

Information Sources Preferred by Students in Academic Writing

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to directly determine the information resources used by students. Also, the study specifically aimed to identify which format and type of information resources are preferred by students when writing their researches or assignments. A devised structured survey questionnaire; other parts of the tool were patterned with the study of Dilevko & Gottlieb⁵. The survey was administered *1st Semester of 2022-2023* to eighty (n= 80) students, forty (40) each from second and fifth year plus students. The collected surveys were sorted and tabulated. Mean, percentage and rank were used to treat the data statistically. Results demonstrated that despite the proliferation of online information sources, students still preferred to use print when writing their researches or assignments. In terms of types, regardless of format, books were still preferred over journals and magazines. This result can be attributed to the library's weak Serials (journals, magazines, etc.) collections. The library should consider to balance and strengthen its collections in both format and type.

Keywords: Information sources; Library resources; Online resources; Print resources

1. INTRODUCTION

Academic libraries play a pivotal role in providing library resources to users (faculty and students) for their academic needs. Users' needs for libraries vary. Students are likely to value the library as a place to study and socialize with their peers as equally important as access to library resources.¹² The University Library and Information Services (ULIS) of the Benguet State University aims to maintain its role in supporting the research and academic requirements of its patrons. Through its various services and collections, ULIS remains steadfast and attuned with its patrons' diverse and sophisticated information needs despite the ever-growing financial challenges. With an enrolment of over 13,000 during the first semester of 2022-2023 in the University, ULIS' daily average users range from 700- 1,500 (est.) patrons as based on library user statistics. The number of daily average users' activities are not limited to borrowing but also includes all services that can be availed in the library. Thus, diversifying collection formats and types tends to be one of solutions to maximise the limited library space.

The Veterinary Medicine Library is one of the two remaining Unit Libraries of ULIS. The VetMed Library exists to support and provide the best information sources and services to Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) students and faculty (Cabfilan, 2022)². While the Veterinary Medicine (VetMed) Library is geographically distanced from ULIS, this does not prohibit DVM students

from accessing information sources at the Main Library. Similarly, non-DVM students may also use information sources at the VetMed Library with certain limitations.

When the Covid19 pandemic struck, libraries had a turn-around reaction in realising how their services may reach their patrons whose mobility were limited due to restrictions. Mostly, small and medium-sized libraries turned to online delivery of services. One of which, was access to and delivery of online sources. Some concerns, were clearly drawn from these experiences which boils down to budgetary constraints, poor e-infrastructure and ill-prepared/trained information personnel. Stress-related problems in using online sources were emphasized as well during the lock-downs. While some enjoyed using online references, some realised that using a print version has its own advantages, health-wise and the ease of browsing or flipping pages.

As we transition to the "new normal," would library patrons' preference in using information sources change? Pertinently, the study of Chisita⁴, *et al.* revealed that there has been an increase in the use of online platforms for accessing information especially library's webpages, electronic books and journals. The use of library online sources from distance locations also rose following closure of campuses. Library patrons' perceptions towards electronic sources significantly improved as they realised that they were equally useful as the print.

This study is carried out mainly to document students' preferred information sources in their academic writing. Furthermore, this study sought to answer if it would

still be wise to invest on a more e-concentrated library collections in relation to library users' intensity and frequency of usage of library resources based on format.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The rapid development in Information Technology has paved way for information to be packaged and delivered in an unprecedented pace. As it continues to become more sophisticated, are we nearing towards the aged claim for a paperless society? Or, would this just widen the gaps we currently have, more likely the digital gap? Relatively, Aase¹ quoted Bob Sacks, a publishing industry analyst, "*Everybody's talking about the death of print, but that's just not going to happen,*" as he went further, "*There's going to be billions of dollars for the next 20 years in print.*" Possibly contributing to the pace of change, administrators often seem to assume that electronic reading resources are not only cheaper, but they are superior for learning as digital natives continue their inevitable march into post-secondary student bodies⁶. On the contrary, increasing cost of science and engineering books in both print and electronic format continues to challenge academic libraries' ability to support teaching, learning and research¹³. Libraries are under pressure to meet the growing need of electronic resources with a flat or shrinking budget.

