

## INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOUR OF ACADEMICS

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper delves into the information-seeking behavior of academics, focusing on the strategies used and the choices made, as well as the problems encountered in reaching sources of scholarly information. The research employed a mixed-method approach based on a questionnaire distributed to faculty members across different departments, complemented by in depth interviews with faculty members from several departments. Results show significant reliance by academics on electronic sources, like academic databases and institutional repositories; however, they have a penchant for hard-copy sources: libraries and interlibrary loans. It is important to mention specific discipline needs, time constraint, and credibility of sources for them to search for information. Overload in information as well as the pace at which digital tools emerge were specific issues that were identified during the investigation. The paper, in general, puts across the need for site-specific services to help the students so as to enhance their work on academic research and organize as a community. Ultimately, such understanding can be used for improvement in the design of better resource management and support systems by the academic institution.*

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**Keywords:** *Information-Seeking Behavior, Strategies, Mixed-Method Approach, Academic Institution, Resource Management.*

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### Introduction

Today, academics are experiencing a fast-shifting landscape of resources that support research and teaching activities in this high-informativeness environment. Technological changes lead to great opportunities but also at the same time bring huge challenges on how scholars seek, access, and utilize information. Understanding information-seeking behavior is important because it directly impacts research quality, productivity, and even academic success. Academic normally encounter vast volumes of information sources which may include in printed material to electronic databases and open-access repositories. The use of electronic resources has, in a fundamental way, changed the way one accesses resources. In all ways, this makes possible the easier and faster retrieval of information compared to the analog ones. However, this sheer volume of information results in information overload. This fails to identify relevant and even credible sources of information.

Additionally, seeking behavior of academics may differ depending on the discipline. This is mainly because research customs, the convention of publishing, and resource availability all influence the way scholars approach meeting their information needs. In fact, in STEM fields, a scholar may lean more towards data repositories as well as technical reports. The humanities scholar, on the other hand, might place greater reliance on archival materials and critical texts. Thus, considering that there is disciplinary variability added to the mix, the complexity of mechanisms within which academics seek and apply information becomes even more complex.

Time constraints also play a critical role in shaping the information-seeking behavior of faculty members. Teaching, research, and administrative pressures often limit the time available for carrying out intensive literature reviews or exploration of resources. Consequently, academics may settle for shallow searches or rely on sources they know, which decreases the depth or scope of their research.

This paper aims to identify academics' information-seeking behavior, strategies, and preferred channels of information as well as challenges. A mixed-method approach provides the scope of forging a balanced view regarding how scholars now navigate their new information landscape. The findings,

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therefore, will not only contribute to the existing body of knowledge about research practices in academics but also feed into developing proper support systems and resources for different academic communities with their specific needs. Ultimately, with such an improvement in our understanding of information-seeking behavior, we will better the effectiveness of research together with collaboration in scholarly environments.

### **Objectives**

This paper seeks to attain the following comprehensive objectives, which are aimed at improving our understanding of information-seeking behavior by academics:

- **Identify Information-Seeking Strategies**

Examine the specific strategies of scholars in finding information. More particular items include the use of keywords, Boolean operators, or even advancement in search functionality with the database. It will determine common practices that enable effective retrieval and reveal the special or more non-conventional methods by which scholars use.

- **Investigate Resource Preferences**

To identify types of information sources used by scholars in their research. It will deconstruct those preferences for digital sources over others including print books and paper documents on the shelves of libraries. This analysis helps a person realize the determinants of why some sources are favored over others, such as ease of access, perceived reliability, or relevance to their area of research.

- **Understand Disciplinary Variation**

Investigate how information-seeking behaviors across the different academic disciplines operate. From a disciplinary distinction like STEM, humanities, and social sciences, this goal seeks to point out what makes these distinct, and such distinctions in interaction impact research behaviors. Against this backdrop of disciplinary difference, it would then be possible to discover patterns in resource use and methodologies of research, presenting a more complex view of academic information-seeking behavior.

- **Examine Challenges Encountered**

Identify and analyze the major issues and challenges that academics face in the information-seeking process. Discuss such issues as information overload, problems in distinguishing a credible resource from an untrustworthy one, and those related to time management. A recognition of the nature of such hindrances will throw light on what bars successful research efforts and add to strategies for coping with such hindrances.

- **Evaluation of Technology Effectiveness**

Investigate the role of digital technologies and tools in shaping the information-seeking behaviors of academics. Improvement in technology in search engines, academic networking sites, and citation management tools will be probed to find out their effect on research practices as efficacious and efficient. Furthermore, the study will observe how academics change the conventional methods with these new technologies and how it affects their research outcomes.

