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Information Needs and Information-Seeking Behavior of Arts and Humanities Teachers: A Survey of the University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

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Introduction

The present era is called the "Information era." Information has become the most important element for progress in society. To thrive in this modern era, one needs a variety of information, no matter how well versed one is in a field or profession. Psacharopoulous (1982) discusses the necessity of information in the present age. We can reorganize the educational system and redefine scientific research only with the help of information.

Information plays a significant role in our professional and personal lives. People need information to work properly in their fields. Questions that provoked this study include:

- what constitutes a need for information?
- what people think at that particular time?
- what actions people take? and
- what problems are faced while seeking information?

Zhang (1998) stresses that a thorough understanding of user information needs and information-seeking behavior is fundamental to the provision of successful information services. Wilson (1994) points out that the scope of information-seeking behavior research is vast and many new concepts and methods are being developed with the help of this research. It is clear that the study of human information-seeking behavior is now a well-defined area of research. According to Devadason and Lingman (1997), the understanding of information needs and information-seeking behavior of various professional groups is essential as it helps in the planning, implementation, and operation of information system, and services in

work settings. White (1975) states that if academic librarians are to realistically serve academic researchers, they must recognize the changing needs and variations in information gathering and provide services that would be most useful.

The study of information needs and gathering behavior dates back to 1948 when Bernal and others presented a paper on scientific information at the 1948 Royal Society conference (Bernal, 1960). During the past 30 years or so, a considerable body of literature has been produced dealing with information needs and information-seeking behavior of both individuals and groups in a variety of contexts (Anwar, Al-Ansari, and Abdullah, 2004). It is estimated that the number of publications on information-seeking behavior were more than ten thousand in the 1990s alone (Case, 2002). Many studies have been conducted to investigate the information-seeking behavior of library users based on their subject interest, occupation, information environment, and geographical location. Information needs and information-seeking behavior of academics have also been a popular area of research for the information scientists for decades (Majid and Kassim, 2000). Many authors have pointed out that the studies on information-seeking behavior and needs of social scientists are fewer than those involving the natural sciences, and the studies of humanists' information needs are fewer still (Line, 1969; Hopkins, 1989; Blazek, 1994; Challener, 1999).

In Pakistan, a number of studies on reading habits of different professional groups have been carried out by various individuals, associations, and institutions which partly indicate their information needs. Anwar (2007) reviewed different research studies on information needs and information-seeking behavior of different groups of people in Pakistan. He mentioned fifteen unpublished studies conducted on the subject so far. Shahzad (2007) conducted a survey to find out the information-seeking behavior of faculty members of Government College University, Lahore. He acquired the data from all three faculties, i.e., science and technology, social sciences and humanities. Anjum (1978) studied the information needs of humanities teachers at the University of the Punjab.

Knowledge of the information needs and information-seeking behavior of users is vital for developing library collections, upgrading facilities, and improving services to effectively meet the information needs of users. A review of the related literature reveals that no comprehensive study on the information needs and information-seeking behavior of arts and humanities faculty members at the University of the Punjab, Lahore has been conducted since 1978.

Objectives of the Study

Following are the objectives of the study:

- To investigate the methods and sources used by humanities teachers to acquire required information.
- To find out the importance of various information resources for their teaching and research.
- To study their information gathering activities.
- To study the purpose of their information-seeking.
- To find out what problems are faced by faculty members in seeking information.

Methodology

The study used a survey questionnaire. A questionnaire was prepared after comprehensive literature search and discussion with subject experts. Both open and closed questions were included in the questionnaire. The population of the study consists of all full-time academic and research staff (total 120) working in 19 arts and humanities departments of the University of the Punjab, Lahore. These are divided among three faculties: Arts and Humanities, Islamic Studies, and Oriental Learning. Of 120 faculty members, 21 were on leave and eight could not be contacted, therefore the population of the study consisted of 90 potential respondents. A pilot test was conducted. The questionnaires were personally

distributed among the sample of the study by the researchers. Of them, 62 responded and the response rate was 69 percent. The collected data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. SPSS (Version 16.0) was used for quantitative analysis.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Personal Profile of the Respondents

