Information-Seeking Behaviour And Access Level Of Women Clients In The District Central Libraries In Tamil Nadu

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Accessing information is crucial for empowering individuals to lead healthy lives. The study aimed to investigate women clients' information requirements and information-seeking behaviours in the study area and to assess the factors influencing this behaviour. The researcher developed a comprehensive questionnaire after consulting previous studies and field experts. Using a simple random sampling technique, the questionnaire was distributed to 150 women clients of the district central library in Tirunelveli. The researcher received **143** fully completed questionnaires from the participants. It was found that the sources and services of the district central library in Tirunelveli influence the information-seeking behaviour of female clients. **Key Words:** Women Clients, District Central libraries, Information-Seeking Behaviour, Access Level

1. Introduction:

Accessing information is essential for empowering individuals to lead healthy lives. The type of information needed varies, and it serves different purposes, from gaining knowledge by reading to preparing class notes. The process of seeking information begins with a desire to obtain unknown information, and it's important to identify the sources and individuals from whom to obtain it. When searching for information, individuals often seek help from friends before turning to official sources such as information desks, the internet, and libraries. In today's digital era, the internet is a primary resource for a wide range of information, while libraries are crucial for students and faculty seeking academic resources. Seeking information is critical for students and faculty who need access to textbooks, reference materials, and multimedia resources.

Information Seeking:
Information seeking involves people purposefully seeking to expand their knowledge. The term "search" refers to the actions of people seeking information and describes how computers find and display information. "Information seeking" is preferred over "information retrieval" because it is more focused on people and open-ended. "Retrieval" implies that the object must have been previously known, often organised for later knowledge by themselves or someone else. "Seeking" conveys the process of acquiring knowledge and is more focused on problem-solving; the solution may or may not be found.

Seeking information is a deliberate process through which people aim to alter their knowledge. This process involves active engagement as information seekers focus on and respond to stimuli, assess their progress, and evaluate the effectiveness of their knowledge. Information seeking can be seen as a cybernetic process involving modifying knowledge through input, purposeful output, and feedback. The information search process focuses on the emotions, thoughts, and comprehension of a situation that individuals need to address a task, problem, or topic. This specific action prompts individuals to seek the significance of valuable research, which can provide a framework for enhancing the information search.

Information Seeking Behaviour:

In today's era of information overload, individuals require access to a wide range of information that varies in level, frequency, volume, and use. This complexity presents challenges in understanding the specific information needs of different user groups and the flow of information within specific contexts or organisations. Furthermore, the utilisation of information is so intricate that a simple system for effective retrieval can only suffice with a thorough assessment of specific needs. This complex scenario has led to the emergence of the concept of information searching and the importance of determining the patterns of searching, known as information-seeking behaviour.

Various researchers and authors have used the terms information-seeking pattern and information habits instead of information-seeking behaviour. These terms highlight users' efforts to gather necessary information from various channels to achieve their goals. As a result, these terms have been used interchangeably in past and current studies. According to Sridhar, information-seeking behaviour refers to the actions and strategies employed to acquire specific knowledge within the universe of information. It involves integrating three fundamental resources: people, information, and systems. The behaviour that provides the user with the highest level of information satisfaction represents the optimal information-seeking behaviour pattern.

Factors Influencing Information Seeking Behaviour:

Influential factors affecting the Information-seeking Behaviour of users encompass various elements such as satisfaction or dissatisfaction, objective need, use of information, information acquisition, accessing information systems, and the sources of information. Factors including payoffs and costs, available resources, update rates, the volume of information, data diagnostics, distributional data characteristics, and conflicts among sources play a pivotal role in shaping information-seeking behaviour. Furthermore, understanding an individual's information needs necessitates careful consideration of factors such as accessibility of the information source, financial implications, time constraints, the relevance of sources to problem-solving, and the comprehensibility of the information source. Social, political, geographical, and educational factors influence information-seeking behaviour.

2. Profile of sample unit:

a. Tirunelveli District Library:

Tirunelveli District Library, often known as the "Anna District Central Library," is one of the significant public libraries in Tamil Nadu. It provides many resources and services to the public, students, researchers, and other community members. It is part of the network of public libraries in Tamil Nadu under the Directorate of Public Libraries.

b. Key Features:

← **Collections:** The library has many books, including fiction, nonfiction, reference materials, magazines, newspapers, and academic journals. The collection covers various subjects, such as literature, science, history, technology, etc.

