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The Evolving Nature of Information-Seeking Habits: An Investigation at Malda District Library

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Abstract
The present study is about the information-seeking behaviour of users of the Malda District Library in the digital context. The study collects primary data through a questionnaire survey of 131 users from different disciplines and categories within the college. It shows the purposes of information seeking, the sources of information, the various channels used, the purpose of visiting the library, the types of services used, the sources used to locate certain documents, and the level of user satisfaction with the different services offered by the Malda district library. It also shows that the information and communication technologies (ICT) have made a significant impact on the information-seeking behaviour of library users, and they are now heavily dependent on electronic resources. The study provides specific recommendations to enhance library services based on the findings.

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1. Introduction
We are in the midst of a revolution of information and knowledge. Knowledge is needed in every aspect of our lives. It is seen as a national resource, akin to water and energy, and recognized as a tool for human and natural resources. It was the exponential growth of literature, library automation, and new communication media that were the main factors that changed the attitudes of librarians, documentalists, and information officers (and especially those of information users or seekers). The information provided by the library can be in the form of print, non-print, and electronic; primary, secondary, and tertiary; and formal and informal. The need for information varies from one individual to another, depending on goals related to their studies, education, employment stage, interests, amount of information available, etc. The expansion of information on the Internet has had an effect. A fundamental area of study within the domains of information management and library science pertains to the investigation of how individuals engage in the pursuit of information. The provision of effective services to library clientele is inextricably linked to a comprehensive comprehension and acknowledgment of their information-seeking behaviours. Such insights are paramount for the design and deployment of software and information systems that are centred around user needs. The discipline of library and information science experiences substantial progress through its rigorous examination of user information needs, search methodologies, and the application of information resources. In our globally interconnected modern era, information assumes a vital and indispensable function in the fabric of daily existence. An academic definition of information seeking behaviour was given by Tom D. Wilson (2000): "Information seeking behaviour is the purposive seeking for information as a consequence of a need to satisfy some goal. It is the micro-level of behaviour used by the searcher to interact with information systems of all kinds."

The Core Idea
An individual feels an information need (a knowledge gap) and begins a search, which is affected by their context, emotions, skills, and resources, and can involve active searching (e.g., Googling) and passive encounters (e.g., finding an article that is relevant).Stages in the Information Seeking Process (e.g., Kuhlthau\'s Model) Carol Kuhlthau\'s popular model of information seeking has six stages, each with corresponding feelings and thoughts:

Initiation
Becoming aware of an information need. (Uncertainty)
Selection
Choosing a general topic or approach. (Optimism)
Exploration
Gathering information, often encountering conflicting or confusing i

Researchers have Identified Several Patterns
- **Active Seeking:** Searching for information (e.g., searching a database for a research paper).
- **Active Scanning:** Scanning sources that may contain information (e.g., scrolling through a news feed).
- **Non-directed Monitoring:** Accidental discovery of information (e.g., overhearing a useful conversation).
- **Passive Attention:** Receiving information without any attempt (e.g., seeing an advertisement).
- **Berrypicking (Bates Model):** The search is iterative, collecting bits of information from a variety of sources, similar to picking berries from bushes rather than collecting everything in one place. # Factors Affecting ISBISB is never constant; it is influenced by:
- **Individual Factors:** Demographics (age, education), psychological state (anxiety, motivation), experience, and information literacy (search skills, critical evaluation).
- **Contextual/Task Factors:** The type of problem (simple fact vs. complex understanding).

Information-Seeking Behaviour Krekel's defines information-seeking behaviours as "any action by an individual to locate a message to satisfy a perceived need."
Naqvi defines information-seeking behaviours as "a mode in which a user behaves in relation to a particular information environment, which is perceived as an interaction process between the user and the rest of the information system."
Wilson points out the connections between these ISB concepts. In his theory, information-seeking behaviours emerges when a need is perceived.
Public libraries operate as establishments that extend their services to the general population without regard for age, sex, occupation, or economic standing. Within Punjab, public libraries comprise those overseen by the Department of Higher Education, Punjab, located at district administrative hubs and identified as District Libraries. Furthermore, this category includes libraries governed by municipal entities, corporations, village councils, youth associations, and other communal organizations. UNESCO defines public libraries as "the local gateway to knowledge, providing an essential pathway for lifelong learning, independent decision-making, and the cultural advancement of both individuals and broader societal entities." (Kaur & Lal, 2016)