First section of the questionnaire dealt with the personal information about the respondents. Of the 62 respondents, 45 (73 percent) were male and 17 (27 percent) were female. The acquired data show that a large number of the respondents (52 percent) were lecturers. Twelve (19 percent) were assistant professors, 10 (16 percent) associate professors, three (5 percent) professors, and four (6 percent) were research staff. Of the 62 respondents, 26 (42 percent) had a PhD, 15 (24 percent) an M.Phil, and 21 (34 percent) a Master's degree. The highest number of respondents (18, 29 percent) had from 6-10 years experience. Seventeen (27 percent) had up to 5 years, twelve (19 percent) had between 11-15 years, nine (15 percent) had 11-20 years. Only one respondent had 21-25 years experience, and five (8 percent) had more than 26 years experience. Most of the respondents (28, 45 percent) were 31-40 years old. Six (10 percent) were under 30. Thirteen (21 percent) respondents were 41-50 years old. Eleven (18 percent) respondents were 51-60 years old. Only two (3 percent) respondents were more than 60 years old. Two respondents (3 percent) did not disclose their age.

Research Productivity

The respondents were asked about their research productivity in terms of books and research papers published. About 50 percent of the respondents have not written a book in their subject field during the last ten years. Five (8 percent) have written one book, nine (15 percent) have written two books, three (5 percent) have written 3, one has written four, seven (11 percent) have written five, and four (7 percent) have written more than five books. A majority of arts and humanities scholars (78 percent) have published some articles during the last five years. Only 13 (21 percent) have not published any articles in their subject field. Twenty-one (34 percent) have written up to five articles, 14 (23 percent) have written 6-10 articles, six (10 percent) have written 11-20 articles, and three (5 percent) have written 21-30 articles. Four (7 percent) have written more than thirty research articles during the last five years.

Sources of Information

The respondents were asked about methods and sources they use to get information for their teaching and research activities. The results show that "consulting with experts in the subject field" was the preferred method (mean=3.98), followed by "conversation with colleagues" (mean=3.82). "Library catalogues" and "attending conferences, seminars and workshops" were given equal preference with mean scores of 3.57 each (Table 1).

Importance of Different Information Resources for Teaching and Research

Respondents' opinions were sought using a five-point Likert Scale on the importance of different information sources for their teaching and research. A list of 23 information resources was provided including open-ended option. Below is the analysis of the acquired responses.

Resources for Teaching

Reference books were ranked as the most important resource for teaching (mean=4.28), followed by "consultation with knowledgeable persons or experts in the subject field" (mean=4.26), "discussion with colleagues" (mean=3.81), while "general books" and "textbooks" were ranked as 4th and 5th with mean

scores of 3.76 and 3.72 respectively. Journals, research reports, bibliographies, newspapers, proceedings, and theses and dissertations were considered as less important (Table 2).

Resources for Research

The results show that “consultation with knowledgeable persons or experts in the field” was ranked as the most important source of information for the research (mean=4.50), followed by reference books (mean=4.39), and discussion with colleagues (mean=3.93). General books were ranked 4th (mean=3.85), while journals and textbooks were ranked 5th and 6th with mean scores of 3.78 and 3.75, respectively (Table 3). Respondents have given a similar importance to many of the resources for both teaching and research.

Information Seeking Patterns

To explore respondents' information-seeking patterns, different questions were asked regarding preferred format and language of material, channels used to get information, location for information gathering, methods of communication, sources of current awareness, purpose of information seeking, and problems in information seeking.

Preferred Format

Most respondents (77 percent) prefer print, followed by electronic materials (39 percent), while audiovisual materials were the least preferred (13 percent) (Table 4).

Preferred Language

Most respondents (45 percent) search for teaching and research material in English. Twenty-three (37 percent) respondents mentioned Urdu as their first choice, and seven (11.3 percent) respondents preferred languages other than English and Urdu. Other languages include Arabic (n=11), Persian (n=5), Punjabi (n=7), Hindi (n=1), and Sindhi (n=1) (Table 5).

Source for Information Resources

Respondents were asked about sources for acquiring information resources. Most use their departmental library (mean= 4.17), followed by personal collections or personal libraries (mean=4.14). Purchase from bookstores and use of the university library were ranked 3rd and 4th with mean scores of 3.58 and 3.48, respectively (Table 6).

Location for Information Seeking

A majority of respondents (mean=3.78) do their information-seeking activities at home. Very few (mean=2.75) use the university library (mean=2.75) (Table 7).