← **Reading Rooms:** The library provides spacious reading rooms accommodating many readers. These reading rooms are popular among students and researchers who use them for their studies.

← **Digital Resources:** To keep up with the digital age, the library is gradually integrating digital resources, including access to e-books, digital magazines, and online journals, although this is still in development compared to major metropolitan libraries.

← **Children's Section:** This dedicated section provides age-appropriate books and educational materials to encourage reading habits among young learners.

← **Special Collections:** The library may have special collections of local history, government publications, and rare books that reflect Tirunelveli's cultural and historical heritage and the surrounding region.

← **Membership and Access:** Membership is usually available at a nominal fee and grants access to borrowing privileges, reading rooms, and other facilities. The library is open to the general public, including non-members, for in-house reading.

← **Community Programs:** The library often conducts book talks, literary discussions, seminars, workshops, and exhibitions to engage the community and promote literacy and education.

← **Educational Support:** It serves as a critical resource for students preparing for competitive exams in civil services, banking, and other government jobs by providing relevant study materials and a conducive environment for studying.

← **Infrastructure and Services:** The library's infrastructure may include computer terminals for accessing digital resources, photocopying services, and Wi-Fi connectivity, enhancing the overall user experience.

← **Local Language and Cultural Focus:** The library has an extensive collection of Tamil books promoting local language literature and regional cultural heritage.

Challenges:

Despite its much strength, the library faces challenges like updating its collection regularly, digitising resources, maintaining infrastructure, and reaching more rural areas in the district. This profile reflects the

general attributes of district libraries, such as the Tirunelveli District Library, and highlights their role as crucial educational and cultural hubs in the community.

3. Review of Literature:

Appleton & Hall (2022) Comprehensively understood the UK public library and its epistemic functions in the early twenty-first century. It is based on the analysis of longitudinal focus group data collected from public library users in two nations of the UK for a part-time doctorate awarded in 2020. The data collection period fell towards the end of a long period of austerity regarding public library funding in the UK that resulted from the global recession of the early 21st century. The study results indicate that the public library's role as a public sphere aligns closely with its epistemic functions, adding a dimension to information services provision beyond access to "traditional" print and online sources. New information and knowledge emerge through personal interactions in public library space. Through such exchanges, the public libraries' responsibility towards the community becomes evident, notably as a platform for citizens to participate actively in society, including its democratic processes.

Hussaini et al. (2022) This study discussed the scenario of public libraries' legislative and financial sources in the Indian con chapter. It further examined the argument on library cess and alternative sources of how public libraries may generate financial resources, specifically in Rajasthan. The study results suggested that the Government of India should amend the constitution and bring the public libraries under the concurrent list. It should adopt a national policy for the holistic development of public libraries nationwide.

Vinayaraj (2022) Evaluated the new services offered by the Indian Public Library Movement (IPLM), supported by the NAASCOM Foundation, in the public libraries established across India. The study found that IPLM actively encouraged each library to engage meaningfully with the community. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents were found to be satisfied with the overall service of the public libraries.

Mohammad Yasir, Balasubramanian P., (2020) Public Libraries are the pillars of social development and changing tools for economic backgrounds and literate people in India. It is one of the parts of the resource providers of political, economic, and technological growth for the people of India. The work has endeavoured to study the profile of public libraries, factors touching on the frequency of visiting public libraries, level of satisfaction with the services of public libraries and overall service quality. The visitors' register provided the framework of the respondents to be covered. Users of the public library of Tirunelveli City constituted the sampling frame.

3. Statement of Problem:

The district central library is the local information centre, providing users accessto knowledge and information. The library services are offeredto everyone, regardless of age, race, gender, religion, nationality, language, or social status. Specialaccommodations and materials should be made available for userswho cannot access regular services and materials. Collections and services should not be restrictedby ideological, political, or religious censorship or commercial pressures. In recent years, libraries have played a crucial role in offering free access to various information resources. It is important to understand the specific needs and behaviours of different user groups, particularly women, to improve the services provided by these libraries. Women in rural and urban areas of Tamil Nadu may have distinct information needs, barriers, and preferences when seeking information and these factors could impact their ability to utilise the resources available in district central libraries. Research in this area is crucial as it can:

←Help improve library services and resource allocation.
←Promote gender-inclusive strategies in library development.

