table no 2;

**Table no 2: Rate of response**

| Respondents Category             | Sample (n) | Responses | Percentages (%) |
|----------------------------------|------------|-----------|-----------------|
| Research Division administrators | 8          | 5         | 62.50           |
| Faculty Members                  | 127        | 115       | 90.55           |
| Total                            | 135        | 120       | 88.89           |

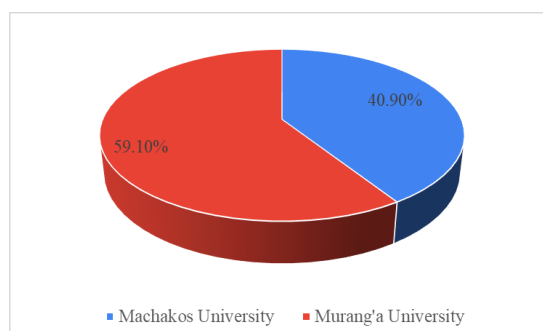
It is notable that all categories of the population that were targeted by the study were adequately represented in the study despite the few individuals who failed to successfully take part in the study.

### Demographic information

Understanding the demographic characteristics of the study participants such as their institutional affiliations (University), department, professional position, years of academic experience and highest academic qualifications were analyzed as a precursor to understanding their utilization of research divisions' website.

### Distribution by University

Distribution of the participants by the two sampled universities was analyzed as shown;

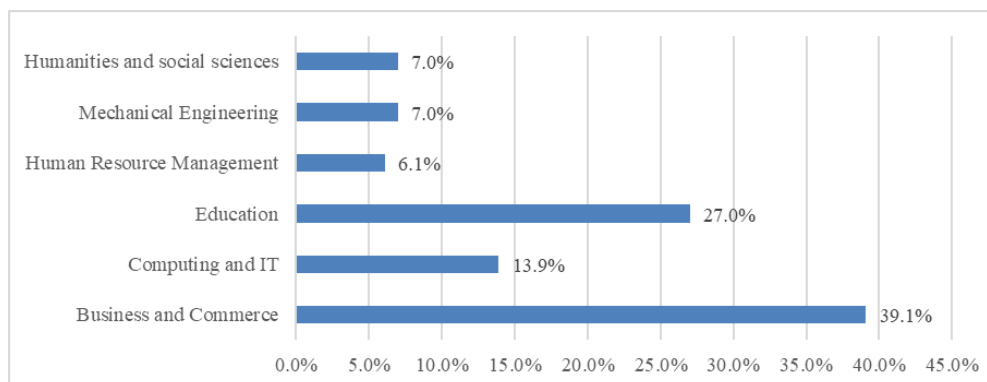


**Figure 1: Universities representation**

The analysis indicates an almost even distribution of the participants across the two universities. The slight difference in the representation of faculty from Murangá University of Technology (59.10%) and Machakos University (40.90%) suggests possible variations in the size of the two institutions' faculty and their willingness to participate in research activities as was also noted by Nafukho et al. (2019).

### Department of the Faculty

To understand the academic disciplines or specializations of the faculty, the study examined distribution of the participants according to their teaching departments. The results are presented in figure 2.

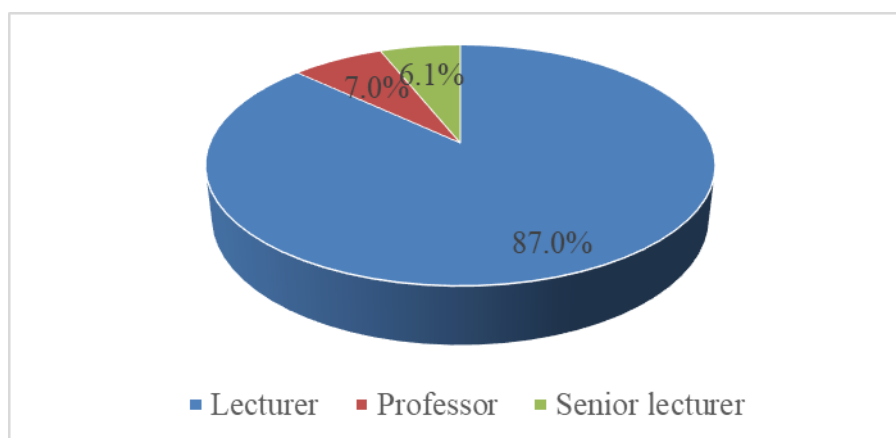


**Figure 2: Departmental representation**

According to the findings in the above figure, most (39.1%) of the study participants were from department of business and commerce from the two universities. This was followed by 27.0% of the sampled faculty were drawn the department of education while 13.9% of them came from Computing and Information Technology department. The other departments including Human Resource Management, Mechanical Engineering as well as Humanities and Social Sciences were represented by 6.1%, 7.0% and 7.0% of the study participants respectively. The statistics reveal education and business and commerce as the departments with higher population of faculty in both of the two universities. Therefore, most of the research activities and output from these universities are on the education and business fields as shown in their institutional repositories (Machakos University, 2025; Murang'a University of Technology, 2025).