Communication Channels

Most respondents prefer “personal meetings or face to face discussions” (mean=3.98). Other channels of communication mentioned were electronic mail and telephone with mean scores of 3.13 and 2.96, respectively (Table 8).

Methods and Sources of Current Awareness

The respondents were asked the sources and methods they use to keep abreast of developments in their field. "Consulting with subject experts" was the most common method (mean=4.32), followed by reading the latest books (mean=4.29) and newspapers (mean=3.80). "Discussion with colleagues" and "participation in professional seminars" were ranked 4 th and 5 th with mean scores of 3.75 and 3.58, respectively (Table 9).

Purpose of Information-seeking

Most respondents mentioned "teaching or lecture preparation" (mean=4.27) as a purpose of information seeking, followed by "to guide researchers and students" and "to support research work" with mean scores 4.14 and 4.09, respectively. "To develop competence" and "to keep up with current developments" were ranked 4 th and 5 th (mean=4.08 and 4.02) (Table 10).

Problems in Information-seeking

Respondents were asked to mention problems they faced in acquiring information for teaching and research. Seventeen possible problems were listed and respondents were asked to rank them using a five-point Likert scale. Results show that most ranked "required material is not available" as number one (mean=3.71), followed by "information is scattered in too many sources," and "information sources are very expensive," with mean scores of 3.60 and 3.47 (Table 11).

Findings

The study reveals that consulting with experts in the subject field was the preferred method of getting information followed by the conversation with colleagues. Reference books were the most important resource for teaching. Consultation with knowledgeable persons or experts in the field was the most important source of information for the research. Most humanities teachers get information sources from their departmental library; they also maintain personal collections and/or personal libraries for this purpose. Most of the humanists prefer information in print, while they least prefer audiovisual material. Results of the study show that a majority of the humanists do their information-seeking activities at home. Meeting personally was the most-used channel of communication, followed by e-mail. Consulting with the subject experts was the most common method to keep abreast with current developments in their subject fields. Most search for information for their teaching preparation or lecturing, to guide researchers or students, and to support research. Unavailability of required material was the most common problem in information-seeking.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study is an effort to fill a gap in understanding the information needs and information-seeking behavior of humanities faculty. Humanities scholars' information needs are diverse and they rely heavily on books and older material, so the lack of availability of required material in libraries is a major problem in information seeking. Information professionals can analyze the findings of the study and design, develop, and introduce new library and information services for humanists. Library and information science professionals, especially in Pakistan, should conduct further studies on user information needs to provide more suitable resources and services to different user groups.

Table 1 Methods and Sources of Required Information

| Rank | Method/Source | Mean |
|------|--|------|
| 1 | Consultation with experts in the field | 3.98 |
| 2 | Conversation with colleagues | 3.82 |

| | | |
|-------|---|------|
| 3 | Media: TV, radio, and newspapers | 3.78 |
| 4-5 | Library catalogues | 3.57 |
| 4-5 | Attending conferences, seminars, and workshops | 3.57 |
| 6 | Book reviews | 3.38 |
| 7 | Visiting bookstores | 3.37 |
| 8 | Bibliographies | 3.33 |
| 9 | Internet search engines | 3.32 |
| 10 | Browsing the collections in libraries | 3.20 |
| 11 | Private or personal correspondence | 3.17 |
| 12-13 | Citations (References in material used) | 3.14 |
| 12-13 | By chance (e.g., while searching on a specific topic, you find valuable information on an entirely different topic) | 3.14 |
| 14 | Current awareness services of libraries | 2.91 |
| 15 | Review articles | 2.86 |
| 16 | Websites of bookstores e.g., Amazon.com | 2.78 |
| 17 | Publisher catalogues and flyers | 2.72 |
| 18 | Conversation with library staff | 2.60 |
| 19 | Electronic databases | 2.51 |
| 20 | Indexing journals | 2.30 |
| 21 | Listservs / e-mail alerts | 2.11 |
| 22 | Reprints received from authors/publishers | 2.07 |
| 23 | Abstracting journals | 2.00 |
| 24 | Internet discussion forums or newsgroups | 1.85 |

0=Don't use; 1=Least preferred; 2=Less preferred; 3=Somewhat preferred; 4=Preferred; 5=Most preferred

