

Social science undergraduates' perceptions of generative Artificial Intelligence tools: A case study

M. A. L. Silva¹, S. M. Adhikari¹, M. A. Lankathilake², S. D. Somaratna²

¹*The Library, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka*

²*Science Library, Faculty of Science, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka*

The penetration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is revolutionising the education landscape. To develop a sustainable framework for the use of AI in higher education, it is vital to identify the perception of undergraduates on AI tools. Although a few studies have examined the undergraduate use of AI for academic work in the Sri Lankan context, there is a gap in research in identifying social science undergraduates' perceptions. Therefore, this study aims to identify the types and purposes of using AI tools, determine undergraduate perception, and find out the relationships between user context and perception of use of AI tools. A survey was conducted with the undergraduates (n=3104) of the Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo, by using the stratified sampling technique based on the academic years with a sample size of 341. A questionnaire was administered to collect data, and 57.4% responded. Data were analysed using SPSS Version 22. Most respondents are between 20-24 years of age (94%), and 87% are females. Respondents use 14 different AI tools, with a majority using a free version of ChatGPT (94%). Most of the respondents (84%) use AI tools daily and smartphones were the preferred devices. Knowledge discovery (65%) is the main purpose of using AI tools, whereas creative work (42%) and assisting in assignments (42%) are the other key purposes. Only 51.2% of undergraduates were satisfied with the use of AI tools, while 38.6% have indicated neutral satisfaction. Ease of use was the main reason to use AI tools, whereas quick response, generation of new ideas and efficiency were the other reasons. Age has a significant relationship with user perception on creativity ($p = 0.023$) and new idea generation ($p = 0.021$). Furthermore, significant relationships were observed between the undergraduate perception with subject streams and the level of study. This study concludes that the social science undergraduates of the University of Colombo use different AI tools, and the majority are satisfied with using AI for academic activities. Higher education institutes should consider developing AI policies to align with the changing needs of the undergraduates in the contemporary education landscape.

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