

## INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOR OF POST GRADUATE STUDENTS OF SPMVV, TIRUPATI (AP): A STUDY

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### ABSTRACT

The present era is an era of information and knowledge revolution. Many electronic resources have been made most available in the libraries. The increase in availability of information on the Web has affected Information seeking behavior. Innumerable types of information, in a large variety of formats and from many different locations, are all available at one place. In the modern society, the types of information and the media which present them have become manifold and multifarious, offering men and women a choice from a wide spectrum of vast selection. Regardless of the group in a human society that is discussed, each one bases its actions upon current information and discards the earlier data. Philosophers emphasize the direct, experiential acquisition of knowledge in the material, physical plane of existence as the most proper form of information. So, no one can deny that knowledge and information are vital.

### INTRODUCTION

Information seeking is a basic activity indulged in by all people and manifested through a particular way of behavior. It is also an aspect of scholarly work most interesting to academic librarians who strive to develop collections, services, and organizational structures that facilitate seeking of information (Wiberley, 1989). There is a universal assumption that man was born innocent and should actively seek knowledge. 'Information seeking is thus a natural and necessary mechanism of human existence' (Marchionini, 1995). Information seeking behavior is the purposive seeking of 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.

Information seeking behavior 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 behavior is expressed in various forms, from reading printed material to research and experimentation. Scholars, students and faculty actively seek current information from the various media available in libraries, e.g.

encyclopedias, journals and more currently, electronic media. Abels (2004) mentioned that the frequency of use of the internet in 1998-2000 had greatly increased. At the same time, expenditure on monographs showed steady increase.

The library, therefore, is the most widely used source of information available to literate societies. The librarian should be aware of what kind of information is being sought, and how it can be obtained. Due to the rapidly escalating cost of purchasing and archiving printed scholarly journals and electronic media, the library has the duty to provide and maintain efficient services.

### **NEED OF THE STUDY**

The nature of information is not easy to describe. Perhaps the most explicit definition in the literature defines information as recorded experience that is used in decision-making. Today, information technology has developed rapidly and has had a huge impact on access to information and on information seeking behavior. The librarian and library-staff have to know and examine the criteria of information seeking and information utility by users for providing information services, designing new information systems, intervening in the operation of existing systems, or planning service programs.

The present human society is living in an information age and as a consequence, man has become more and more information conscious. More and more people deliberately and consciously seek information and it has become an integral part of human activity especially in the area of education, research and development, production and marketing of goods, all of which have contributed to the improvement of the quality of life. World War I and II accelerated research and development activities resulting in information explosion. The information so produced is recorded and reported in a variety of documents-printed and non-printed documents. The information explosion coupled with multiplicity of documents has created problems to the generators, users, and the organizers of information.

The users of information are finding difficulty in identifying and physically locating the relevant information at the time when it is required. In this context, the libraries, being the reservoirs of knowledge and the centers of learning, have a greater responsibility in providing the right information to the right user at the right time, in the right form so that the information will be put to maximum use, thereby promoting the use of information. To achieve this, the Libraries/Information Centers need to be planned and designed based on the needs and requirements of the users of libraries.

User studies are one of the interdisciplinary areas of research in library and information science and form a large body of literature in the discipline. However it is an area, which combines some of the most used and the least precisely defined concepts of Library and Information Science. These concepts, such as information uses or need, Information seeking behavior, channels of communication, exist in a system of complicated and interdependent relations from recognition of some need perceived by the user. A user may follow formal and /or informal channels of communication in order to acquire the desired information.

Users have been viewed as passive recipients of information and the study investigates their external behavior, generally by means of qualitative methods. Although these surveys have yielded much quantitative data, which gives an overall picture of information needs and seeking behavior, they fail to convey a real picture regarding the factors which trigger the information search and a more in-depth insight into the individuals' concepts and thoughts. On the other hand, in user-oriented studies, users are viewed as active and self controlling recipients of information and they are concerned with the internal cognitions and attitudes of users, which are investigated by qualitative methods. The cognitive approach of the researchers focuses their efforts to understand 'how individuals process information and then illustrate this process through models'. In the holistic approach, the researcher is not only interested in the cognitive needs of the users but also takes into account other factors which influence them to use the information sources, the methods followed in searching for information and possible reasons for not using information sources, if any. Another category is the action research. This approach views users as active participants during their research and tries to understand the language, the activities and the social inter-relationships of users. A more recent one is the theory of usability techniques, which was with the use of computers and new technology in conjunction with information seeking behavior. They focus on the use of a system; but from the user's point of view. They take as a base user's needs in order to create an environment, which will be friendly, effective and easy for a user to handle.

