University of Nebraska - Lincoln
DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal) | Libraries at University of Nebraska-Lincoln

10-1-2011

An Investigation of Use of Information Sources by Social Scientists

Ajay Kumar
Purvanchal University, Ajay_azamgarh@rediffmail.com

S. N. Singh
Mizoram University, drsinghsn@yahoo.com

Akhilesh K. S. Yadav
Mizoram University, akhilksy@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac

Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

Kumar, Ajay; Singh, S. N.; and Yadav, Akhilesh K. S., "An Investigation of Use of Information Sources by Social Scientists" (2011). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. Paper 585.
http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/585

StatCounter.com RSS Add to Google

http://unllib.unl.edu/LPP/

***Library Philosophy and Practice* 2011**

ISSN 1522-0222

An Investigation of Use of Information Sources by Social Scientists

Ajay Kumar
Assistant Professor
Department of Library and Information Science
Purvanchal University, Jaunpur, U.P.

S. N. Singh
Associate Professor
Department of Library and Information Science
Mizoram University, Aizawl, Mizoram.

Akhilesh K.S. Yadav
Junior Research Fellow
Department of Library and Information Science
Mizoram University, Aizawl, Mizora

Introduction

Information resources, library and information personnel, and users are important components of modern libraries. For proper and systematic planning and development of information resources and services, the user studies are the first step in the development of need-based collections in libraries. A large number of user studies have been reported in the literature from the west.There are only a few studies of users in India, and there are no in-depth studies in science and technology, social science, and humanities in India. In the present paper, an attempt has been made to study the use of information sources by the social scientists of Mizoram University.

Social Science Information

Research in social science depends heavily on availability of information. Access to the right information is a difficult task because information is abundant, but users do not know whether it is available and where to locate it. Unless mechanisms for the organization of information are evolved to send information to the target user, all expenditure and efforts on its generation become wasteful. Information is a required commodity in any research activity because of its potential value in policy formation and decision-making. Social science research has become diversified, giving birth to a number of new research areas. Information needs of social scientists have become both discipline-oriented and mission-oriented. Information in the form of data, both raw and processed, is heavily relied upon by social science information users.

Title dispersion, or the variety of information sources in social science, is greater than in the sciences. Social scientists increasingly use official records, archival materials, files, committee/commission reports, addresses and proceedings of political parties, legislative

proceedings, rules, databases, newspapers and bulletins, etc., apart from conventional documents like books, journals, research papers, conference proceedings, theses, and statistical serials.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study are:

- To determine the use of formal and informal sources of information by social scientists of Mizoram University.
- To determine the degree to which social scientists make use of various types of information sources.
- To identify the methods followed by them to keep in touch with the latest developments in their fields.
- The availability of information sources and services in Mizoram University.

Scope and Methodology of the Study

A social scientist is a person who is involved in teaching and research activities in any of the following area: Economics, Sociology, Anthropology, Political Science, Psychology, History, Public Administration, and Social Work. Mizoram University, a central university in India was selected for the survey. Various social scientists were included in this survey.

There are number of methods that can be used to study each technique. There is a trend toward using a combination of two or more methods. Parker and Paisley (1966) recognize three types of methods in studying the users of information. These are (i) by asking people; (ii) by observing its occurrence; and, (iii) by examining the resultant products. In the present study, the investigators have adopted the first method for the study of information-seeking patterns of social scientists i.e., questionnaire method.

A total of 100 questionnaires was distributed randomly to the participants. Seventy were returned and these data were tabulated and analysed.

Review of Literature

Although information use is a fundamental concept, there are no definitional or methodological approaches that are broadly accepted or applied. The classic work of Taylor (1991) identifies the following eight classes of information use: 1) Enlightenment; 2) Problem Understanding; 3) Instrumental; 4) Factual; 5) Conformational; 6) Projective; 7) Motivational; 8) Personal or Political. The categories are not mutually exclusive, so that information used in one class may also address the needs of other classes.

While the concept of “information needs” is difficult to define, isolate. and measure because it “involves a cognitive process which may operate on different levels of consciousness and hence may not be clear even to the inquirer himself” Crawford (1978), other terms such as “demand” and “use” seen relatively easy to define. In reference to this, Brittain (1975), states that the demand that a user makes upon an information service can be recorded; likewise, the use made of services and documents can be recorded. However, a term such as “requirement,” which is often used to indicate use, demands, and needs, remains difficult to define.