- **Inform Support Services**

Informs actional recommendations to help academic institutions develop supports and resources tailored to their specific needs.

This goal identifies particular needs or preferences that faculty members have for the variety of library services, training sessions, and research support in order to better communicate and enhance these aspects in such institutions to better enable scholars in their information-seeking activities.

- **Encourage Collaborative Practices**

Promote and support interdisciplinary collaborative information-seeking behaviors of researchers. This is less so knowing how interdisciplinary collaboration can be beneficial in sharing resources and establishing collective knowledge. It changes the focus to the creation of a collaborative environment, through which this study seeks to establish the value of shared information-seeking strategies as well as the potential for developing innovative research results.

- **Changes Over Time**

Discuss how academia's information-seeking behaviors have evolved with the rapid development of technology and changes in research practices. The scope will be longitudinal in order to trace these trends over time and capture how scholars adapt their strategies within an ever-shifting information landscape.

### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical underpinning of this research into the information-seeking behavior of academics draws upon a number of well-established theories and models, and taken together, results in an overarching understanding of the processes related to searching for, evaluating, and using information. Integrating these theoretical perspectives is an attempt to frame the complexity and nuances of academic information-seeking behavior along cognitive, social, and technological dimensions.

- **Kuhlthau's Information Search Process (ISP) Model**

Kuhlthau's Information Search Process (ISP) Model gives an extensive description of the phases that the seeker undergoes in the information search process. It consists of five stages:

- **Initiation** The perception of a need for information.
- **Selection** Identification of a topic or key area of focus.
- **Exploration** A broad search for information
- **Formulation** Narrowing or delimitation and forming a more specific research question or thesis.
- **Collection**: Collection of the relevant information to support the formulated thesis.

The model focuses on the cognitive and affective experience of the users while searching for information. Anxiety and uncertainty are often said to occur when it comes to the case of information searching. In academics, if they could understand the emotional responses during different stages of searching, it could clarify the way emotions play a part in their search strategy and ultimately the research productiveness.

- **Wilson's Model of Information Behavior**

In the Wilson model, information behavior is highly integrated across different factors, encompassing individual characteristics, social dynamics, and contextual settings. It can be summarized as follows:

- **Individual Factors** Personal reasons, prior knowledge, and past experiences, which defines how academics seek information.
- **Social Factors** How colleagues, institutional culture, and cooperative practices affect the way academics seek information.
- **Environmental Factors** The role played by available resources, such as library services and digital databases, which can be facilitative or hinder access to information.

Using Wilson's model, this research will explore how the interplay of these factors affects academics' information seeking behavior, thereby illuminating the social and contextual dimensions more generally surrounding these practices.

- **Belkin's Anomalous State of Knowledge (ASK) Model**

The ASK model of Belkin's theory underlines the basic reasons behind information seeking. It is understood that people seek information to fill the gaps in their knowledge. The above-mentioned scenario is significant and very applicable when academics encounter uncertainty in their work. In this connection, the ASK model includes

- **Knowledge Gap Recognition**: The recognition of not knowing something on the part of academics triggers the process of seeking information.
- **Information Seeking as a Problem-Solving Process** The necessity of problem-solving concerning such gaps motivates students to seek information, which guides their strategies of search Utilizing the ASK model, the study can examine at great length what, in fact, prompts academics to seek information and how their perceptions of the knowledge gaps they have influence their search strategies.

- **Information Retrieval Models**

Information retrieval models comprise Boolean models and vector space models, which provide frameworks for understanding how information is organized, indexed, and retrieved in digital environments. Such models are important for the following reason: In understanding how academics navigate their way around a database or a search engine, two core aspects shine out as key features:

- **Understanding Boolean Logic:** This aspect shows the methods through which academics make use of logical operators - AND, OR, NOT - while refining their searches and filtering out unnecessary results.
- **Vector Space Model:** This model depicts the translation of documents and queries into a multidimensional space, where relevance and ranking are salient features of a search result.

Through these models, the ability to probe has enabled the study to look at the various techniques used by scholars in conducting searches and how knowledge of such models influences results from their searches.

- **Social Constructivism**

Social constructivism centers the process of knowledge formation on social interaction and, consequently, cultural context. In the academic information searching context, it thus asserts that:

- **Collaboration and Peer Influence** Students typically draw on discussions and collaborations with fellow students to inform their thinking as well as how they go about research.
- **Disciplinary Culture** Different kinds of academic disciplines create their own norms and practices of information and resource usage.

Applying social constructivism will enable the study to explore how collaborative practices and disciplinary contexts influence information-seeking behavior, engaging the social dynamics of academic research.