The Post Graduate Students of Sri Padmavathi Mahila Visvavidyalayam (SPMVV), Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh are expected to optimally utilize the university library as one of their major sources of information. However, observing and conducting studies on library use in the university environment in general establishes the fact that students do not use most of the library information resources. It is assumed that students could be experiencing

technical problems in accessing information resources. This coupled with lack of knowledge and awareness of the resources resulting in the students' poor information seeking behavior was singled out as the biggest cause that needed investigation. Library information resources are expensive. They are costly in terms of their acquisition and retention. The librarians need to manage these resources and make them accessible. To attain cost effectiveness in the university library services and to promote the use of library information resources and services, this study sought to establish ways of improving the information seeking behavior of Post Graduate students in SPMVV.

Taking into account the constant development in the provision of recent electronic systems, the lack of understanding the information seeking behavior poses an obstacle in the process of interpreting the way in which the electronic information services are being delivered. Knowledge generated by user studies helps to develop information systems and information services. Hence, there is need for alternative research methods and conceptual frameworks, which will provide the information to the science community, the evidence to acquire a more in-depth understanding of the users of information services.

#### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The present study is entitled, "Information seeking Behavior of Post Graduate Students of Sri Padmavathi Mahila Visvavidyalayam, Tirupati (AP): A study".

#### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The study examined the information seeking behavior of Post Graduate students in the Sri Padmavathi Mahila Visvavidyalayam, Tirupati (AP). Precisely, the focus was on obtaining information on the nature of academic information needed by the students, the sources consulted and the general pattern of information gathering system by the students. More specifically, the objectives of the study were:

- To study the information needs and seeking behavior of Post Graduate Students in Sri Padmavathi Mahila Visvavidyalayam (SPMVV)
- To identify the types and range of information resources used currently by Post Graduate Students and determine the level of their use
- To investigate the availability of information resources that affects the information seeking patterns and communication process of Post Graduate Students

- To determine whether or not different kinds of information need leads to different information seeking behavior and communication channels
- To identify the information searching methods adopted while searching for information in the library
- To analyze the possible reasons for not using information sources, if any and
- To suggest measures for enhancing the use of information sources, and seeking a synthesis of theoretical elements from information science.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

### Study Population and Sampling Tool:

The population of this study consists of Post Graduate Students of SPMVV, Tirupati (AP). As it is not possible to study the entire population in view of time and cost, a sample of 831 Post Graduate Students has been selected by stratified random sampling method. The Post Graduate students covered in the study are from Humanities, Social Sciences and Science subjects. The Post Graduate Students were stratified on the basis of the disciplines of their study: Humanities, Social Sciences and Pure Sciences. Out of the 831 Post Graduate Students thus selected, 630 students returned the questionnaire, with an overall response rate of 75.81%. The sample for the present study is composed of 630 students.

### Tool for Data Collection:

Questionnaires and interview methods were used in this study, with self-administered and hand delivered questionnaires distributed to the student respondents. Semi-structured in-depth face-to-face interviews were used to collect data from their information seeking endeavors. The tools designed to elicit research information in order to identify the factors including socio-economic factors which are liable to affect the information seeking behavior such as nature of the information need, the purpose it would serve or the existence of external barriers posed by the environment of Post Graduate Students in the University. As the study population was scattered and a large population was involved, the questionnaire method was adopted for collecting research data keeping in view of the objectives of the study. It was also felt necessary to adopt interview method to overcome the limitation of the questionnaire especially among some students, who could not respond to questionnaire owing to shortage of time. Under such circumstances, interview schedule was employed in obtaining research data from the Post Graduate Students of SPMVV as a supplement to questionnaire method.

**Statistical Inference:**

The data collected from the respondents of the study was coded and decoded by feeding the independent variable of information seeking behavior in the SPSS-Statistical Package in Social Sciences (11.0 version).

**SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The study is confined to Post Graduate Students of SPMVV to understand their information seeking behavior. The university environment is of a heterogeneous group comprising Post Graduate Students, Research Scholars and Teaching Faculty in the purview of information seeking channel and instead of covering all the groups of users, only Post Graduate Students have been taken for the research study. This is the limitation of the study. This is to cover mainly a fair proportion of students representing all the departments instead of becoming a sample representation of a few departments.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Barrett (2005) made an explanatory research on the information seeking habits of graduate student researchers in the humanities, by conducting in-depth interviews with a small sample of humanities graduate students, were used to explore to what extent humanities graduate students might constitute a user group distinct from faculty and undergraduate models.

Fulton, Kerins and Madden (2004) report the results of two empirical studies which explored the information seeking behavior of engineering and law students in Ireland. The findings reveal similar patterns in the information seeking behavior between students studying to become professionals and information seeking patterns of these groups. Students learned their information seeking strategies, including effective and less effective approaches, from educators. Misperceptions of the role and value of libraries and information professionals in their studies were common, and as a result, students often adopted information seeking strategies that excluded libraries and library staff. The two studies suggest that engineering and law students in Ireland could benefit from greater information literacy training and awareness, enabling them to acquire the information skills they need to function effectively and efficiently in their future professional work lives.

Hanson (1964) revealed that 24% of the scientists in atomic energy in UK undertake information searching on their own.

Hartmann (2001) concluded that undergraduate students experienced difficulty in locating items from the library collection and did not understand the processes for retrieving journal articles.

Herner and Mavitt (1954) found that one-fifth of the population studies visited the library very often to do their own literature searching.

Kenney's (1966) study conducted at International Labour Office found that the rank order of approaches of users was by subject headings, personal authors and title.

Machovec (1984) opined that voice recognition systems for on-line literature searching will make it much easier for intermediaries and users to interrogate with on-line information utilities without having to type.

Majid and Ali (2002) studies the use of information resources by computer engineering students in Singapore and found that the top five information resources in order of preference were books (94%), Lecturers (84%), the internet (86%), and friends (84%). They relied heavily on printed sources of information and their use of electronic journals and databases was very low.

Osiobe (1988) found that browsing was the most important source of finding references for undergraduate students. He concluded that respondents in the University of Botswana did seek help from University library staff with 40% receiving help from the reference librarian and approximately 32% from the subject librarian.

Rokitskaya (1975) observed that the present techniques and strategy of literature searching were found inadequate due to lack of stability of the reference system and bibliographical tools.

Shenton (2004) revealed that effective information skills are a prerequisite for young people in today's society, relatively little is known about how youngsters actually find information. The existing knowledge base on the subject is scanty and piecemeal, and few efforts have been made to explore, as an entirety, studies of young people's information seeking and to isolate the methods, perspectives and strategies that researchers have adopted. Examination of these areas can alert prospective investigators to issues that they should explore and approaches that they might wish to take in their own work.

Song's (2004) investigates information seeking behavior of one particular segment of international students – international students seeking degrees in the field of business at the University of Illinois of Urbana-Champaign. The survey was designed to compare their

perceptions of library services and information seeking behaviors. This study focused on three aspects of how domestic and international business students to assess the effectiveness of library instruction sessions; how domestic and international business students use library services; and use the internet for their research. The survey results offer insights into understanding different perceptions of these two student groups with respect to their library use patterns and research strategies.

**Data Analysis:** An attempt has been made to analyze the research data collected from students from SPMVV and interpret the results revealing their information seeking behavior that provides valuable source of information to the library managers and planners in designing and developing a suitable strategy in promoting the better use of valuable information sources including electronic format and thus justifying the cost effectiveness of library efforts.

**Results and Discussion:** The results of the user observations, questionnaire schedule, interviews and participatory design sessions provide a rich description of how information seekers use various information sources, searching methods employed in obtaining desired information and problems of not using information resources, if any.

The research study is confined to Post Graduate students of SPMVV. The departments of the university have been broadly classified under major disciplines representing Humanities, Social Sciences and Pure Sciences. Discipline-wise distribution of respondents is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Discipline-wise Distribution of Respondents**

Discipline	No. of Respondents	Percent
Humanities	120	19.0
Social Science	248	39.4
Pure Sciences	262	41.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>630</b>	<b>100</b>

It is found from the Table 1 that, more or less, the students covered in the study belong to the disciplines of Social Sciences (39.4%) and Pure Sciences discipline (41.6%). However, 19% of students represent Humanities, which is less when as compared to Social Sciences and Pure Sciences discipline mainly because of the less number of departments under Humanities and their total intake of students.