Line (1971) says that the harder a discipline in social sciences, the more heavily the researchers in that discipline make use of abstracts and indexes. Line gave the example of psychologists and geographers who made use of this kind of material compared with sociologists and economists. Shokeen and Kaushik (2002) report that social scientists of Haryana University in India used current journals, textbooks, and reference books most frequently for their information needs.

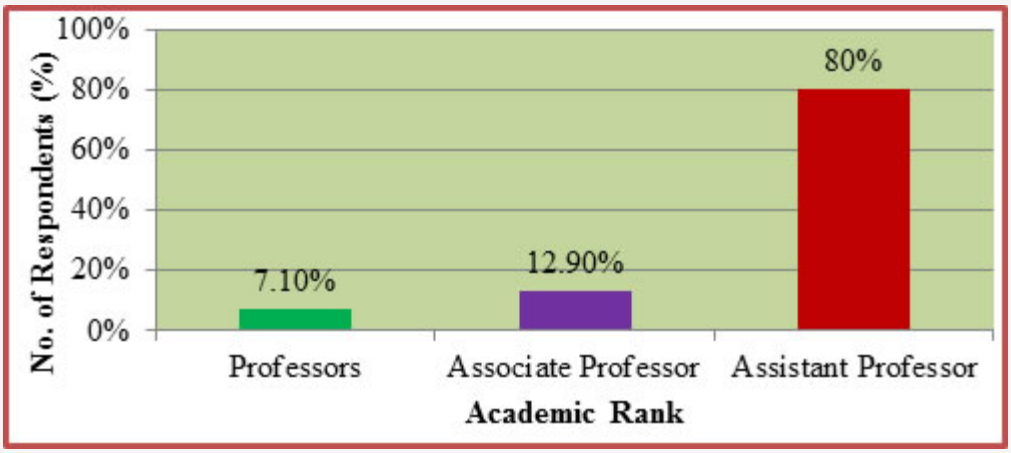
Fatima and Ahmad (2008) explore the idea that the use of library resources and services is necessary to help students meet their information requirements and finds that textbooks and journals are the most popular sources to information for students' course work.

Finding and Analysis

Academic Rank Distribution

The analysis of data given in figure 1 shows that in the group of social scientists of Mizoram University, 5 (7.1%) Professors, 9 (12.9%) Associate Professors, and 56 (80%) Assistant Professors.

Figure 1: Respondents' Distribution Based on Academic Ranks



Formal Sources Used by the Social Scientists

Formal and informal sources of information refer to all facilities and channels or transmission media from which scientists can obtain information.

Table 1: Formal Sources Used by the Social Scientists

Sources	Generally Used	Rarely Used	Never Used
Personal Information File	11 (15.7%)	42 (60%)	17 (24.3%)
Text books/ Monographs	69 (99.8%)	Nil	1 (1.4%)
Print Journals	64 (91.4%)	4 (5.7%)	2 (2.9%)
Newspapers/ Magazines	55 (78.6%)	12 (17.1%)	3 (4.5%)
Government Publications	16 (22.9%)	49 (70%)	5 (7.1%)
Publisher's Catalogue	25 (35.7%)	37 (52.9%)	8 (11.4%)
Library Catalogue	31 (47.1%)	33 (47.1%)	6 (8.6%)
Thesis/ Dissertation	14 (20%)	50 (71.4%)	5 (7.1%)
Abstract/ Indexes	34 (48.6%)	30 (42.9%)	5 (7.1%)
Research Report	28 (40%)	37 (52.9%)	4 (5.7%)

Bibliography	39 (55.7%)	24 (34.3%)	6 (8.6%)

The most-used resources include monographs and textbooks, print journals, newspapers, and magazines.

Informal Sources Used by Social Scientists

We describe the informal domain as encompassing the procedure the scientist uses to develop raw information into a finished product worthy of being submitted to a journal .

In connection with the use of informal sources, there was remarkable difference between the two groups. Table 2 contains the computed data with regard to the use of informal sources of information by the social scientists.

