

Information Seeking Behaviour of Students in Digital Environment: A Case Study

Jaspal Kaur Bhatia

Venkata Rao P

Abstract

The paper presents the results of a survey of the information seeking behaviour of students at Dev Samaj College, Chandigarh. The purpose of the survey was to explore the use of information technology by the college students for seeking information and to know how they access e-resources. The study made an effort to determine the sources of accessing e-resources in particular. A questionnaire was randomly circulated to one hundred students, who visited the library. The overall response rate was 64%. It was revealed that less than fifty percent of the respondents were not aware about e-resources. It was found that the students of the College use search engines as a major source to access e-resources for their information needs and for the purpose of updating knowledge on their subjects of interest. In order to overcome the hindrances in accessing the e-resources, the study recommends awareness programmes for the students and to provide training on web searching and retrieval skills.

Keywords: Information Seeking Behaviour, College Students

1. Introduction

Knowledge and information are vital for career development and growth. In the modern society, the types of information and the media which present them have become manifold and multifarious, offering a vast selection for the academic community in particular. The increase in information on the Web has affected information seeking behavior.

Information seeking behaviour involves personal reasons for seeking information, the kinds of information which are being sought, and the ways and sources with which needed information is being sought. Information seeking behaviour is the purposive seeking for information as a consequence of a need to satisfy some goal. In the course of seeking, the individual may interact with manual information systems (such as a newspaper or a library), or with computer-based systems (such as the Web).

Academic libraries have a long history, starting with the chained and closed-access libraries of earlier times to the present-day hybrid, digital, and virtual libraries that use the latest technology for provision of information through various services. Today, these libraries are surrounded by networked data that is connected to vast ocean of Internet-based services to make desired information sources accessible to the academic community – students and the faculty alike.

In order to ascertain how the college students seek information in digital environment, a survey was carried out during October/November 2010 at the Dev Samaj College for Women, Chandigarh.

Dev Samaj College for Women (DSCW), Chandigarh established in 1981 is affiliated to Panjab University, Chandigarh. The college library has a collection of over 14000 documents along with 82 periodicals and non-print media such as CDs and DVDs. The Library has computerized its operations and services using SOUL software in the year 2003 and is equipped with all modern facilities like reprography, audio-video cassettes, access to the Internet, etc. In February 2010 the library migrated to LibSys software. The interconnectivity of the library is also in place. The library has developed a digital library of collections containing newspaper clippings, annual reports, and prospectuses of the College. This Digital Library is available for access to the users.

2. Review of Literature

A number of studies in the recent past were carried out to find out the information seeking behaviour of users in different types of libraries all over the world. Some of the surveys in the context of students are reviewed here.

Nicholas, et al (2009) carried out a study to provide evidence on the actual information seeking behaviour of students in a digital scholarly environment. The study showed that the undergraduates and postgraduates were the most likely users of library links to access scholarly databases, suggesting an important "hot link" role for libraries.

Fatima, Nishat and Ahmad, (2008) investigated the information seeking behaviour of college students to find out the awareness and usage of library resources. The findings of the survey indicated the need to increase the usage of library resources and services. Kakai et al (2004) observed that the information seeking behaviour of students involved active or purposeful information as a result of the need to complete course assignment, prepare for class discussions, seminars, workshops, conferences, and for writing final year research papers.

Majid and Tan, (2002) investigated the information needs and information seeking behaviour of computer engineering undergraduate students at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. The purpose was to identify the types of information sources used by the students, their preferred information formats and the use of various electronic information sources. It was found that the use of databases and electronic journals was quite low.

Fidzani (1998) surveyed 144 students to determine the information seeking behaviour and use of information resources by graduate students at the University of Botswana. The purpose of the study was to find out what their information requirements were and determine their awareness of library services available to them. The findings of the study indicated that the guidance in the use of library resources and services was necessary to help students meet some of their information requirements.

As few studies were focused on information seeking behaviour of students in digital environment, the present survey is an attempt to fill the gap.

3. Objectives

The study has the following objectives to ascertain the information seeking behaviour of students in the digital environment:

- 3.1 To examine the information seeking behaviour;
- 3.2 To explore the use of information technology;
- 3.3 To know the sources of accessing e-resources;
- 3.4 To know the purpose of information seeking; and
- 3.5 To know the hindrances in seeking information from e-resources

4. Methodology

A questionnaire based survey method was adopted to gather the data on the information seeking behaviour of the students of Dev Samaj College for Women, Chandigarh. The questionnaires were distributed to 100 students randomly to the students who visited the library during October / November 2010. Sixty four filled in questionnaires were returned by the students with the response being 64%.