### Professional position

The study also sought to establish the representation of the faculty as per their professional positions. The results are presented in figure 3 below;

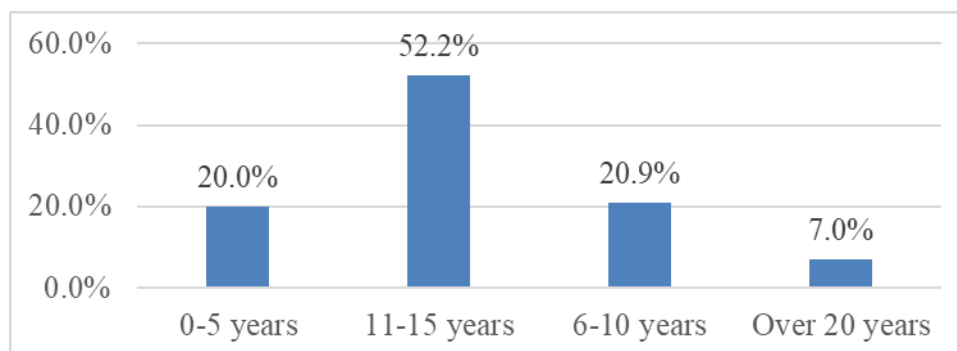


**Figure 3: Professional position**

The results from the above figure indicates that majority (87.0%) of the faculty who took part in the study were serving in the position of Lecturers while professors and senior lecturers were represented by 6.1% and 7.0% of the study participants respectively. The findings suggests that a greater percentage of faculty are lecturers while those at the position of professorship are the minority as was also reported by Nafukho et al. (2019). As such, they were greatly involved in research activities while seeking to build their careers towards senior ranks including professorship.

### Years of academic experience

Academic experience of the participants was also examined to appreciate their knowledge accrued over the years. Figure 4 shows their analyzed distribution.

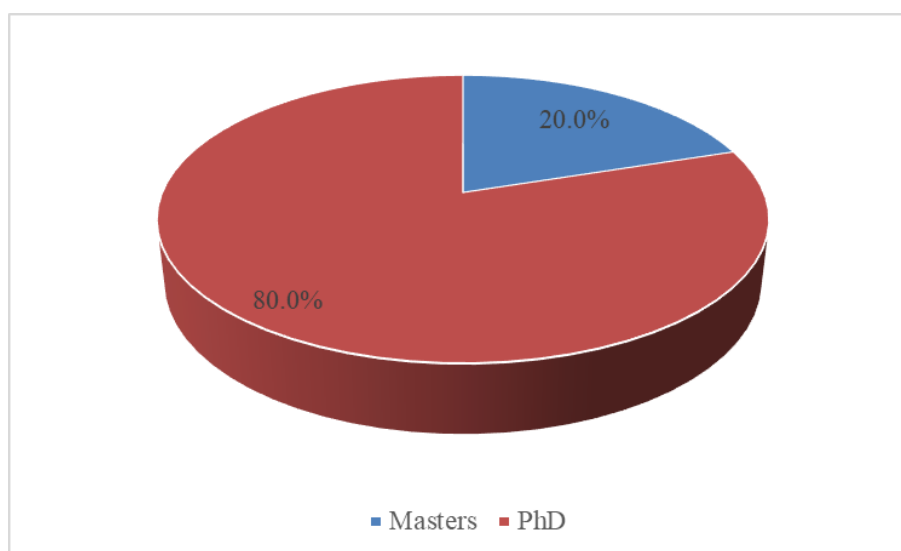


**Figure 4: Academic experience**

From the above presentation, most (52.2%) of the participants had been members of university teaching staff for 11 years to 15 years. This was followed by 20.9% who had been in academia for 6 years to 10 years and 20.0% of them who had been in academia for not more than 5 years. The study also revealed a similar trend in which the least proportion (7.0%) of the participants had been in academia for more than 20 years. The findings confirm a report by Mtwisha et al. (2021) that mid-career faculty form the backbone of teaching staff members, with both new entrants and veteran members comprising smaller proportions.