4. Objectives of the study:

✓ To detect the information needs and seeking behaviour of women clients in the study area.
✓ To assess the factors that influences the information-seeking behaviour of women clients in the study area and to evaluate the impact of this behaviour.

6. Null and Alternative Hypotheses:

H_O: The sources and services of the district central library do not influence the information-seeking behaviour of women clients in the study area

H_1 The sources and services of the district central library influence the information-seeking behaviour of women clients in the study area.

7. Scope of the study:

The research focuses on the demographic profile of women clients in the Tamil Nadu region. Tirunelveli district Central Library is the study's sample unit. The study includes an analysis of the type of information

required, preferred information sources, information accessibility, information-seeking strategies, the involvement of library staff, and the satisfaction level of women clients with the district central library's resources and services. Additionally, the study aims to identify the factors influencing women clients' information-seeking behaviour in the study area.

8. Methodology:

The demographic scope of the research compasses women clients of the district central library in Tirunelveli district. The main aim is to examine women clients' information requirements and information-seeking behaviours in the study area. Additionally, the research evaluates the factors that impact the information-seeking behaviour of women clients in the study area.The researcher developed a comprehensive questionnaire after consulting prior studies and field experts. Utilising a simple random sampling technique, the questionnaire was distributed to 150 women clients of the district central library. The researcher obtained **143** fully completed questionnaires from the participants.

9. Limitations:

This study is limited to the Tirunelveli district central library district of Tamil Nadu.The sample size is confined to 143 female clients in the study area. The researcher followed a simple random sampling technique to select respondents.The present research is purely based on primary data, so the results are based on the truthfulness of the respondents' replies.

10. Data Analysis and Interpretation:

Table 1

Gender	Category	Number	Percentage
Age	< 30 Years	32	22.30
	30 – 50Years	65	45.32
	>50 Years	46	32.37
Educational Qualifications	School level	14	10.07
	Graduate	59	41.01
	Post Graduate	42	29.50
	Others	28	19.42
Marital Status	Married	42	29.50
	Unmarried	101	70.50
Occupational status	Govt. Employee	20	13.67
	Private sector	64	44.60
	Self-employed	33	23.02
	Others	27	18.71
Monthly income	Below 25000	39	27.34
	25000 - 50000	66	46.04
	50000 - 100000	22	15.11
	Above 100000	16	11.51

Table 1 displays the demographic details of the participants chosen for the research. Regarding the respondents' age, the majority (45.32 percent) fellinto the 30 – 50 age brackets. Theparticipants were requested to indicate their educational qualifications. Thehighestproportion, 41.01 percent, are graduates, followed by 29.50 percent of postgraduates and 13.67 per cent of professionals. Participants were also asked to provide details about their occupation, revealing that thehighestpercentage(44.60 percent) work in the private sector, followed by 23.02 percent who are self-employed and 18.71 percent whoare homemakers, students,or retired employees. Concerning the respondents' income, 46.04 percent fellinto the income

bracket of 25000 – 5000, 27.34 percent below 25000, and 15.11 percent with an income of Rs.50000 – 100000.

Table 2 Frequency of Visits to the Public Library

Sl.no	Particulars Frequency of Visit	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Daily	22	15.24
2.	Two or Three times a week	28	19.64
3.	Once in a week	36	25.51
4.	Once in a month	16	11.51
5.	On Weekly holidays	24	16.48
6.	Occasionally	17	11.63
Total		**143**	**100**

(Source: Primary Data)