While undergraduates typically begin researching assignments and essays using online sources, books and print journals remain crucial components of submitted work because of their completeness, accuracy, permanent accessibility, and in-depth nature. Online sources may be convenient, but they have shortcomings that make print sources necessary for submitting high-quality assignments (Dilevko & Gottlieb, 2002).⁵ Furthermore, Lederer⁸ posts this question referring to *why libraries should retain a core print reference collection*, "*A growing number of materials are available online, but realistically, how much of the really good and reliable online stuff is free?*"

The arrival and proliferation of electronic resources and digital libraries have a number of significant impacts on the use of print resources and traditional libraries. It has also sparked a new wave of literature on the perceptions and preferences of print and electronic resources.⁹ Online library resources can act as trusted source to find various references for conducting research or writing research papers. With the increasing number of published papers, the use of online library resources becomes increasingly important for academics, including for university students.¹¹ As a result, e-resources have become the most sought-after modern library's reserves in satisfying varied needs of students, teachers, and researchers with minimum effort and time.⁷

These assumptions of course go along with the literacy level of students in terms of using e-resources. As Yamson, Appiah & Tsegah¹⁴ further posited, electronic resources offer a wide range of new access opportunities that are absent in the traditional environment, including

remote access, 24/7 access, and multiple users for single sources. "*So, its neglect completely, becomes a limitation to their progression in academia. Whilst saying this, we should also not forget the issue of internet access which seems to be the problem faced by most students. The fieldwork indicated that accessibility, accuracy, and ease of use were the most dominant challenges students faced and therefore should be looked at very carefully. If students are guaranteed access to the internet at a click of the button, the use of e-resources would come easy and more convenient to them.*"

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are to:

- Determine the types and formats of information sources used by students;
- Identify how students access information sources;
- Determine the level and frequency of usage of online sources by students; and
- Determine the extent of agreement on issues and statement surrounding students' preferences in using information sources

4. METHODOLOGY

This survey was conducted to gather data about students' preferred information sources in academic writing. The survey tool was designed with ten (10) items based on the main objective of the study. Spaces were provided in some parts of the tool for the respondents to input any comments, suggestions, justifications, etc. Some parts were based on the study of Dilevko, J. & Gottlieb, L.⁵ Descriptive statistics was used to treat gathered data (mean, percentage and ranking). The tool was pre-tested on twenty students from different colleges. Based on the results, adjustments were made before the tool was administered.

Forty (40) second year students and forty (40) fifth year and above students enrolled for the degree Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM), first semester of School Year 2022-2023 served as respondents. The instrument was administered face-to-face on the respondents with permission from the course lecturer during actual classes by the author with the support of the lecturer. This method allowed the author to respond out rightly to some questions from the respondents for clarifications. Thus, a hundred percent retrieval for the administered survey tool was achieved with a total of eighty (n=80) respondents.

Second year respondents were asked to answer the tool during a class while fifth year and above respondents were randomly chosen within the college. The year levels of respondents were mainly based on the amount of time they have already spent using information sources in varied formats in their academic writing.

The study was conducted when lock-downs were still being carried-out due to COVID-19 and mobility were

restricted. Consequently, this study's results cannot generalise the preference of a larger population of respondents or students.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study aims to determine which information sources are preferred by students in writing their researches or assignments and attempts to elicit why such information sources are preferred. This study is also anchored from a quote from Dilevko & Gottlieb⁵, "*these scenarios were developed to gauge whether students would take the trouble to consult a 'better' print source than a 'more convenient' electronic source.*"

Comments, suggestions, and other *worded* responses elicited from the respondents is incorporated in the discussion of the results of this study.

5.1. Types and Formats of Information Sources

With the advancement of telecommunications, a wide array of ways by which desired information can be accessed proliferate (Cabfilan & Ricardo, 2020)³. As the cost of acquiring books continues to increase, so as the subscription to journals at a much higher rate. The ability therefore of small-medium size libraries to enhance their collections are put at risk. Coupled with these challenges is the level of literacy current library users have. While it is true that sources of information proliferate, the skills of users to discern and source their information needs must also be enhanced. As Scoulas & De Groote¹² puts it, faculty want their students to graduate with information literacy skills that allow them to locate, evaluate, and use information.

Clearly, the result of the data gathered (n=80), seventy-four (92.5 %) of the respondents put books as the preferred type of information source over journals and magazines. The result reflects not only the ability of students to comprehend scientific publications but also the lack of such type of information source, an imbalance in the collections.