Table 2: Informal Sources Used by the Social Scientists

Sources	Generally Used	Rarely Used	Never Used
Personal contact with colleagues	60 (85.7%)	8 (11.4%)	2 (2.9%)
Seminars, workshops, conferences	64 (81.4%)	5 (7.1%)	1 (1.4%)
Consulting Reference Librarian	11 (15.7%)	53 (75.7%)	6 (8.6%)
Exhibitions, concerts, performances	7 (10%)	51 (72.9%)	2 (17.1%)

Electronic Databases

Electronic databases are i ncreasingly important sources of information. Electronic information is available in nearly all areas of knowledge. A single databases may refer to a variety of sources, including periodicals, articles, books, government documents, etc. Awareness of electronic databases by social scientists is given below in table 3.

Table 3: Awareness of Various Electronic Databases

Sources	Aware by Social Scientists	Used by Social Scientists
Psych Info.	8 (11.4%)	8 (11.4%)
ProQuest	1 (1.4%)	1 (1.4%)
EBSCO Host	1 (1.4%)	1 (1.4%)
Lexis	1 (1.4%)	Nil
ERIC	Nil	Nil
LISA	1 (1.4%)	Nil
Dissertation	15 (21.4%)	13 (18.6%)

Abstract		
SCOPUS	Nil	Nil
J-gate	5 (7.1%)	Nil
JSTOR	26 (37.1%)	26 (37.1%)

The social scientists of Mizoram University were also asked which electronic databases they were aware of, with JSTOR 26 (31.1%), Dissertation Abstracts 15 (21.4%), as the most common responses.

Electronic Versus Print Resources

One research question is the extent to which social scientists use electronic resources and print resources for research and teaching. Figure 2 shows that most social scientists preferred print, with 65 (92.9%) indicating that they preferred print versions compared to only 4 (5.7%) who preferred electronic versions.

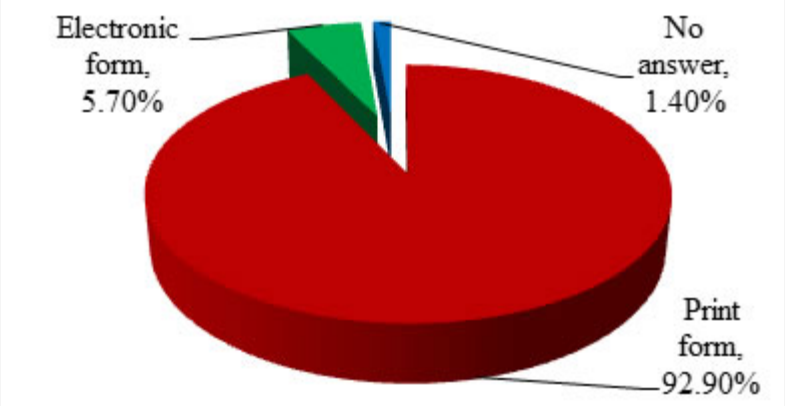
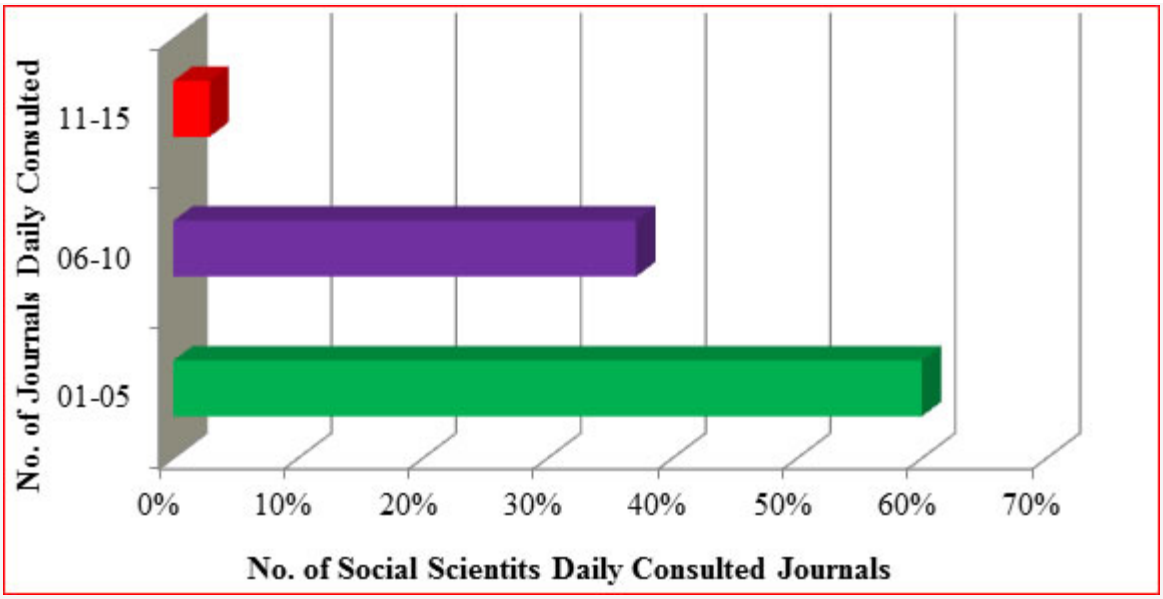