### Highest degree obtained

On academic qualifications, the study requested the participants to indicate their highest academic certificate obtained. Their responses were analyzed and results presented in figure 5;

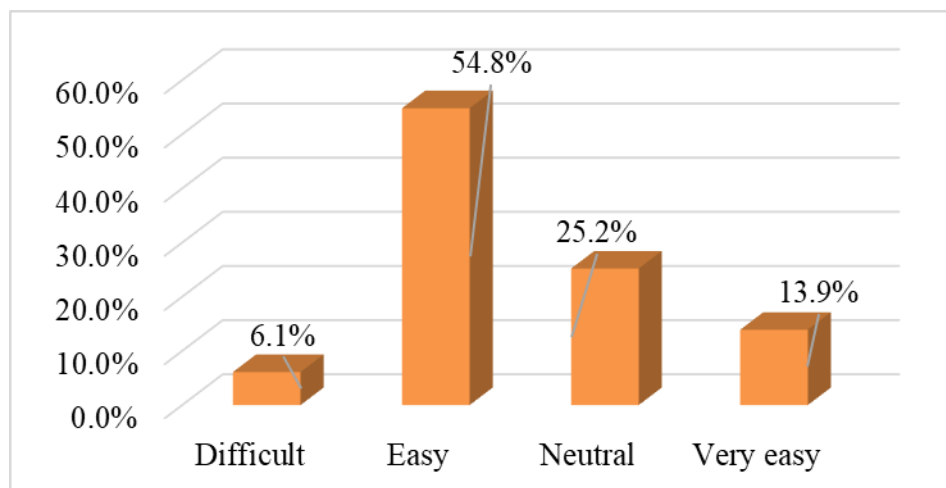


**Figure 5: Academic qualifications**

Since the study targeted members of universities faculty, its participants were holders of either PhD or Masters Degrees as indicated in figure 4.5 above. It is notable that majority (80%) of them were PhD holders while 20% had Masters Degrees, with ongoing PhD programs. This distribution is attributable to the standard required by Kenyan Commission for University Education that University Lecturers should be PhD graduates. The finding is consistent with studies such as Jowi (2021), who observed a growing shift toward PhD-level hiring, especially for full-time and tenure-track faculty in public universities.

### Ease of navigating the research division website

The initial step on assessing the utilization of research resources involved establishing the ease of navigating the research information website or portal among the sampled faculty. Figure 6 shows analysis of the responses.

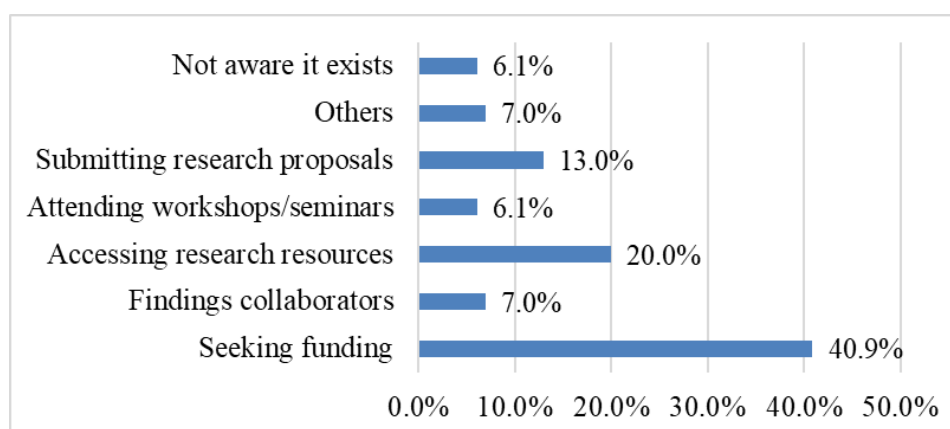


**Figure 6: Ease of navigating the website**

A larger percentage, 54.8%, of the participants showed that the research division websites of the universities were easy to navigate while 13.9% reported that they found the websites or the research portals very easy to navigate. However, 25.2% of the sampled respondents were neutral (not sure) on the ease of navigating such platforms. Only 6.1% of the study participants found difficulty in navigating the research divisions' website or the research portal. The findings are quite consistent with those on relevance of the contents as presumably the faculty who make regular use of the research resources are hardly challenged in the navigation of the research platforms while those with little interests in research activities within the universities are not informed enough to tell whether such platforms are usable or otherwise. Owan et al. (2021) alluded to this scenario through a study indicating that researchers with limited engagement in regular studies have lower probability of different research platforms, even within the mother institutions.

#### Primary purpose of using the university research division website

The study also determined the primary purpose of using the university research division website by the faculty.