**FREQUENCY OF USE OF LIBRARY:**

Library and Information Centre is a knowledge bank considered to be the heart of the university enriched with variety of information sources and services in print and electronic format to support learning, teaching and research. Attempts were made to understand the habit of using the library by the Post Graduate students in a university. Table 2 showing the frequency of visits to the library.

**Table 2: Frequency of Using Library by Respondents**

Frequency of Visit	No. of Respondents	Percent
Every day	367	58.3
Alternate day	128	20.3
Once in a week	79	12.5
Occasionally	53	8.4
Do not use library	3	0.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>630</b>	<b>100</b>

It is clear from the Table 2 that, all the respondents of the study i.e. Post Graduate students of university area in the habit of using the library. Among them, about 58.3% of respondents visit the library everyday, 20.3% of respondents visit the library every alternate day, 12.5% of respondents visit once in a week, 8.4% of respondents visit the library occasionally and a very negligible portion opine that they do not use library.

**PURPOSE OF USING LIBRARY**

Library should be viewed as an integral part and parcel of every academician to encourage, motivate and support not only learning and research but also to develop ideal citizens of the country. Thus, the purpose of visiting the library is equally important for optimization of respondents' knowledge to support their educational endeavor. Table 3 shows the purpose of seeking information by the respondents of the study.

**Table 3: Purpose of Using Library**

Purpose	No. of Respondents	Percent
Preparing for examination	215	34.1
Preparing project work	74	11.7
Preparing for competitive examination	160	25.4
Preparing for Dissertation work	60	9.5
Preparing Notes	105	16.7
General Reading	16	2.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>630</b>	<b>100</b>

It is noted from the Table 3 that, about 34.1% of respondents' purpose of visiting the library is preparing for examinations. This is followed by respondents using the library to prepare for competitive examinations (25.4%). About 16.7% of respondents use the library to prepare the notes and preparing project work (11.7%). Least of the respondents are preparing for dissertation work (9.5%) and general reading (2.6%). Thus general tendency for visiting the library by the Post Graduate students is to prepare for general examinations and prepare for competitive examinations.

It was asked to the Post Graduate students as to whether they need instruction on how to use information sources in their subject areas for more effective use of libraries. The table 4 shows the result.

**Table 4 : Need for Instruction/Guidance for Using Various Information Sources**

Instructions/Guidance	No. of Respondents	Percent
Agree	419	66.5
Strongly Agree	131	20.8
Neutral	76	12.1
Disagree	1	0.2
Strongly disagree	3	0.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>630</b>	<b>100</b>

It is clear from the Table 4 that, 66.5% and 20.8% of respondents agree and strongly agree that they need instruction on how to use information sources in their subject areas for more effective use of the library. While 12.1% of respondents are neutral in their attitude towards need for instruction on using information sources in their subject areas and very negligible portion of respondents disagree for undertaking instructions in using the library resources. Thus, most of the respondents of the study opined the need for instruction on using information sources in their subject areas.

Internet is presumed to be used for academic and research endeavor, but besides these purposes, internet may be used for different purposes also. To check the purpose behind using the internet by the respondents, Table 5 present the following.

**Table 5: Purpose of Using Internet Technology**

<b>Purpose of Using Internet</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Research Project	270	42.9
Means of Communication	113	17.9
Downloading Programs	113	17.9
Professional Development	66	10.5
Chatting	5	0.8
Entertainment	16	2.5
Do not use internet	47	7.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>630</b>	<b>100</b>

It is seen from the table 5 that, quite surprisingly internet is used mainly for research project (42.9%) than for communication (17.9%) and downloading programs (17.9%). However, the other purpose of using internet by the respondents are for professional development (10.5%), entertainment (2.5%) and chatting (0.8%). Thus the result shows that, research projects, communication and downloading programs are the purposes of using internet.

The results confirms with the study conducted at Large south western University (Drnek, 1998), which reveals that the most frequent response from the students to use the internet was conducting research and obtaining additional information on topics of interest for class, followed by e-mail communication.

Frequency of using various library services by the post Graduate students is shown in Table 6.