5. Data Analysis

The data collected from the students through the questionnaires were analyzed using simple percentage technique.

5.1 Knowledge of Information Technology

The question was asked to know the status on the knowledge of information technology of the students of the college. In response to this question, 30 (46.87%) students indicated that their status on the knowledge of information technology being "Average", while 24 (37.5%) mentioned as "Good". Only 10 (15.62%) students had "Very Good" knowledge of information technology, as shown in Table 5.1 below:

Table 5.1: Knowledge of Information Technology

Status	Response Received	Percentage
Very Good	10	15.62
Good	24	37.50
Average	30	46.87
Total	64	99.99

5.2 Knowledge of E-Resources

From Table 5.2, it is seen that majority of the students, ie 30 (46.87%) had no knowledge of e-resources, while 10 (15.62%) indicated that they did not know about the e-resources. Yet, 24 (37.50%) students had the knowledge of e-resources.

Table 5.2: Knowledge of E-Resources

Category	Response Received	Percentage
Yes	24	37.50
No	30	46.87
Don't Know	10	15.62
Total	64	99.99

5.3 Types of E-Resources Accessed

Table 5.3 shows the types of e-resources accessed by the students to seek information for their needs. The e-books were preferred by 11 (17.19%) students, followed by bibliographic database, which was accessed by 10 (15.62%) students. The electronic journals and CD-ROM databases were the other e-resources accessed by 8 (12.5%) students and 7 (10.93%) students, respectively.

Table 5.3: E-Resources Accessed

Status	Response Received	Percentage
Type	Response Received	Percentage
Electronic Journals	8	12.50
Electronic Books	11	17.19
Bibliographic Databases	10	15.62
CD-ROM Databases	7	10.93

5.4 Sources of E-Resources

The students were asked to mention the sources they used to access the e-resources as shown in Table 5.4. It is clear from the table that 24 (37.5%) students use Search Engines as source of accessing e-resources, while 20 (31.25%) students found the source in the form of websites of universities and institutions. The OPAC as a source to access the e-resources got the favour of 17

(26.56%) students. It is evident from the analysis that the majority of the students found the search engines an easy way to get access to e-resources.

Table 5.4: Sources of E-Resources

Source	Response Received	Percentage
OPAC	17	26.56
Search Engines	24	37.50
Websites of Universities and Institutions	20	31.25

5.5 Frequency of using E-Resources

The usage of the e-resources amongst the students is yet to pick-up as is evident as shown in Table 5.5. Very few students frequently accessed the e-resources – 5 (7.81%) students used e-journals; 4 (6.25%) used e-books and online databases and just 2 (3.12%) had CD-ROM databases. While these e-resources had found favour by a few more students who could access them sometimes. However, it is very clear from the Table that majority of the students never used e-resources.

Table 5.5: Frequency of Using E-resources

E- Resources	Frequently (%)	Sometimes (%)	Never (%)
Electronic Journals	5 (7.81)	12 (18.75)	47 (73.43)
Electronic Books	4 (6.25)	13 (20.31)	47 (73.43)
Online Databases	4 (6.25)	11 (17.19)	49 (76.56)
CD-ROM Databases	2 (3.12)	10 (15.62)	42 (65.62)

5.6 Purpose of using E-Resources

The purpose for which the e-resources were used by the students, as shown in Table 5.6, indicated that majority of the students, ie 24 (37.5%) e-resources for preparing their academic assignments and for themselves updating on their subjects of interest. While 20 (31.25%) students used e-resources for the purpose of career development and growth, followed by 19 (29.68%) students who used e-resources for preparing them selves for competitive examinations.

Table 5.6: Purpose of using E-Resources

Purpose	Response Received	Percentage
For academic assignments	24	37.50
For learning to prepare for competitions	19	29.68
To keep up-to-date on subjects of interest	24	37.50
For career development and growth	20	31.25

5.7 Problems in Accessing e-resources

The students were asked to indicate the problems they encountered for accessing e-resources as shown in Table 5.7. The majority of the students, 45 (70.31) agreed that limited access to computers was the major problem for not able to use the e-resources, while 23 (35.93%) students disagreed with using e-resources often distracts from work being the problem. 41 (64.06%) students felt that too much information was the problem they faced to access the e-resources.