Figure 2: Preference for Print or Electronic Form of Information

Journals Consulted Daily by Social Scientists

Journals are important vehicles of communication. The number of journals consulted daily by users is given in figure 3. As revealed by data appearing in figure, a majority of social scientists of Mizoram University 1-5 journals daily.

Figure 3: Daily Consulted Journals by Social Scientists



Tools and Techniques Used for Current Information

The scientists need to keep in touch with the latest developments in their field. They need to keep abreast of developments in the literature in their field. Table 4 shows data regarding the tools used by scientists to remain current in their subject.

Table 4: Tools and Techniques Used by Social Scientists

Sources	No. of Social Scientists
Browse print journal	63 (90%)
Browse e-journals	42 (60%)
Search library catalogue	40 (57.1%)
Browse the stacks at library	42 (60%)
Browse relevant Internet sites	47 (67.1%)
Search references of relevant articles	31 (44.3%)

Respondents were asked about methods used to locate relevant research information. They indicated that browsing print journals were most popular and browsing electronic journals also popular.

Methods Used by Social Scientists to Obtain Journal articles

The social scientists use different methods for obtaining relevant articles. Table provides data pertaining to the methods used by social scientists to obtain articles.

Table 5: Methods Used by Social Scientists to obtained Journal's Articles

Sources	No. of Social Scientists

Personal print subscription	28 (40%)
Read print journal at library	61 (87%)
Document delivery services	4 (5.7%)
Read library's electronic copy	39 (55.7%)
Interlibrary loan	1 (1.4%)
Photocopy of journal articles at library	Nil
Colleagues	Nil

The most popular way to obtain articles is to read print journal in library and the second most popular way is to read the electronic version.

Electronic Journals

Methods for accessing electronic journal articles are shown in table 6.

Table 6: Access Electronic Journal Articles

Response	Social Scientists
E-mail a copy to your self	14 (20%)
Print a copy of articles	41 (58.5%)
Save copy to the pen drive or CD	47 (67.1%)
Read article on screen	21 (30%)

Most respondents save a copy to a pen drive or CD, while more that half print them.

Table 7: Method of Seeking Information by Social Scientists

Sources	Generally Used	Rarely Used	Never Used
Asking librarian	3 (4.2%)	3 (4.2%)	64 (91.4%)
Attending conferences and meetings	26 (37.1%)	41 (58.5%)	3 (4.2%)
Reading conferences and meetings papers	27 (38.5%)	36 (51.4%)	7 (10%)
Reading professional journals in your field	65 (92.8%)	5 (7.1%)	Nil
Reading text books in your field	65 (92.8%)	4 (5.7%)	1 (1.4%)

Searching bibliographical data base	7 (10%)	57 (81.4%)	6 (8.5%)
Talking colleagues or expert in your own department	3 (4.2%)	63 (90%)	4 (5.7%)
Using Internet search engine	13 (15.6%)	13 (15.6%)	44 (62.8%)
Writing to colleague at another university	33 (47.1%)	3 (4.2%)	34 (48.6%)

The social scientists of Mizoram University use many different methods for seeking information. The most common by far is consulting journals and textbooks.

Interlibrary loan has become essential because no library can become self-sufficient, due to proliferation of literature, multiplicity of documents, paucity of funds, and, limited personnel. The data relating to use of this facility is shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Frequency of used of interlibrary loan facility in the recent past

Frequency	Social Scientists
Once	1 (1.4%)
Twice	Nil
More than Twice	2 (2.9%)
Never use	30 (90.9%)
Total	33

Out of 33 social scientists of the university, who were aware of this facility 1 (1.4%) used it once in the recent past; 2 (2.9%) used this more than twice; and remaining 30 (90.9%) did not use this facility in the recent past.