2. Review of Related Literature
Numerous studies have been carried out recently to examine library patrons' information-seeking behaviour according to their subject interest, occupation, information environment, and location. Das and Jana emphasized the digital information-seeking habits and requirements of Jadavpur University users. The "information seeking behaviour of M. Tech" was examined by Naqvi. Pupils from Z. He. Aligarh Muslim University, College of Engineering and Technology. A study titled "Information seeking behaviour of faculty members of Rajabhat Universities in Bangkok" was conducted by Patitungkho and Deshpande. Majid and Kassim investigated how law professors at Malaysia's International Islamic University sought out information. These studies showed that users' ISBs are drastically shifting toward e-sources and services as a result of the quick development of ICTs. Additionally, there is a greater emphasis in the domains of science and technology.

3. Objectives
Information is a constant need. It varies for different groups, depending on the subjects they belong to. The following are the objectives of the study:
3.1 To identify the information needs of users at different levels
3.2 To explore how users utilize formal and informal sources of information
3.3 To analyse trends in users reading habits
3.4 To study how information technology impacts access to information and information seeking behaviours
3.5 To analyse how users are accessing the Internet and digital documents
3.6 To suggest solutions to the problems faced by the authorities in libraries due to the rapid expansion of ICT.

4. Methodology
Method Selection Social surveys use several different approaches or strategies. This study largely relied on structured questionnaires. The method itself has been overcome by the interview, and informal discussions with the respondents were used to obtain information that was not provided by the questionnaire and interviews. Indirect methods are also employed in the collection and refinement (e.g., analysis of library records) of information.
Variable Taken the following variables were taken for analysis to satisfy the objective of the study: Teachers (including professor, assistant professor, part-time teacher, and guest teacher). Students (including both undergraduate and graduate students of various academic fields).
Procedure: A sample survey was conducted by distributing 160 questionnaires to 120 students and 40 teachers; the teachers were randomly selected (stratified random sampling) from each discipline, and a sample of six (two female and four male students) from each discipline were selected in the same manner; 131 of the 160 questionnaires were returned, for a response rate of 85.63 percent. Data were further refined and added to through informal conversations with the users.

5. Study of the Subject
5.1 Rural Library Context in West Bengal
Since the District Library of Malda is a part of the West Bengal state system, a 2026 study of rural public libraries in West Bengal can serve as an overview of the conditions and limitations. It is officially known as District Library, Malda, with postal code 732101, located at English Bazar, Malda, and West Bengal. Cultural Preservation Project: Major Digitization Project: The library is undertaking a major digitization project to preserve 42 rare manuscripts and palm-leaf texts that are at risk of physical deterioration. Notable Manuscripts: The library houses rare manuscripts, including a 16th-century Rup Manjari (on Tulot paper) and a 1581 edition of Chaitanya Charitamrita. Cooperation: Gour College is part of this project, with mass communication students photographing every page. Completion Date: The digitization is expected to be completed within two to three months, with a target completion date of March 2026. Accessibility: These digital works will be available for public access and research via a dedicated web portal. Official Listings: The library is listed on the West Bengal and Malda district websites (malda. gov. in).

5.1.1 District Library, Malda: The Apex Body in the District

The library acts as the main office for all government aided libraries in the district. It gives out money to these libraries. Arranges training for them. The library also keeps track of statistics. The library has a collection of books compared to libraries in rural areas and it is, for people who live in the city. The library has books and this is because it is meant for the urban community.

5.1.2 Block Libraries

These libraries are found at the office of each block like the ones in Chanchal, Harishchandrapur and Gazole. The block libraries help connect the District Library to all the libraries in the villages. They are like a bridge, between the District Library and the village libraries making it easier for people to get the books and information they need.

5.1.3 Rural/Village Libraries (Gramin Granthagar)

The main part of the system is the libraries. Malda has than 200 government aided libraries in rural areas. Each of these libraries serves a group of villages. The libraries are run by committees elected by local people.