- **Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)**

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) stipulates that two factors, perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness, independently influence a person's acceptance and usage of technology. Such a framework is pertinent when discussing how academics engage with digital resources and tools, emphasizing:

- **Perceived Ease of Use:** The greater the academic's perception that information technology is easy to use and intuitive, the greater the likelihood of their usage and effectiveness.
- **Perceived Usefulness:** Academic students' belief that a technology will improve their research efficiency or quality affects its acceptance.

Implementing TAM in this research will allow for an exploration of how perceptions of digital tools influence academics' search for information behavior, especially in an age of technological changes of unprecedented speed.

### **The Role of Theoretical Frameworks in Analysis**

The study, through integration of the above theoretical frameworks, depicts an understanding of the information-seeking behavior of academics on multidimensional terms:

- **Cognitive and Affective Dimensions Kuhlthau's:** ISP model and Belkin's ASK model focus on the cognitive processes and emotional experiences of scholars when they seek information. From the studies of these two authors, it is possible to understand how uncertainty and anxiety can influence the search strategies of scholars.
- **Social and Contextual Consequences:** Wilson's model and social constructivism highlight the role of social context and contexts overall in illustrating how common practices and institutional norms influence the strategies academics employ in seeking information.
- **Technological Involvement:** The Technology Acceptance Model offers access to the crucial role that digital tools play in making information retrieval easier or more difficult, and thus offers the ability to see how academics adjust their practices in response to changing technologies.

### **Approach**

The research is based on a mixed-methods approach that will help to delve into the information-seeking behavior of academics. Combining both quantitative and qualitative research techniques, the study attempts to provide deep insight into scholars' access, evaluation, and utilization of information in their research practice. Here are some of the key components that make up the methodology.

### Research Design

The research study in question employs a sequential explanatory design that comprises two phases—one quantitative followed by another qualitative. Such design allows for the gathering of wide-ranging quantitative data that can be further probed by an in-depth qualitative insight

- A survey is disseminated to gather numerical data on academics' information-seeking behavior and their preferences and challenges. This has the effect of providing a broad overview and sets general trends and patterns within the academic community.
- **Qualitative Phase:** In-depth interviews will be conducted with a few selected participants of the survey as a means of probing their experiences and perspectives in greater detail. This phase digs deeper into the motivations, emotions, and contextual factors that influence them in their information-seeking behavior.

### Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling will be done for both the survey and interview to obtain selected respondents. Target population comprises all faculty members from a range of disciplines within higher education institutes.

- **Participating for Surveys:** A sample of diverse academics would be targeted to ensure that such representation from different fields of subjects and stages of careers as well as different types of institutions. Information-seeking behavior, therefore may reveal disciplinary differences.
- **Participants of Interview:** A stratified reduced sample will be drawn from the survey respondents to serve as participants for an interview. At this stage, they have been examined in terms of their willingness to participate and richness of responses generated while responding to the survey. The selection would focus on heterogeneity along the lines of discipline, research focus, and information-seeking experiences.

### Data Collection Techniques

Survey A questionnaire would be designed as an online mechanism to collect quota data. For the survey, the following would be included:

- Demographic questions: (e.g., discipline, years in academia, rank).
- Questions of information seeking strategies (e.g. resources consulted, search strategies).
- Items regarding problems faced (e.g., not enough time, too much information).
- Likert-scale items which probe the respondent's perceptions of technology use and service support.
- **Semi-structured interviews with interviewee:** Qualitative data will be collected through semi-structured interviews. The open-ended questions in the guided-interview questionnaire will allow respondents to voice their information-seeking behaviors elaborately. Key points would be:
  - Specific search strategy that has been employed to find information.
  - Experiences with digital and traditional resources.
  - Difficulties encountered during the study
  - The role of collaboration and social dynamics in information seeking.

### Data Analysis

- **Quantitative Data Analysis:** A statistical analysis will then be performed using SPSS or R. Descriptive statistics will outline and summarize the data from the survey. Inferential statistics (for example, t-tests, ANOVA) can be performed in order to point out possible significant differences that exist in information-seeking behavior between disciplines or demographics.
- **Qualitative Data Analysis:** Thematic analysis will be employed to analyze the interview transcripts. The process will run through the following steps:
  - Re-reading familiarization with the data.
  - Coding the data for finding themes and patterns of information-seeking behavior.
  - Interpretation of themes in such a way that motivation, difficulty, and contextual influence on the information-seeking practices of the academics could be understood.