Table 2 Importance of Different Information Resources in Teaching

| Rank | Information Source | Mean |
|------|--|------|
| 1 | Reference books (dictionaries, encyclopedias, yearbooks, handbooks, almanacs etc.) | 4.28 |
| 2 | Consultation with knowledgeable persons or experts in the field | 4.26 |
| 3 | Discussion with colleagues | 3.81 |
| 4 | General books/Monographs | 3.76 |
| 5 | Textbooks | 3.72 |
| 6 | Journals | 3.55 |
| 7 | Research reports | 3.43 |
| 8 | Bibliographies | 3.21 |
| 9 | Newspapers | 3.15 |
| 10 | Proceeding of conferences, workshops, and seminars | 3.10 |
| 11 | Theses and dissertations | 2.95 |
| 12 | Biographies | 2.91 |

| | | |
|-------|---|------|
| 13 | Manuscripts and archives | 2.85 |
| 14 | Audiovisuals (videos, slides, sound recordings) | 2.76 |
| 15-16 | Electronic databases (CD-ROM and online) | 2.67 |
| 15-16 | TV and radio programs | 2.67 |
| 17 | Newsletters | 2.61 |
| 18 | Pamphlets and brochures | 2.55 |
| 19 | Government publications and documents | 2.50 |
| 20 | Maps, atlases, guidebooks | 2.47 |
| 21-22 | Indexes and abstracts | 2.26 |
| 21-22 | Internet news groups and discussion forums | 2.26 |
| 23 | Discussion with library staff | 2.17 |

0=Don't use; 1= Not at all important; 2= Somewhat important; 3= Important; 4= Very important; 5=Extremely important.

Table 3 Importance of Different Information Resources in Research

| Rank | Attributes | Mean |
|------|--|------|
| 1 | Consultation with knowledgeable persons or experts in the field | 4.50 |
| 2 | Reference books (dictionaries, encyclopedias, yearbooks, handbooks, almanacs etc.) | 4.39 |
| 3 | Discussion with colleagues | 3.93 |
| 4 | General books/Monographs | 3.85 |
| 5 | Journals | 3.78 |
| 6 | Textbooks | 3.75 |
| 7 | Bibliographies | 3.67 |
| 8 | Research reports | 3.61 |
| 9 | Thesis and dissertations | 3.57 |
| 10 | Proceedings of conferences, workshops, and seminars | 3.49 |
| 11 | Electronic databases (CD-ROM and online) | 3.47 |
| 12 | Newspapers | 3.25 |
| 13 | Biographies | 3.11 |
| 14 | Manuscripts and archives | 3.10 |
| 15 | Pamphlets and brochures | 2.92 |
| 16 | Maps, atlases, guidebooks | 2.88 |
| 17 | Audiovisuals (videos, slides, sound recordings) | 2.79 |
| 18 | TV and radio | 2.76 |
| 19 | Government documents | 2.68 |
| 20 | Indexes and abstracts | 2.62 |
| 21 | Discussion with library staff | 2.58 |
| 22 | Newsletters | 2.54 |
| 23 | Internet news groups and discussion forums | 2.48 |

0=Don't use; 1= Not at all important; 2= Somewhat important; 3= Important; 4= Very important; 5=Extremely important.

Table 4 Preferred Format of Information Resources

| Information Format | No. of Responses | Most Preferred | Preferred | Less Preferred |
|--------------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Print | 62 | 48 (77 percent) | 6 (10 percent) | 8 (13 percent) |
| Electronic | 59 | 24 (39 percent) | 28 (45 percent) | 7 (11 percent) |
| Audiovisual | 57 | 8 (13 percent) | 19 (31 percent) | 30 (48 percent) |

Table 5 Preferred Language of Information Material

| Language | Rank 1 | Rank 2 | Rank 3 |
|----------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| English | 28 (45 percent) | 17 (27 percent) | 8 (13 percent) |
| Urdu | 23 (37 percent) | 25 (40 percent) | 3 (5 percent) |
| Others | 7 (11 percent) | 6 (10 percent) | 16 (26 percent) |