**Figure 7: Primary purpose of using the website**

The findings on the primary purpose for usage of the research information platforms mirrors those in previous sections concern reasons for visiting such platforms. For instance, majority (40.9%) responded that they use the research division website to seek funds for their research projects. This resembles the 33.9% of the participants who accessed research division website to find funding opportunities. Additionally, 20.0% of the sampled faculty accessed the websites to access resources for research while 13.0% visit them to submit research proposals. 7.0% of the faculty visit them to find collaborators while another 7.0% for other purposes. 6.1% are unaware of the websites.

#### Frequency of using features of the university research division website

The study went further to assess the frequency with which the faculty use different features of their universities research divisions' website or the research portal. The analyzed response are presented in table number 3.

**Table no 3: Frequency of using the website features**

|                                             | Never |      | Rarely |      | Sometimes |      | Frequently |      | Very frequently |     | Total |    |
|---------------------------------------------|-------|------|--------|------|-----------|------|------------|------|-----------------|-----|-------|----|
|                                             | Count | %    | Count  | %    | Count     | %    | Count      | %    | Count           | %   | Mean  | SD |
| Research funding application forms          | 37    | 32.2 | 7      | 6.1  | 39        | 33.9 | 32         | 27.8 | 0               | 0.0 | 3     | 1  |
| Online workshops/seminars                   | 14    | 12.2 | 30     | 26.1 | 47        | 40.9 | 16         | 13.9 | 8               | 7.0 | 3     | 1  |
| Collaboration platforms                     | 29    | 25.2 | 22     | 19.1 | 40        | 34.8 | 24         | 20.9 | 0               | 0.0 | 3     | 1  |
| Research resources (e.g., databases, tools) | 14    | 12.2 | 30     | 26.1 | 32        | 27.8 | 31         | 27.0 | 8               | 7.0 | 3     | 1  |
| Feedback or inquiry forms                   | 29    | 25.2 | 23     | 20.0 | 55        | 47.8 | 0          | 0.0  | 8               | 7.0 | 2     | 1  |

With regard to how frequent the participants use the research division website, most of the sampled faculty from the two university occasionally (sometimes) use each of the five features of the research divisions' website. For instance, 40.9% of them indicated that they sometimes attend works or seminars that organized and communicated through the research divisions' website. This also reflects 47.8% others who indicated the same frequency (sometimes) in their usage of the research divisions' feedback and inquiry forms. It is notable the two features that are frequently used by the faculty are research funding application forms (27.8%), research resources such as publication databases and research tools among (27.0%) others as well as collaboration platforms (20.9%). It is also notable that substantial number of faculty members have never used each of the feature, with 32.2% of them indicating that they have never use the research funding application forms. Substantial number of the faculty seem not to have used online forms such as the Feedback or inquiry forms and the collaboration platforms according to 25.2% of the study participants.

#### Perceived usefulness of the Research Divisions' resources

Further, the study examined the extent to which members of faculty perceive the usefulness of the research resources within their research divisions' websites. Therefore, the research asked the participants to indicate the extent to which they agree with multiple statements described their perceived usefulness of the research resources. The analyzed responses are presented in table 4 below;

**Table no 4: Perceived usefulness of the Research Resources**

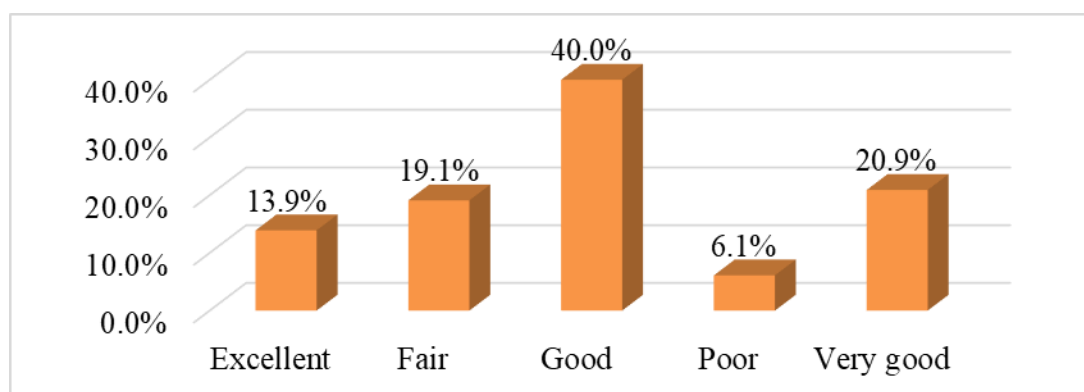
|                                                                 | Strongly disagree |      | Disagree |      | Neutral |      | Agree |      | Strongly agree |      | Total |    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|------|----------|------|---------|------|-------|------|----------------|------|-------|----|
|                                                                 | Count             | %    | Count    | %    | Count   | %    | Count | %    | Count          | %    | Mean  | SD |
| The website provides valuable information for my research needs | 8                 | 7.0  | 0        | 0.0  | 22      | 19.1 | 61    | 53.0 | 24             | 20.9 | 4     | 1  |
| The website enhances my ability to secure research funding      | 16                | 13.9 | 8        | 7.0  | 29      | 25.2 | 54    | 47.0 | 8              | 7.0  | 3     | 1  |
| The website facilitates collaboration with other researchers    | 8                 | 7.0  | 16       | 13.9 | 29      | 25.2 | 46    | 40.0 | 16             | 13.9 | 3     | 1  |
| The website is regularly updated with relevant content          | 8                 | 7.0  | 16       | 13.9 | 45      | 39.1 | 30    | 26.1 | 16             | 13.9 | 3     | 1  |