Fig 1
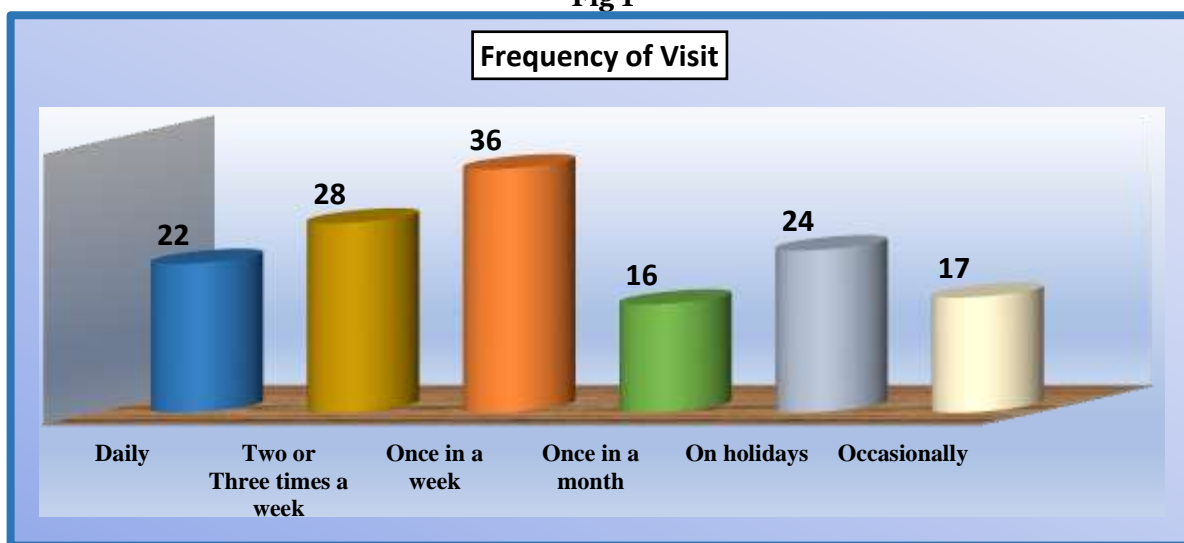
The information presentedin Table 6.4 demonstrates how often respondents visit the district central library. The data analysis shows that 25.51 percent of respondents go to the library once a week, while 19.64 percent visit it twice or thrice a week. Moreover, 16.48 percent of respondents exclusively visit the library on weekends. Additionally, 15.24 percent visit the library every day, 11.63 percent visit it occasionally, and 11.51 percent go to the library once a month.

Table 3 Purpose of Visit to the District Central Library

Sl.no	Particulars Purpose of Visit	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1.	To borrow and return books	70	48.98
2.	To read newspapers/ Magazines/	106	74.38
3.	To consult reference books	59	40.97
4.	To read subject books	47	33.18
5.	To refer to the question, bank	38	26.64
6.	To prepare cases	22	15.35
7.	To complete classroom assignments	35	24.72
8.	Use theses and dissertations	29	20.54
9.	To use Photocopy	26	18.17
10.	To use internet	53	36.79
11.	To update the current information	85	59.37
12.	Obtain information needed for jobs/career	41	28.67
13.	To know the Social Activities	51	35.78

| 14. | Opportunities to Bond with Like-Minded People | 35 | 24.49 |

(Source: Primary Data)

Table 3 discloses the respondents' purpose for visiting the district central library in the study area. It is observed that 74.38 percent of the respondents visit the district central library to read newspapers or magazines, followed by 59.37 percent of women clients to update their current information, and 48.98 percent of the selected respondents go to the district central library to borrow and return books.

Table 4 Information Needs of Women Clients

Sl. No	Particulars	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Improving my work decision-making	77	53.72
2.	Technical information	64	44.92
3.	Environmental information	47	32.62
4.	Business Information	34	24.04
5.	Religious information	46	32.28
6.	Employment information	66	46.50
7.	Health care information	32	22.12
8.	Market Analysis (Both Trend and Strategy)	48	33.41
9.	Keeping up-to-date	85	59.37
10.	Improving knowledge	80	55.64
11.	Continuing education	59	41.08
12.	Sharing knowledge with your colleagues	46	32.17
13.	Answering colleagues' questions	50	35.10
14.	Answering Clients 'questions	19	13.21
15.	Writing reports/research papers	77	53.72

Table 4 presents the information requirements of female clients at the district central libraries within the study area. The data reveals that 59.37 percent of respondents seek to stay updated, followed by 55.64 percent aiming to enhance their knowledge and 53.72 percent needing information to improve their decision-making capabilities.

