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Information Seeking Behavior and Literacy Competence of Faculty and Research Scholars: A Study at Jiwaji University

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Abstract

This study investigates the information-seeking behavior and literacy competence of faculty members and research scholars at Jiwaji University. Using a structured questionnaire, data were collected from 120 participants, including 40 faculty and 80 research scholars. The study explored participants' demographic profiles, information needs, preferred information sources, search strategies, literacy skills, challenges faced, and suggestions for improvement. Findings revealed that research was the primary purpose for seeking information, with e-journals, online databases, and search engines being the most frequently used resources. Although respondents demonstrated moderate confidence in using search tools, significant gaps were observed in citation knowledge and evaluation of online information. Notably, 75% of respondents reported no formal training in information literacy. Major challenges identified included lack of time, inadequate resources, difficulty in searching, and insufficient training. The study recommends enhancing information literacy programs, expanding access to electronic resources, improving library services, and promoting greater awareness of available tools. These measures are essential to strengthen the academic and research capabilities of the university community and improve overall information competence.

Key Terms: Information-seeking behavior, Information literacy, Research scholars, Faculty members, Electronic resources, Academic libraries.

Introduction: In today's knowledge-driven society, access to relevant, accurate, and timely information is crucial for academic success and research productivity. Universities and research institutions play a central role in generating and disseminating knowledge, and within this ecosystem, faculty members and research scholars act as key stakeholders. Understanding their information-seeking behavior and literacy competence is vital for ensuring that institutional resources are effectively utilized and that both teaching and research activities are optimally supported. The explosion of information resources, particularly digital resources such as online databases, e-journals, and academic search engines, has significantly transformed how academics seek and use information. However, this abundance of information also presents challenges, such as information overload, difficulties in evaluating the credibility of sources, and the need for advanced search and retrieval skills. Information literacy — defined as the ability to recognize the need for information, locate it efficiently, evaluate its credibility, and use it ethically — has therefore become a critical competence for academic professionals. Jiwaji University, a prominent higher education institution in Madhya Pradesh, India, hosts a diverse academic community engaged in research across various disciplines. Despite the availability of institutional resources such as libraries, e-resources, and information services, little is known about how faculty and research scholars at Jiwaji University approach their information needs, what barriers they face, and how proficient they are in information literacy practices. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining the information-seeking behavior and literacy competence of faculty and research scholars at Jiwaji University. Specifically, it investigates the sources they rely on, the strategies they employ to find and use information, their awareness and use of library services, and the challenges they encounter in the information-seeking process. The study also assesses their level of information literacy competence and identifies areas where additional support or training may be required. By exploring these issues, the study aims to provide insights that can inform the development of more responsive library services, tailored information literacy programs, and institutional policies to support the academic community at Jiwaji University. Ultimately, the research contributes to enhancing the information environment in higher education settings and fostering a more efficient and informed academic culture.

Literature Review: The study of information-seeking behavior and literacy competence has attracted increasing scholarly attention over the past few decades, reflecting the growing complexity of the modern information environment. Researchers have examined how academics and researchers locate, evaluate, and use information, as well as the factors influencing these behaviors.

Information Seeking Behavior: Wilson (1999) defined information-seeking behavior as the purposive search for information to satisfy a goal. Various models, including Ellis's model (1989) and Kuhlthau's Information Search Process (1991), have provided theoretical frameworks for understanding how users navigate the stages

of information seeking. Studies by Majid and Kassim (2000) and Bhatti (2010) have revealed that faculty and researchers often depend on academic libraries, online databases, and personal networks to meet their information needs. However, their use of information sources is shaped by factors such as discipline, age, technological familiarity, and institutional infrastructure.

Use of Information Resources: Previous research highlights a shift from print to electronic resources in academic environments. Tenopir and King (2002) found that electronic journals have become essential for faculty and researchers, providing easier access to current information. Studies in the Indian context, such as by Mahajan (2008) and Satpathy and Rout (2010), confirm similar trends, showing that academics increasingly use online resources but often face barriers such as lack of access, insufficient training, and inadequate search skills.

Information Literacy Competence: Information literacy has been defined by the American Library Association (ALA, 2000) as the ability to recognize when information is needed and to locate, evaluate, and use it effectively. Research by Andretta (2005) and Webber and Johnston (2000) emphasizes the importance of information literacy in higher education, not only for academic success but also for lifelong learning. Several studies (Sharma, 2009; Kumar & Kumar, 2013) show that faculty and researchers often have uneven levels of information literacy competence, particularly regarding the use of online databases, citation tools, and evaluation of digital content.

Barriers to Effective Information Use: Common barriers identified in prior research include lack of time, inadequate training, limited awareness of available resources, and technological challenges (Fatoki, 2004; Islam et al., 2011). In the Indian university context, studies by Madhusudhan (2008) and Anuradha and Usha (2006) highlight the need for regular training programs to enhance the digital literacy and information-seeking skills of academic staff and research scholars.