5.2 Historical & Cultural Context in Malda
5.2.1 Region of Convergence

Malda has an interesting history because it was part of the old Gour-Banga region. This history gives Malda a cultural feel. The libraries, in Malda often do things that show off the history of the Islamic people the Bengali people and the people who were born and raised there like the Rajbanshi people.

5.2.2 Political & Social Activism

In Bengal you will find that libraries are important places where people talk about politics and social issues. This is also true for Malda. The libraries in Malda have been very active in discussions about politics and things that affect the community. People often talk about things like farming and how to improve education in the area. Malda is a place that produces a lot of mangoes and jute so these agricultural issues are a deal for the people who live there. Libraries in Malda are also focused on teaching people how to read and write which's a major issue, in the area. Maldas libraries are doing a job of helping people with literacy.

5.2.3 Functions & Community Role

The libraries in Malda do a lot of things. They are very important for people who live in Malda. The libraries in Malda are like a place where people can go to learn new things and get information. The libraries, in Malda have books and other things that people can use to help them with their studies or to just learn something new.

- **Reading Room & Lending:** Providing Bengali, Hindi, and English newspapers, magazines, and books (fiction, non-fiction, textbooks).
- **Cultural Hub:** We have events for Eid and Durga Puja and Poila Boishakh which's the Bengali New Year. We also have Rabindra-Nazrul Jayanti. People like to take part in poetry competitions, which we call kobita and song competitions, which we call gan. These are very common in our Cultural Hub. We like to have these events, for Eid and Durga Puja and Poila Boishakh and Rabindra-Nazrul Jayanti.

- **Educational Support:** This is really important for school and college students who do not have access, to coaching. Many libraries offer tutoring or help students prepare for their exams.
- **Awareness & Information:** Disseminating information on government schemes (Kanyashree, Swasthya Sathi, and agricultural subsidies), health, and sanitation.

5.2.4 Key Initiatives & Notable Libraries

Computerisation and Digital Steps: Some block and district libraries have got computers under state and central plans like the National Mission on Libraries. They have tried to make their catalogues digital. The E-Granthagar project wants to give people resources.. Computerisation is not easy in rural areas, like Malda because Digital Steps are hard to take when internet connection is bad. Computerisation and Digital Steps are important for the E-Granthagar project to work properly.

The Malda District Central Library is a place that often has exhibitions. These exhibitions are about the history of Malda. They have a lot of information, about the Gour ruins. The library does this to get people to care about the heritage of Malda. The Malda District Central Library wants people to know more about Malda and its history.

Progressive Rural Libraries have some good programs. Some libraries in places like Habibpur, Bamangola and Manikchak are doing a job. They have things like women's reading groups where women can get together and read. They also have environmental awareness drives to teach people about taking care of the earth. Progressive Rural Libraries are making a difference, with these community programs.

5.3 District-Specific Challenges

When you think about the infrastructural situation, remote villages near the Mahananda River or in the Barind region have a really tough time. The problem is that it is hard to get to these places. Many library buildings are in shape. They do not have the things that people need like good furniture, toilets and electricity that work all the time. The Mahananda River and the Barind region are home, to many of these villages. They all face the same issues with libraries. We have to depend a lot on the small amount of money we get from the government and the little fees our members pay, which is usually around ₹5 to ₹10 every month. This means we do not have money to buy new books or magazines all the time. The money we get is just not enough so we cannot buy books or a periodical regularly which is a big problem for us and our work, with books and periodicals.

5.3.1 The Digital Divide

It is a problem. In areas of Malda the internet is pretty good. If you go to the rural areas it is really hard to get a good internet connection. This makes it very difficult to have library services, in these areas. The Digital Divide is a challenge when it comes to powering these library services.

5.3.2 Socio-Economic Factors

People are not finishing school because the dropout rates are really high. Also people have to move to places for work like to other states where they can work as labourers. This happens during times of the year which is called seasonal migration. All of this affects how often people read and how much young people are involved with Socio-Economic Factors, like these. Management Issues: Library committees can sometimes be affected by local politics, impacting operations and neutrality.