**Integration of Findings**

The outcome of the two phases, that is, quantitative and qualitative, will be integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of information seeking behavior by academics. Quantitative data will present general trends while qualitative insights will add depth and context to these trends.

The integration will include:

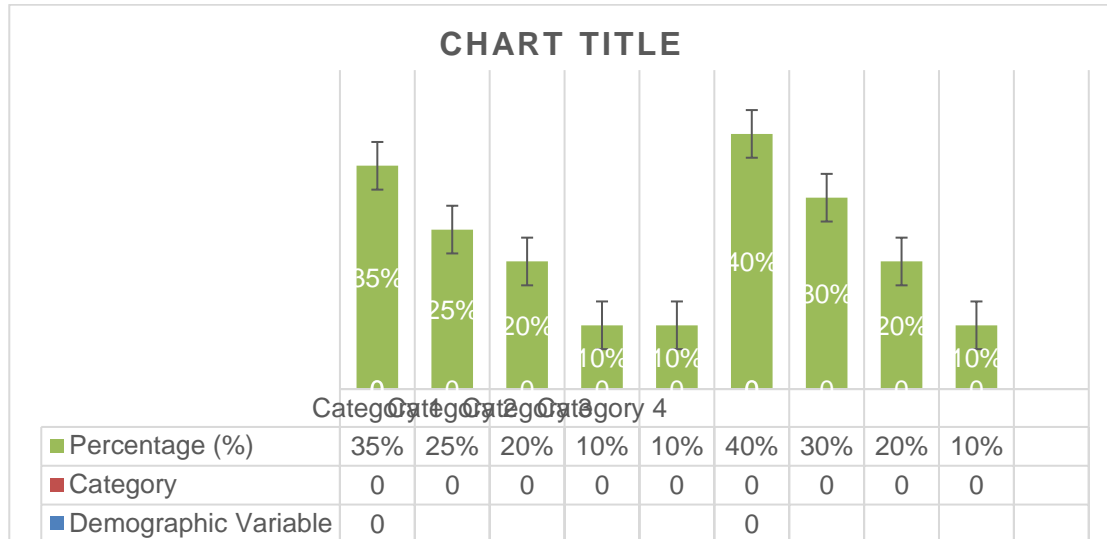
- The comparison and contrasting of results of the two phases regarding areas of convergence and divergence.
- The interpretations of the qualitative data would help elaborate and contextualize more fully the quantitative patterns that may emerge from analysis with a view to richer, more developed narrative capability around information-seeking behavior among academics.

**Graphs Tables and Diagrams**

Of course, here are some proposals for graphics, namely tables or diagrams, in your presentation on the information-seeking behavior of academics. These materials might be useful in establishing important findings and enhancing the way you present your data.

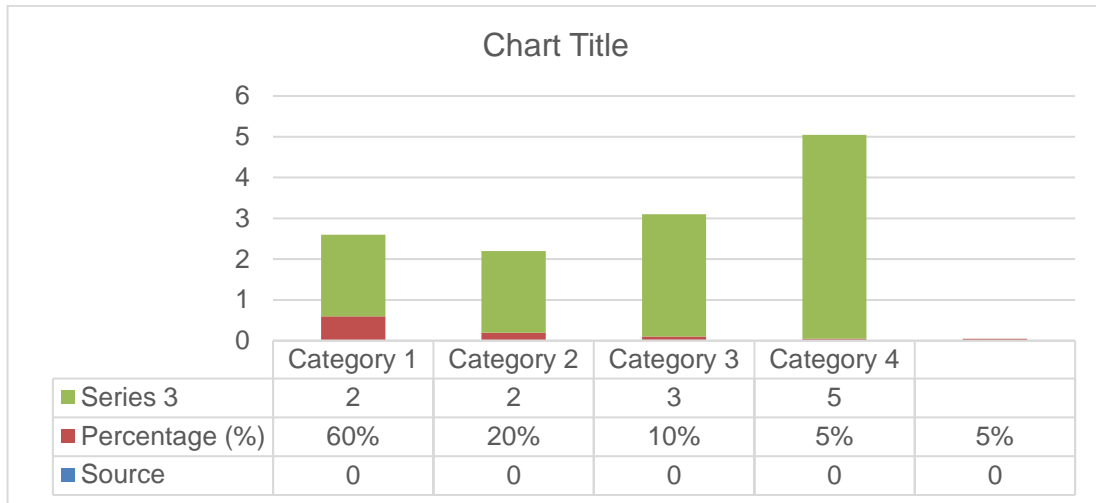
• **Survey Response Distribution Table**

| Demographic Variable | Category        | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Discipline           | STEM            | 35%            |
|                      | Humanities      | 25%            |
|                      | Social Sciences | 20%            |
|                      | Arts            | 10%            |
|                      | Other           | 10%            |
| Years in Academia    | 0-5 years       | 40%            |
|                      | 6-10 years      | 30%            |
|                      | 11-20 years     | 20%            |
|                      | 20+ years       | 10%            |