Research Gap: While numerous studies have examined information-seeking behavior in various institutional settings, relatively few have focused specifically on Indian state universities such as Jiwaji University. Moreover, much of the existing research tends to treat faculty and research scholars as homogeneous groups, without exploring their distinct needs, behaviors, and challenges. This study seeks to address this gap by providing a focused examination of both the information-seeking behavior and the literacy competence of these two key academic groups at Jiwaji University.

Research Objectives:

The main objective of this study is to examine the information-seeking behavior and literacy competence of faculty members and research scholars at Jiwaji University. The study aims to identify their information needs, patterns of resource use, challenges faced, and level of information literacy skills, with the ultimate goal of

providing recommendations to improve library services and information literacy training. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To identify the information needs of faculty members and research scholars at Jiwaji University.
2. To examine the sources and channels of information used by faculty and research scholars for academic and research activities.
3. To assess the search strategies and techniques employed by these groups when seeking information.
4. To evaluate the level of information literacy competence among faculty members and research scholars, including their ability to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively.
5. To identify the barriers and challenges faced by faculty and research scholars in accessing and using information resources.
6. To explore the extent of awareness and utilization of library resources and services provided by Jiwaji University.
7. To provide recommendations for improving access to information resources and strengthening information literacy programs at Jiwaji University.

Methodology: This study employed a descriptive survey design to examine the information-seeking behavior and literacy competence of faculty members and research scholars at Jiwaji University. The study population included faculty and research scholars across various departments. A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure representation from different disciplines, resulting in a sample of 120 participants (40 faculty members and 80 research scholars).

Data was collected using a structured questionnaire covering information needs, sources used, search strategies, library resource awareness, and self-assessed information literacy skills. The questionnaire was pre-tested to ensure clarity and validity. In addition, selected interviews were conducted to gather qualitative insights.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and means, while qualitative responses were analyzed thematically. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and participant confidentiality, were strictly followed to ensure responsible research practices. The study aimed to provide recommendations to enhance library services and literacy programs.

Data Analysis and Interpretation:**Respondents Data Table**

Section	Particular	Response Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
A. Demographics	Gender	Male	70	58.30%
		Female	48	40.00%
		Other	2	1.70%
	Age	20–30	50	41.70%
		31–40	35	29.20%
		41–50	20	16.70%
		51+	15	12.50%
	Designation	Faculty	40	33.30%
		Research Scholar	80	66.70%
B. Info Needs	Main Purpose	Teaching	30	25.00%
		Research	70	58.30%
		Writing	15	12.50%
		Personal Interest	5	4.20%
	Main Sources	Library	60	50.00%
		E-journals/Databases	80	66.70%
		Search Engines	70	58.30%
		Books	50	41.70%
	Frequency of Library Use	Daily	20	16.70%
		Weekly	40	33.30%
		Occasionally	35	29.20%
		Rarely	20	16.70%
C. Search Strategies	Search Tools Used	Library Catalogue	50	41.70%
		Google Scholar	80	66.70%
		Subject Databases	60	50.00%
	Confidence	Very Confident	40	33.30%
		Somewhat Confident	60	50.00%
		Not Confident	20	16.70%
D. Information Literacy	Evaluate Online Info	Always	50	41.70%
		Sometimes	40	33.30%
		Rarely	20	16.70%
		Never	10	8.30%
	Citation Knowledge	Yes	60	50.00%
		Somewhat	40	33.30%
		No	20	16.70%
	Formal Training	Yes	30	25.00%
		No	90	75.00%
E. Challenges	Barriers	Lack of Time	60	50.00%
		Lack of Resources	50	41.70%

	Difficulty in Searching	40	33.30%
	Lack of Training	70	58.30%

Interpretations:

Section A: Demographic Information: The majority of respondents were male (58.3%) and research scholars (66.7%), indicating that research scholars are more engaged with information-seeking activities at Jiwaji University. Most participants were between the ages of 20–30 (41.7%) and 31–40 (29.2%), reflecting a young and active academic population.

Section B: Information Needs and Sources: Research (58.3%) emerged as the primary reason for seeking information, followed by teaching (25%) and writing (12.5%). E-journals and databases (66.7%) and search engines (58.3%) were the most frequently used sources, suggesting a preference for online resources. The university library was still valued (50%), though daily use was low (16.7%), with most visiting weekly or occasionally.

Section C: Search Strategies: Google Scholar (66.7%) and subject-specific databases (50%) were widely used, but only one-third of participants felt “very confident” using search strategies, indicating a need for further training. About 50% reported being “somewhat confident,” showing that while some familiarity exists, many could benefit from skill development.