Adequacy of Information Sources and Services

Table 9: Adequacy of information sources and services of the main library attached to university

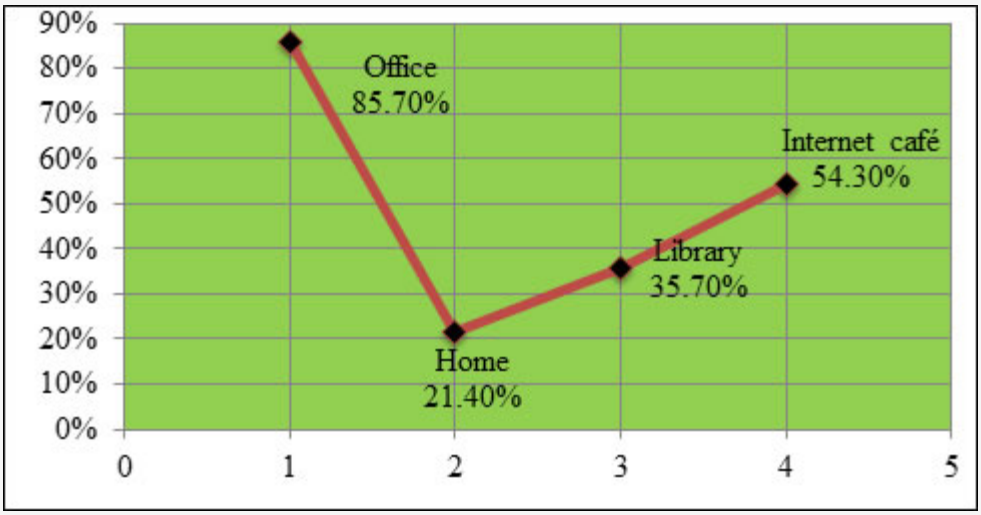
	Adequate	Inadequate	Need tremendous improvement
Information sources	12 (17.1%)	30 (42.9%)	28 (40%)
Information services	11 (15.7%)	22 (31.4%)	37 (52.9%)

Close to half of respondents felt that sources were inadequate to meet their requirements. A large number also felt the need for tremendous improvement in information sources. About one-third found information services inadequate, while more than half felt the need for tremendous improvement in information services.

Internet Resources

Information about Internet by respondents is shown in figure 4.

Figure 4: Location Used to Access Internet by Social Scientists



The vast majority of respondents access the Internet in the office.

Online Public Access Catalogues (OPAC)

Online public access catalogues are one of the most important services available on the Internet.

Table 10: Use of OPAC by the Social Scientists

Frequencies of OPAC (Times/Month)	Social Scientists
0-10	59 (84.3%)
11-20	10 (14.3%)
21-30	1 (1.4%)
More than 30	Nil

A large majority of respondents use the OPAC up to 10 times per month.

Conclusion

Social scientists of Mizoram University depend on many kinds of formal and informal sources of information. Monographs and textbooks are extremely important, as are print journals. More than 80 percent use seminars, workshops, and conferences for seeking information. Electronic databases were a less popular source of information. The results showed a clear preference for print documents. With regard to adequacy of information sources and services, less than 20 percent found that information sources were adequate.

References

Brittain, J. M. (1975). Information needs and application of the results of user studies. *In* A. Debons, & W. J. Cameron (Eds.). *Perspectives in Information Science* (pp. 425-447). Noordhoff,

Leyden: International Publishing.

Crawford, S. (1978). Information needs and uses. *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology*, 13, 61-81.

Fatima, N., & Ahmad, N. (2008). Information seeking behaviour of the students at Ajmal Khan Tibbiya College, Aligarh Muslim University: a survey. *Annals of Library and Information Studies*, 55(2), 141-144.

Line, M. B. (1971). The information needs and uses of social scientists: an overview of INFROSS. *Journal of Documentation*, 23(8), 412-434.

Parker, E. B., & Paisley, W. J. (1966). Research for psychologist at the interface of the scientist and his information system. *American Psychologist*, 21(11), 1061-1071.

Taylor, R. S. (1991). Information use environments. *In* B. Dervin & M.J. Voigt (Eds.), *Progress in communication science* (Vol. 10, pp. 217-254). Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing.

Shokeen, A., & Kaushik, S. K. (2002). Information seeking behaviour of social scientists of Haryana Universities. *Library Herald*, 40(1), 29-33.