The mean agreement of 4 (SD = 1) shows that the first statement received a general agreement among the faculty, with majority (53.0%) agreeing that the website provides valuable information for their research needs while none of them disagree. Equally notable is 47.0% of the study participants who expressed agreement with the statement that the website enhances their ability to secure research funding while only 13.9% strongly disagreed with the same statement. Similarly, 40.0% of the participants agreed with the statement that the website facilitates collaboration with other researchers while just 7.0% of them expressed strong disagreement with the same statement. However, 39.1% of them were neutral on the prompt that website is regularly updated with relevant content while 7.0% strongly disagreed with the prompt. Overall, the faculty agree that the websites of the research division resources are useful.

#### Overall satisfaction with the research division website

The research went further to seek participants' level of satisfaction with the research division's website as provided in figure 8;





**Figure 8: Overall satisfaction**

It is notable from the above figure that the participants were impressively satisfied with overall outlook of their research divisions' websites and resources. The highest number of the respondents (40.0%) rated their level of overall satisfaction as good while 20.9% of them indicated "Very good". This was followed by 19.1% of the study participants who indicated that they were fairly satisfied whereas the overall satisfaction of 13.9% of participants was excellent. Worthy of note is that only 6.1% of the sampled faculty members indicated their overall satisfaction level as poor.

#### **Challenges in using the university research division website**

The challenges that the faculty face when using the university research division website were also inquired and the responses presented in table 5;

**Table no 5: Challenges in using the research website**

|                                       | Count | %    |
|---------------------------------------|-------|------|
| Difficulty in navigation              | 22    | 19.1 |
| Lack of relevant resources            | 31    | 27   |
| Never used                            | 7     | 6.1  |
| Outdated content                      | 8     | 7    |
| Technical issues (e.g., slow loading) | 31    | 27   |

The study identified five main challenges that the faculty cited as possible hindrances to their optimum utilization of the research divisions' website / research portal. Technical issues like slow loading or downloading of resources within the website was a common challenge among 27.0% of the study participants. A similar challenge concerning navigation of the website site was highlighted by 19.1% of the participants who indicated that they encounter difficulty while navigating the platform. Another 7% of the participants said the website had outdated content while 6.1% had never used the websites.

## **VII. Discussion**

Majority of the faculty members (80.9%) expressed their awareness of a number of services that were offered through the research division websites of the respective universities in support of the activities. Different factors effective communication about the services to faculty through email updates, organized seminars and works as well as one-on-one engagements among the individual faculty members were proposed as the key drivers of the impressive awareness levels. For instance, 32% of the study respondents indicated that interpersonal communication among colleagues was the most effective means through which they got to know about the research divisions' services. However, the study revealed that just a few members of the faculty actually accessed the divisions' websites. For instance, 51.3% of the sampled faculty members reported that they infrequently visited the website of their research divisions. The statistical gap between the faculty awareness and their actual usage of the websites points to limited appreciation of the websites and their contents as valuable tools in supporting research activities. Therefore, the research underscores the importance of not only maintaining but also actively enhancing university research division websites as central hubs for research support.

## **VIII. Conclusion**

On the utilization of the research resources, 54.8% of the research participants could easily navigate the research divisions' websites while only 6.1% found difficulty in navigating the website to retrieve the required resources. Information about research funding opportunities was the most utilized content of the research

divisions' website since it was cited by 40.9% of the study participants. Other members of faculty accessed the website to access research resources while some used the platform to submit their research proposals. All kinds of research support contents of the websites were found to be quite useful to the faculty as the study participants expressed good level of overall satisfaction.

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