Books are easier to acquire than journals and magazines. Most of the serial collections of the library are old subscriptions. Having such condition in collection building is caused by several reasons but primarily due to financial constraints. This however is a common problem being experienced by most libraries. Respondents, in choosing books as their preferred information source also wrote that "*books are more reliable,*" "*easier to understand,*" "[often] *available,*" etc.

While it is expected, especially during the Covid pandemic that online is the preferred format for students' information source, the result yields that more than half of the respondents prefer to use a combination of print and online formats when doing their assignments or research. Relative to the earlier results and discussion, mixing formats of information sources is perhaps a solution to the current imbalance in the library collections in terms of format. Mixing sources of information can also improve

the quality of students' submissions, thereby preventing over-reliance to either print or online sources. As one respondent wrote, "*I prefer mix because not all the time, resources are available online.*" The availability of resources and the capacity of students to access information free of charge is also one factor in mixing their sources of information. Considering that not all students are financially-abled to have their own Internet access at home as well as having personal subscription to e-journals. The financial constraints faced by the library as well in so far as subscription to e-resources and purchase of new books are concerned coupled with the poor Internet infrastructure of the University among others contribute to this.

5.2. Accessing Information Sources

Students access information sources in various ways. While schools are deemed to provide the basic information sources needed by the students, financial limitation is still an issue to be resolved. This often times leaves students to wonder or explore their resourcefulness in securing needed information. For this particular study, four common ways by which students can access information sources were provided. Respondents were provided a space to indicate other means of accessing information just in case it is not covered in the options provided. Majority of the respondents access their information needs via online subscription or their personal Internet connection. Internet connections within universities are plagued with speed issues and ours is definitely not exempted. As the speed of Internet will always be dependent on the type of subscription availed including the telecommunications infrastructure in the university, the amount of allocated budget for such will dictate the quality and speed of access to online information. Being said, students lamented "*library doesn't have Internet,*" "*Internet not strong in the library, signal is weak in the University,*" etc. Having very slow Internet speed is always being equaled to having no Internet access at all. A couple of respondents stated that they access information sources via personal Internet because they do not have time to go to the library.

The library's print collections ranked second in the four options provided where students would access information. Collection development is always based on the curricular offerings of the University. Thus, at the very least, the library's print collections must be able to satisfy the information needs of the students. While the library's collections cannot serve the latest versions or editions at all times or on time due to financial limitations, existing collections are being maintained. Most of the faculty members as observed, use print information sources available in the library and refer these to their students to be used in their classes.

Using their personal print copies as their source of information, whether bought or received from someone they know, ranked third. The availability of print sources

whether it be in a physical store or via e-marketing allows students who have financial capacity to buy their own print references and secure their personal copies. While the library management is aware that such updated references are already available in the market, government procurement procedures would always play part in the delay of acquisition. Other students who have established academic relationship with their seniors may be able to borrow or ask copies of previously owned sources, especially if these sources are not available in the library. Sadly, students accessing information sources online via the University or the Library ranked the least, with only nine (9) students responding. A clear indication of the current status of Internet infrastructure within the University. Furthermore, these nine students may also represent a cluster of students who have no other options but to use the Internet facilities of the University/Library in doing their assignments or researches. These results must urge the administration to invest a portion of the University's fund in enhancing/upgrading its information technology infrastructure.

5.3. Level and Frequency of Usage of Online Sources (by Subjects/Courses and Types and Formats of Information Sources)

Many still believe that with the proliferation of online resources and based from observations, a greater number of students would still prefer to use print information sources. Provided that these print resources containing their information needs are available. For this study, students' subjects were grouped into four: general education, basic sciences, clinical sciences and para-clinical sciences. They

were then asked to rate in percentage (25, 50, 75, 100 %) their level of usage of resources when making their assignments or researches. Under all subjects, majority of the respondents indicated that 75 % of their submitted assignments or researches were based or taken from online sources (Table 1). This outcome further validates earlier results where students opt to combine the use of information sources in terms of format when making their assignments or research instead of solely sourcing these either in print or online format. Given the scenario that classes were held face-to-face when this study was conducted, students came from being heavily dependent on online sources due to the lockdowns. It was also noted that delivery of print library sources during the lockdowns were almost impossible or not practical. As a solution, libraries were forced to harvest online sources and scan print collections to be sent to students online. This mode of information delivery continued until lockdowns were lifted, which students took time to adjust with. When lockdowns were being lifted, students' frustrations in using online information sources surfaced. Frustrations in having limited gadgets to use, strained eyes, difficulty in browsing e-books, slow to having no access to the Internet, among others. While 75 % level in using online sources is way high as against the use of print sources, this reflects that students are regaining their use of print sources. This directly opposes some "thinking" that when everything reverts to the new normal, library users will become heavily dependent in using online sources and that the demise of print publications are near. Moreover, acquisition of print library resources during the pandemic was on halt to give way for sources which can be easily transmitted online.