**Table 6 : Frequency of Using Library Services**

<b>Library Services</b>	<b>Inter-Library Loan</b>	<b>Reference Services</b>	<b>Photocopy Service</b>	<b>CD-ROM Search</b>	<b>Book Reservation-Circulation</b>
Never	332	162	354	370	364
Sometime	95	95	52	46	45
Occasionally	14	30	13	11	17
Often	64	89	66	67	70
Very often	125	254	145	136	134
<b>Total</b>	<b>630</b>	<b>630</b>	<b>630</b>	<b>630</b>	<b>630</b>

It is indicated from the Table 6 that, among the various information services, reference service (254) is very often used service as compared to other library services. The library services in general used quite often and occasionally is almost same for the inter-library loan, reference service, photocopy service, CD-ROM search, book reservation-circulation and bound periodicals over night service. However, more than half of the respondents of the study indicated that they never use inter-library loan, reference, photocopy service, CD-ROM search and book reservation-circulation.

### **Summary of Findings:**

The significant findings of the study are given below:

- All the respondents are in the habit of using the library and more than half of them visit the library everyday and one-fifth visit the library every alternate day and a very negligible portion do not use the library and they are having their personal book collection.
- The main purpose of visiting the library is preparing for examinations, followed by preparing for competitive examinations and dissertation work.
- Educational information is the pre-dominantly used information-need for the respondents useful for their academic and research activities followed by employment and job related information.
- All the respondents of the study undertake information searching on their own to meet their desired educational needs.
- More than half of the respondents have undergone formal training in information searching.
- Two-third and one-fourth of the respondents agree and strongly agree that they need instruction on how to use information sources in their subject areas for effective use of library.
- Majority of the respondents are using books to support their curriculum and examinations needs of the course accounting to 94.6%. Thus books remain a popular source of information to the Post Graduate students in for their academic course and for curriculum support.

- Among the Post Graduate students not using books, the reasons for not using are lack of sufficient number of copies of books and non-availability of latest editions of books.
- Almost all the respondents use internet technology for their academic and research activity.
- The main purpose of using internet is for research project than for communication and downloading programs.
- Browsing website and search engines are the most preferred methods for finding information on the internet.
- E-reference books and e-journals are the types of electronic information sources browsed on the internet by the respondents.
- Major reasons for not using internet are mainly the fact that, respondents are not interested in accessing internet and feel lack of training in browsing the internet.
- Majority of the respondents are of the opinion that information resources in the university library are adequately stocked.
- More than four-fifth of the respondents indicated the availability of adequate books on competitive examinations.

### **SUGGESTIONS:**

Information seeking is widely used in information sciences to encompass the entire process from recognizing the need for information to finding and using it. It focuses on interaction between the information seeker and information resources. In fact, it is a cyclic or interactive process by nature and is more than simply gathering information, encompasses posing and identifying the question, exploring available information; coming back to refine the question, gathering and evaluating further information, and synthesizing and using it. This cyclic process of gathering, sorting, evaluating and refining may be carried out a number of times.

A holistic view of information seeking process comes near to ideas of inquiry learning. They both emphasize an iterative question-driven process of finding, managing and evaluating information. An additional aspect of inquiry learning is its collaborative nature, which gives rise to a challenge of arranging collaborative situations of information seeking with heterogeneous groups of students. A naïve way of students' information seeking

process emerged through empirical studies. Instead of being a holistic process, it manifests itself in the form of information gathering only, and uncritical acceptance of information. When learning activities are focused on information gathering, such important phases as refining the question, evaluating and synthesizing information, is easily neglected.

The results of the study emphasize the need for better orientation about library resources and services and user-training workshops especially in using and searching skills for journals, abstracting sources (abstracting databases) and internet to support learning, teaching and research. There is a need to organize user-workshops in educating and training regarding the various information sources available that includes primary, secondary and tertiary information sources both print and e-format. Further, the information services extended by university library need to be strengthened as a majority of them are not using the information services extended by the library to an optimal extent.

Using new technological devices merely for copy-pasting information is simply not enough. Instead, a new pedagogical culture, which is supported by technology, has to be carefully designed and put to use for developing students' information skills. In addition, it is important that new pedagogical models, which emphasize higher order information seeking activities do not become an unmanageable additional cognitive load. The library plays a significant role in promoting the better use of information sources and services, but at the same time, the teacher plays an important role in coordinating and scaffolding students' learning activities towards a comprehensive inquiry process. In addition to supporting students, it is also necessary to offer teachers new conceptual devices for understanding the potential and challenges of collaborative inquiry learning and to provide support for practical pedagogical implementation. The starting point for effective information seeking with technological support is thus embedded in a sound theoretical understanding of the information seeking process, as it is intertwined with meaningful pedagogical practices.

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