Table 5 Factors Influencing the Information Seeking Behaviour of Women Clients

Coefficients						
Model	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	1.223	.158			7.733	< 0.05
Lending Services	.159	.037	.189		4.274	< 0.05
Reference and Research Services	.419	.036	.493		11.743	< 0.05
Infrastructure and Accessibility	-.129	.031	-.152		-4.167	< 0.05
Community and Educational Programmes	.136	.033	.159		4.058	< 0.05
Special Collections and Services	.254	.045	.215		5.668	< 0.05
Recreational Resources	.414	.030	.480		13.598	< 0.05
Technology and Digital Access	.312	.042	.271		7.451	< 0.05
a. Dependent Variable: Influencing the Information Seeking Behaviour of Women Clients						

The data in Table 5 displays the regression coefficient linking the variables associated with "sources and services of the district central library " to the Information Seeking Behaviour of Women Clients. The R, R2, and adjusted R2 values stand at 0.849, 0.721, and 0.718, respectively, surpassing the 0.60 threshold. This suggests a strong correlation between the sources and services of the district central library and the information-seeking behaviour of the respondents. The analysis yields an F-value of 37.532 with a significance value below 0.05, indicating the model's suitability. All seven variables related to resources and services of the district central library significantly influence the respondents' information-seeking behaviour in the study area. The independent variables exhibit a "t" value exceeding 1.96 with a significance value below 0.05 at a 95% confidence level,

11. Findings:

←Regarding the respondents' age, the majority (45.32 percent) fell into the 30 – 50 age brackets.
←The participants were requested to indicate their educational qualifications. The highest proportion,41.01 percent, are graduates, followed by 29.50 percent of postgraduates and 13.67 percent of professionals.
←Participants were also asked to provide details about their occupation, revealing that the highest percentage (44.60 per cent) work in the private sector, followed by 23.02 per cent who are self-employed and 18.71 per cent who are homemakers, students, or retired employees.
←Regarding the respondents' income, 46.04 percent fell into the Rs. 25000 – 5000 income bracket, 27.34 percent below 25000, and 15.11 percent with an income of Rs.50000 – 100000.
←The data analysis shows that 25.51 per cent of respondents visit the library once a week, while 19.64 per cent visit it twice or thrice a week. Moreover, 16.48 per cent of respondents exclusively visit the library on weekends. Additionally, 15.24 per cent visit the library every day, 11.63 per cent visit it occasionally, and 11.51 per cent go to the library once a month.
←It is observed that 74.38 per cent of the respondents visit the district central library to read newspapers or magazines, followed by 59.37 per cent of women clients to update their current information, and 48.98 per cent of the selected respondents go to the district central library to borrow and return books.
←The data reveals that 59.37 percent of respondents seek to stay updated, followed by 55.64 percent aiming to enhance their knowledge and 53.72 percent needing information to improve their decision-making capabilities.
←The study suggests a strong correlation between the sources and services of the district central library and the information-seeking behaviour of the respondents. The analysis yields an F-value of 37.532 with a significance value below 0.05, indicating the model's suitability. All seven variables related to resources and services of the district central library significantly influence the respondents' information-seeking behaviour in the study area. The independent variables exhibit a "t" value exceeding 1.96 with a significance value below 0.05 at a 95% confidence level,

12. Conclusion:

Examining the information-seeking behaviour and access levels of women clients in district central libraries in Tamil Nadu provides valuable insights into the changing role of public libraries in addressing gender-specific requirements. While these libraries are essential access points for information, education, and empowerment, several obstacles still impede optimal utilisation by women clients. Their information needs encompass education, employment, health, legal rights, and entrepreneurship. This indicates that public libraries can play a significant part in advancing the socio-economic status of women. Despite the general accessibility of libraries in district central locations, women frequently encounter time constraints due to household responsibilities, limited transportation options, and a lack of female-friendly infrastructure. Furthermore, socio-cultural impediments, such as gender-based expectations and the need for more awareness, curtail their complete participation. Although digital resources have been integrated into many libraries, the digital literacy gap hampers equitable access, particularly among rural and under privileged women. Libraries have yet to fully bridge the digital divide fully, thus limiting the benefits of online resources for women. Nevertheless, libraries that have actively addressed the needs of women by providing programs tailored to women, literacy workshops, and safe, welcoming environments have observed increased usage rates. Safe public spaces significantly contribute to women's engagement and empowerment. In summary, while district central libraries in Tamil Nadu are pivotal in providing information access to women, they must continue to evolve by focusing on inclusivity, accessibility, and women's empowerment to realise their full potential as knowledge centres. By surmounting existing barriers, these libraries can better serve as catalysts for societal progress, particularly for women in marginalised or rural areas.

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