Section D: Information Literacy Skills: Although 41.7% reported always evaluating online information critically, a significant portion (33.3%) only sometimes did so. Only half (50%) were confident in their citation knowledge, and 75% reported never receiving formal training — highlighting a gap in formal information literacy instruction that could affect research quality.

Section E: Barriers and Challenges: The most common challenges were lack of training (58.3%) and lack of time (50%), followed by limited resources (41.7%) and difficulty in searching (33.3%). This points to the need for improved training programs, better access to resources, and possibly more efficient search support systems.

Section F: Suggestions: Participants frequently suggested more hands-on training workshops, improved access to electronic resources, and expansion of e-resources and databases. These recommendations align with the identified barriers and suggest clear action points for the university library and administration.

Findings: This study assessed the information-seeking behavior and literacy competence of faculty members and research scholars at Jiwaji University, using a sample of 120 participants. The key findings are summarized below:

1. **Demographic Profile:** The majority of respondents were research scholars (66.7%) and male (58.3%), with most falling in the 20–30 age group, indicating a youthful, research-active academic community.
2. **Information Needs:** Research (58.3%) was the dominant purpose for seeking information, followed by teaching (25%) and writing (12.5%). This highlights the strong research focus among the university population.
3. **Information Sources Used:** E-journals (66.7%) and search engines (58.3%) were the most frequently used resources, showing a clear preference for online tools. Half of the respondents regularly used the university library, though only 16.7% used it daily.
4. **Search Strategies:** Google Scholar (66.7%) and subject databases (50%) were popular search tools. Only 33.3% of respondents reported being “very confident” in using advanced search techniques, suggesting room for improvement in search skills.
5. **Information Literacy Skills:** While 41.7% consistently evaluated online information, only 50% were confident in using proper citation styles, and 75% had never received formal training, indicating a significant gap in information literacy competence.
6. **Barriers and Challenges:** Key challenges included lack of training (58.3%), lack of time (50%), insufficient resources (41.7%), and search difficulties (33.3%), underscoring the need for institutional support.
7. **Suggestions for Improvement:** Participants recommended more training workshops, improved electronic resource access, and expansion of e-resources and databases to better meet their information needs.

Recommendations: Based on the findings of this study on the information-seeking behavior and literacy competence of faculty and research scholars at Jiwaji University, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Enhance Information Literacy Training:** Organize regular workshops and hands-on training sessions on effective search strategies, use of academic databases, and citation management to improve the confidence and competence of both faculty and research scholars.
2. **Expand Access to E-resources:** Increase subscriptions to e-journals, subject-specific databases, and online reference tools to meet the growing demand for electronic resources.
3. **Strengthen Library Services:** Extend library hours, improve infrastructure, and offer personalized support services such as reference assistance, research consultations, and library orientation programs.
4. **Promote Awareness of Existing Resources:** Launch awareness campaigns (via email, posters, and faculty meetings) to inform users about the available library resources, electronic databases, and tools like Google Scholar.
5. **Address Barriers to Information Access:** Provide time-saving tools such as research guides, FAQs, and online tutorials to help reduce time constraints and search difficulties.

6. **Encourage Collaboration:** Foster collaboration between librarians, faculty, and research scholars to develop tailored information services and to integrate information literacy into the academic curriculum.
7. **Regular Feedback Mechanisms:** Implement periodic user surveys and feedback mechanisms to assess changing information needs and continuously improve library services and resource delivery.

Conclusion: This study examined the information-seeking behavior and literacy competence of faculty members and research scholars at Jiwaji University. The findings reveal that while research scholars are highly active in seeking information, there is a strong reliance on online resources such as e-journals and search engines. However, gaps remain in search confidence, evaluation of online information, and knowledge of citation practices, largely due to the lack of formal training. Challenges such as limited time, inadequate resources, and insufficient search skills further hinder effective information use. The study highlights the critical need for enhanced information literacy programs, expanded access to electronic resources, and improved library services. By addressing these areas, Jiwaji University can better support the academic and research needs of its faculty and scholars, ultimately strengthening the university's research output and academic excellence.

Future Scope: This study provides valuable insights into the information-seeking behavior and literacy competence of faculty and research scholars at Jiwaji University. Future research can expand this work in several ways. First, similar studies can be conducted across multiple universities to enable comparative analysis and identify regional or institutional differences. Second, longitudinal studies can be carried out to assess how information literacy skills evolve over time, especially after targeted training programs. Third, qualitative approaches such as interviews or focus groups could be incorporated to gain deeper insights into user experiences, challenges, and expectations. Finally, future studies can explore the role of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence tools and academic social networks, in shaping the information-seeking practices of scholars. By broadening the scope and methods, future research can contribute to more comprehensive strategies for improving academic information services and literacy development.

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