Table 6 Source for Acquiring Required Information Resources

| Rank | Source | Mean |
|------|-------------------------|------|
| 1 | Departmental library | 4.17 |
| 2 | Personal collection | 4.14 |
| 3 | Purchase | 3.58 |
| 4 | Main university library | 3.48 |
| 5 | Colleagues | 3.42 |
| 6 | Free of cost/Donations | 2.22 |

1=Never; 2=Seldom; 3=Sometimes; 4=Frequently; 5=Always

Table 7 Location of Information-seeking Activities

| Rank | Location | Mean |
|------|-----------------------------------|------|
| 1 | Home | 3.78 |
| 2 | Departmental library | 3.69 |
| 3 | Office | 3.24 |
| 4 | Central library of the university | 2.75 |

1=Never; 2=Seldom; 3=Sometimes; 4=Frequently; 5=Always

Table 8 Communication Channels Used for Information-seeking

| Rank | Source | Mean |
|------|---|------|
| 1 | Meeting personally / Face to face discussions | 3.98 |
| 2 | Email | 3.13 |

| | | |
|---|------------------------------|------|
| 3 | Telephone | 2.96 |
| 4 | Postal mail (Writing letter) | 2.93 |
| 5 | Fax | 1.71 |

1=Never; 2=Seldom; 3=Sometimes; 4=Frequently; 5=Always

Table 9 Methods and Sources Used for Current Awareness

| Rank | Methods/Sources | Mean |
|------|--|------|
| 1 | Consulting experts in subject field | 4.32 |
| 2 | Reading latest books | 4.29 |
| 3 | Reading newspapers (print and online) | 3.80 |
| 4 | Discussions with colleagues | 3.75 |
| 5 | Attending professional conferences, seminars, and workshops | 3.58 |
| 6 | Browsing shelves in bookstores | 3.43 |
| 7 | Browsing publishers' catalogues | 3.30 |
| 8 | Media: TV and radio | 3.24 |
| 9 | Scanning current issues of print and electronic journals | 3.22 |
| 10 | Reading newsletters | 3.14 |
| 11 | Through current awareness services of libraries like CAS, SDI & Content Page Service | 2.61 |
| 12 | Scanning recent issues of abstracting and indexing tools | 2.60 |
| 13 | Through email alerts (Listserv) | 2.60 |

1=Never; 2=Rarely; 3=Sometimes; 4=Frequently; 5=Very frequently

Table 10 Purposes of Information-seeking

| Rank | Purposes | Mean |
|------|------------------------------------|------|
| 1 | Teaching preparation or lecturing | 4.27 |
| 2 | Guiding researchers students | 4.14 |
| 3 | Support research | 4.09 |
| 4 | Develop competence | 4.08 |
| 5 | Keep up with current developments | 4.02 |
| 6 | Writing a book or article | 3.98 |
| 7 | Workshop and seminar presentations | 3.58 |
| 8 | General knowledge | 3.56 |
| 9 | Service or job requirement | 3.40 |
| 10 | Reading purposes only | 2.96 |
| 11 | Carry out administrative work | 2.73 |
| 12 | Preparation for TV and radio | 2.18 |

1= Not at all important; 2= Somewhat important; 3= Important; 4= Very important; 5=Extremely important

Table 11 Problems Faced by Respondents in Information-seeking

| Rank | Problems | Mean |
|------|--|------|
| 1 | Required material is not available | 3.71 |
| 2 | Information is scattered in too many sources | 3.60 |
| 3 | Information sources are very expensive | 3.47 |
| 4 | Information sources are located far away | 3.28 |
| 5 | Latest information sources are not available | 3.21 |
| 6 | Information explosion or too much information | 3.20 |
| 7 | Lack of time for searching | 3.20 |
| 8 | Non availability of electronic resource (e-journals and databases) | 3.13 |
| 9 | Too many classes or administrative work | 3.09 |
| 10 | Lack of training in electronic resources/products | 2.81 |
| 11 | Library staff is incompetent or not well-trained | 2.67 |
| 12 | Lack of computer hardware or software | 2.64 |
| 13 | Lack of technical support | 2.53 |
| 14 | Lack of information about available sources | 2.47 |
| 15 | Lack of support from library staff | 2.47 |
| 16 | Lack of knowledge in using the library | 2.11 |
| 17 | Language barrier (most of the material is in foreign languages) | 2.11 |

1=Never; 2=Seldom; 3=Sometimes; 4=Frequently; 5=Always

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