Table 1. Level of usage (%) of online sources in submitting assignments/researches by subject or course

		1-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-100%
General education	(n=76)	4 (5.26%)	18 (23.68%)	39 (51.32%)	15 (19.74%)
Basic sciences	(n=79)	2 (2.53%)	27 (34.18%)	35 (44.30%)	15 (18.99%)
Clinical sciences	(n=65)	4 (6.15%)	23 (35.38%)	28 (43.08%)	10 (15.38%)
Para-clinical sciences	(n=65)	6 (9.23%)	24 (36.92%)	28 (43.08%)	7 (10.77%)

Table 2. Frequency of use of information sources in submitting assignments/researches based on formats and types of sources

Frequency of use	Second years				Fifth years and above			
	Books		Journals/Magazines		Books		Journals/Magazines	
V=Very Often (3.51-4.00)								
O=Often (2.51-3.50)	Online	Print	Online	Print	Online	Print	Online	Print
S=Seldom (1.51-2.50)	3.76 (V)	3.14 (O)	2.53 (S)	2.17 (S)	3.48 (O)	2.81 (O)	3.50 (O)	2.67 (O)
N=Never (1.00-1.50)								

The following is the results' ranking in the level of usage (%) of online information sources: 50 %, 100 % and 25 % (ranked 2nd, 3rd and 4th respectively). The frequency of usage of information sources in terms of types and formats between second year and fifth year plus students was also determined (Table 2).

The results however were not treated statistically to see if there is a significant difference in the level of usage. With a mean result of 3.76, online books were very often used by second year students as compared to fifth year plus students who often use online books with a computed mean of 3.48. In terms of using print books, both group of respondents use the said information source often. On the other hand, journals and magazines for both formats were seldom used by 2nd year students. This however is expected since second year students are taking foundational courses where corroborations or citations for their course assignments are not yet that needed. Whereas, fifth year plus students are already in their advance courses and research level course assignments are already being required for their course submissions. Being said, they often use journals or magazines for both formats. To validate further, respondents were asked if they supplement their online information sources with print and vice versa. Their response was an overwhelming *Yes* for both questions.

Relatively, the frequency of usage of information sources in terms of types and formats were also sought (Table 3). This time by subject or course. Under the general education courses, respondents often use books in both formats and often use print journals or magazines but seldom use its print version. Online books under the basic sciences were very often used while its print counterpart is used often. Journals and magazines in online format were used often while its print version is seldom used. Only under clinical sciences that online journals or magazines were used very often. This is attributed to the fact that in clinical practice, an updated information or data is needed and most likely be sourced from journals or magazines. All the rest under clinical sciences subject were used often regardless of format. Para-clinical sciences, recorded no variation in the respondents' answers, regardless of type and format of information sources, these were often used. Print journals and magazines in general education and basic sciences courses were the only sources that

recorded seldom usage. This can be ascribed to the limited collections on subscribed print journals and magazines by the library. Also, personally subscribing to journals and magazines entails exorbitant fees plus the uncertainty of delivery even when it is fully paid. Not to mention frequent delays in delivery as well, where subscriptions are mostly delivered way past its issue dates.

5.4. Extent of Agreement on Issues and Statement Surrounding Students' Preferences in Using Information Sources

Using a four-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree=4, Agree=3, Disagree=2, Strongly Disagree=1), respondents were given several topics and issues in a statement form to further validate their responses and elicit their opinions or attitudes towards these statements. In relation to writing assignments and researches, respondents were asked if in the future would they: *1. rely exclusively on print; 2. prefer a print book than its online version; and 3. still prefer a print journal or magazine than its online version.* Statement number 2 ranked first with a computed mean of 3.16 interpreted as *Agree*. Followed by statements number 3 (2.73) and number (2.59) both interpreted as *Agree* as well (Table 4). These results clearly justify that print library resources should continue to progress and improve and not left behind to be replaced completely by its online versions.