6. Data Analysis and Findings

All collected data is methodically organized and analyzed. The data was also interpreted using the underlying facts and hints to arrive at a generalization conclusion.

The results or outcomes of this investigation are as follows:

The majority of responders (85%) look for information to improve their general awareness and level of knowledge. However, preparing answers to questions for their studies is the primary reason why 57% of students seek information. 78.7% of educators look for information to prepare their lectures. Two. Through the Internet (77.6%), newspapers (73.3%), and journals (39.4%), library patrons stay up to date on the latest advancements in their field. Although the highest percentage of teachers (63.3%) used journals, only 34.7% of students did the same. Three. The majority of respondents use reference books (58.4 percent), the Internet (79.1 percent), and recreational books (81 percent) to find information. Fewer users ask friends, teachers, and resource people for the information they need. Forty. The most popular media among the various categories are reference books (92%), recreational books (81%), magazines (62.8%), and newspapers (59%). 9.98.5% of the respondents believe that digital documents would improve library services. 12.99.8% of the respondents want to access old question papers, syllabi, project reports and other course materials in digital format. The main problems faced by the users of the library are insufficient availability of Internet facility in the library (78.4%), material not available (16.1%), and unfamiliarity in library use (17.1%). The availability of Internet facility is limited in respect of total library users and hence they suffer for e-journals, document downloading, etc.

Respondents' views were as follows

a) Improve the internet facilities
b) for searching e-journals,
c) for downloading documents,
d) for consulting e-books,
e) for higher education and online exams,
f) for keeping up to date with the most recent advancements in the field;
g) Provide a greater variety of regional language newspapers, books, journals, and magazines;
h) Explain the e-book feature;
i) Send an email alert service for overdue notices and new arrivals;
j) Online learning resources, CD-ROMs containing lecture notes from well-known professors, and model questions for competitive exams;
k) Schedule regular meetings with library patrons to seek their input and improve services.

7. Recommendations

The following recommendations were made to improve library services:

i) Internet access to browse e-books, e-journals, download articles, access DELNET services, and keep up to date with the latest developments.
ii) The latest books and magazines from different disciplines should be bought regularly.
iii) There should be an increase in the number and diversity of the books, CD-ROMs, and AV materials.
iv) A promotional campaign should be initiated to increase the usage of library resources.
v) As many terminals as possible should be equipped with OPAC or WebOPAC, and usage instructions should be given.
vi) A variety of strategies could be used to convert fewer users to regular users.
vii) An e-mail alert service to inform the library users about this may be initiated.

Conclusion

Many studies have been conducted in this area, with a special focus on the information-seeking behaviours of the patrons of Belagavi district public library. For example, the study showed that most people rely on public libraries for newspaper information and competitive exams, and that public libraries play an important role in meeting those needs; determining whether the services and resources provided by libraries are meeting the needs of patrons is also important. In addition to the well-maintained infrastructure, public libraries require more recreational books and journal resources to attract patrons; more copies of competitive books and magazines would be desirable to attract a user community and increase use of public library resources and services. The information environment is complex. Websites abound. Many organizations maintain institutional repositories that are updated and free. The e. open access. Contributions may be shared over the internet, and anyone can use them. Their websites have numerous articles added daily. Information can be disseminated anywhere in the world in an instant. Information and communication technology (ICT) and advanced web-based communication systems (for example, the implementation of group mail and other forums) have transformed the process of gathering information, making it interactive. They prefer online information to printed information. Without information being gathered, processed, and then distributed to information users in a specific, comprehensive, timely, and affordable way, progress will be slow. The public library system in Malda district is a vital but under-resourced social infrastructure. It stands at a crossroads, clinging to its historic role as a cultural guardian and democratic space, while urgently needing to adapt to the digital age and the specific socio-economic needs of its population-be it a farmer in Chanchal or a student in Ratua.

Its success will depend on strategic investment in infrastructure and technology, coupled with community-driven management that leverages Malda's unique cultural identity to remain relevant. The library in Malda is not just a storehouse of books; it's a potential lifeline of information and a beacon for community development in a district that blends ancient history with modern challenges.

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