• **Bar Graph of Preferred Information Sources**

| Source                     | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------------|----------------|
| Academic Databases         | 60%            |
| Library Catalogs           | 20%            |
| Google Scholar             | 10%            |
| Institutional Repositories | 5%             |
| Other                      | 5%             |

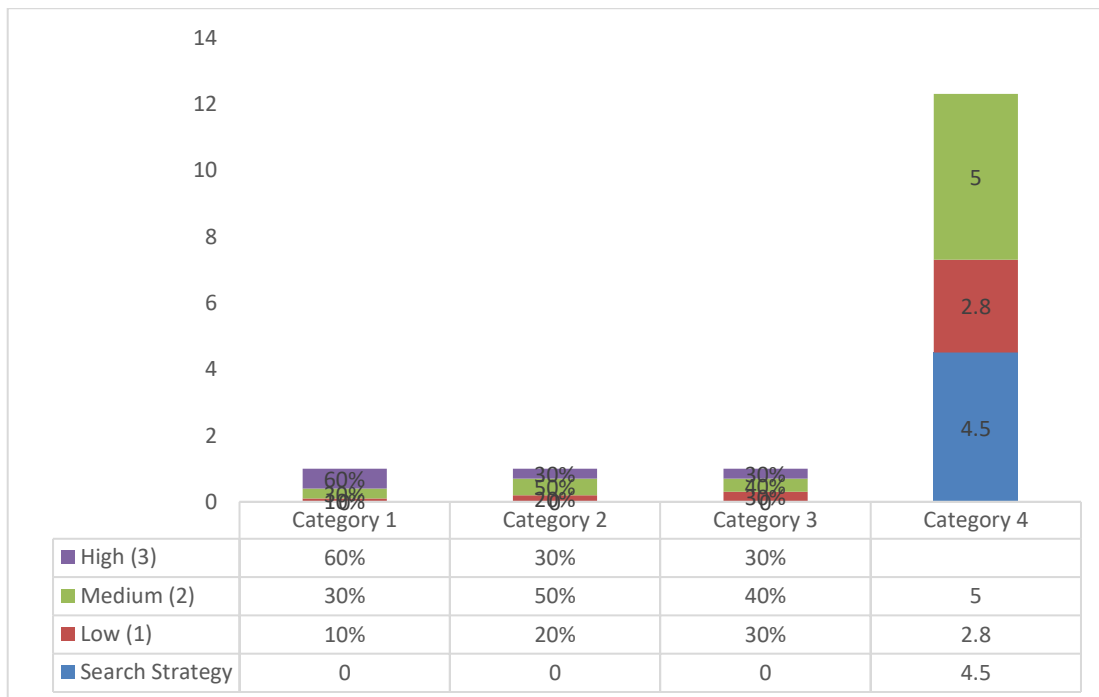


- Pie Chart of Challenges Faced in Information-Seeking**

- Information Overload: 35%
  - Time Constraints: 30%
  - Difficulty Assessing Credibility: 20%
  - Limited Access to Resources: 10%
  - Other

- Heat Map of Search Strategies Used by Academics**

| Search Strategy   | Low (1) | Medium (2) | High (3) |
|-------------------|---------|------------|----------|
| Keyword Search    | 10%     | 30%        | 60%      |
| Boolean Operators | 20%     | 50%        | 30%      |
| Advanced Search   | 30%     | 40%        | 30%      |



**Conclusion**

A study on the information-seeking behavior of academics would be very beneficial as it gives insights into strategies, challenges, and dynamics that shape the way scholars negotiate the complex terrain of research. With academia increasingly reliant on digital resources and collaborative practices, understanding how such behaviors function is key in creating an environment conducive to supporting effective research and scholarship.

**Multidimensional Holistic View**

Information-seeking is an intrinsically complex process flavored by requirements of individual needs, norms of disciplines, and availability of information. Researchers suffer from the complexities of having voluminous information, time constraints, and credibility difficulties, all resulting from extensive research productivity and quality of scholarly outputs.

Reliance on established academic databases and peer-reviewed journals underscores a basic need for authentic and reliable sources of information. Preference for the same thus emphasizes institutional support in developing access to quality material. In an era of easy proliferation of misinformation, proper access to well-established sources of information can be accessed for the integrity of academia and advancement of knowledge.

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