Table 5.7: Problems in Accessing Electronic Resources

Problem	Agree (%)	Disagree(%)
Too much information is retrieved	41 (64.06)	18 (28.12)
Lack of IT knowledge and skills to effective utilize services	28 (43.75)	17 (26.56)
Using e-resources often distracts from work	27 (42.18)	23 (35.93)
Limited access to computers	45 (70.31)	8 (12.50)

5.8 Use of Automated Information Services

Table 5.8 below indicated the awareness and use of automated information services provided by the library. The circulation service was used by 43 (67.18%) students, while only 3 (4.68%) made use of selective dissemination of information service.

Table 5.8: Use of Automated Information Services

Automated Service	Response Received	Percentage
Circulation Service	43	67.18
Reference Service	28	43.75
Bibliographical Service	11	17.19
Current Awareness Service	26	40.62
Selective Dissemination of Information	3	4.68
Newspaper Clippings	33	51.56

Table 5.9 shows the areas of training as required by the students to access the e-resources. 45 (70.31%), the majority of the students, indicated that they required training for learning more about the Internet and search engines in order to access and make use of e-resources. Training in information retrieval skills got the attention of 34 (53.12%) students, while 23 (35.93) students wanted to improve their OPAC searching. Overall, majority of the students indicated that they should be trained for accessing e-resources.

Table 5.9: Areas of Training Required

Areas of training	Response Received	Percentage
Learning more about Internet and Search Engines	45	70.31
Information Retrieval Skills	34	53.12
OPAC Searching	23	35.93

6 Conclusion

The college students are loaded with assignments and learning on their own in the present day competitive academic environment. Information seeking and gathering could be a challenging task to these college students with limited resources and services available in a college library. The Internet has attracted the attention of the students as an easy source of accessing information and e-resources as is evident from the above study. Yet, only a sizeable number of students could frequently seek information from e-resources. Most of the students access e-resources for updating their knowledge on their respective subjects and for academic assignments. A majority of the students found that limited access to computers being the problem to use e-resources and indicated their willingness to get trained to learn more about using the Internet and e-resources.

The college library should play a pivotal role in facilitating the students in the use of Internet and e-resources and other library and information services. The college library should organize the awareness programmes and seminars to educate the students on seeking information from e-resources and to maximize the use of library resources and services. As there will be growing dependence on the Internet by the students for their information needs, the college library should strive to have the facilities and resources required.

References

1. AJIBOYE, Josiah O and TELLA, Adeyinka. (2007). University undergraduate students' information seeking behaviour: Implications for quality in higher education in Africa. The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology, 6 (1), article 4. Available at: <http://www.tojet.net/articles/614.pdf>

2. FATIMA, Nishat and AHMAD, Naved. (2008). Information seeking behaviour of the students at Ajmal Khan Tibbiya College, Aligarh Muslim University: A Survey. *Annals of Library and Information Studies*, 55 (June), 141-144.
3. FIDZANI, B T. (1998). Information needs and information seeking behaviour of graduate students at the University of Botswana. *Library Review*, 47 (7), 329-340.
4. KAKAI, M; IKOJA-ODONGO, R and KIGONGO, I M N. (2004). A study of the information seeking behaviour of undergraduate students of Makerere University, Uganda. *World Libraries*, 14 (1), 544-564.
5. MAJID, Shaheen and TAN, Ai Tee. (2002). Usage of information resources by computer engineering students: A case study of Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. *Online Information Review*, 26 (5), 318-325.
6. NICHOLAS, David, et al. (2009). Student digital information seeking behaviour in context. *Journal of Documentation*, 65 (1), 106-132.
7. PATITUNGKHO, Kingkaew and DESHPANDE, Neela. (2005). Information seeking behaviour of faculty members of Rajabhat Universities in Bangkok. *Webology*, 2(4). Available at: <http://www.webology.ir/2005/v2n4/a20.html>.

About Authors

Mrs. Jaspal Kaur Bhatia, Librarian, Dev Samaj College for Women, Chandigarh.

Dr. Venkata Rao P, Librarian and Coordinator of Documentation Division at M G State Institute of Public Administration Punjab, Chandigarh.