Furthermore, statements relating to replacing print sources with online sources were again asked in a different manner. Respondents were asked if they would use a: *1. print journal or magazine rather than its online version; 2. print journal or magazine rather than its related online version; 3. print book rather than its online version; and 4. print book rather than its related online version* (Table 5). Using a print book rather than its online version (2.99) and rather than its related online version (2.96) ranked first and second respectively and were both interpreted as *Agree*. This is again a clear validation that books (regardless of format) have a greater level of usage for the reason that subscriptions (regardless of format) to journals and magazines by the library is minimal or weak. While reasons for lack of subscription abound (some were discussed earlier), this remains a perennial challenge to many academic libraries, especially those in the developing nations. On the other hand, using a

Table 3. Frequency of use of information sources in submitting assignments/researches based on subjects/courses, types and formats of sources

Frequency of use	General education				Basic sciences			
	Books		Journals/Magazines		Books		Journals/Magazines	
V=Very Often (3.51-4.00)	Online	Print	Online	Print	Online	Print	Online	Print
O=Often (2.51-3.50)	3.49 (O)	3.16 (O)	3.05 (O)	2.38 (S)	3.51 (V)	3.27 (O)	3.05 (O)	2.45 (S)
S=Seldom (1.51-2.50)	Clinical Sciences (except 2 nd years)				Para-clinical Sciences			
N=Never (1.00-1.50)	Online	Print	Online	Print	Online	Print	Online	Print
	3.45 (O)	3.32 (O)	3.55 (V)	2.96 (O)	3.33 (O)	3.21 (O)	3.29 (O)	2.79 (O)

Table 4. Extent of agreement on statements concerning reliance to and preference of print information sources. In the future, I would . . .

Extent of agreement	... rely exclusively on print	... prefer a print book than its online version	... still prefer a print Journal/Magazine than its online version
SA=Strongly Agree (3.51-4.00)			
A=Agree (2.51-3.50)	2.59	3.16	2.73
D=Disagree (1.51-2.50)	(Agree)	(Agree)	(Agree)
SD=Strongly Disagree (1.00-1.50)			
Rank	3	1	2

Table 5. Extent of agreement on statements relating to use of print over online information sources. I would use a . . .

Extent of agreement	... print journal/magazine rather than its online version	... print journal/magazine rather than its related online version	... print book rather than its online version	... print book rather than its related online version
SA=Strongly Agree (3.51-4.00)	2.75 (A)	2.77 (A)	2.99 (A)	2.96 (A)
A=Agree (2.51-3.50)				
D=Disagree (1.51-2.50)				
SD=Strongly Disagree (1.00-1.50)				
Rank	4	3	1	2

Table 6

Extent of agreement	Extent of agreement on issues/concerns surrounding the use of online sources	Mean	Rank
SA=Strongly agree (3.51-4.00)	Reading online sources on computer monitors is difficult	2.66 (A)	7
A=Agree (2.51-3.50)	Online sources sometimes have incomplete volumes and missing issues that I need	3.18 (A)	2
D=Disagree (1.51-2.50)	It is difficult to know the proper way to cite online sources	2.53 (A)	8
SD=Strongly disagree (1.00-1.50)	Some information/data in the print sources are not found in the online versions	3.11 (A)	3
	The Internet connectivity is unreliable	2.86 (A)	5
	There is a chance that the online sources I need will not always be there	3.15 (A)	1
	There is a lack of standardized file formats (pdf, JPEG, TIFF, etc.) among the online sources that I use	2.89 (A)	4
	The school/library has limited access to paid/subscribed online sources	2.74 (A)	6

print journal or magazine rather than its related online version (2.77) or rather than its online version (2.75) ranked third and fourth, similarly interpreted as Agree.

As a final question for this study, respondents were presented with eight selected statements pertaining to issues or concerns surrounding the use of Online Sources (Table 6). All eight issues had a computed mean equivalent to or interpreted as Agree. The statement *There is a chance that online sources will not always be there* and *Online sources sometimes have incomplete volumes and missing issues that I need* ranked first and second respectively. Relative to this result, library users must always be

taught that information can be sourced in different types and formats. That in writing a research or assignment all data must be complimented by information coming from different formats and types to make the output more reliable. Online sources indeed might not always be there and that the availability of such is dependent on the type of subscription, access to the Internet, etc. User education, a continuous and progressive one, is very important in research and academic writing. Almost everyone would and could agree that reading online sources on computer monitors is difficult. Having a computed mean interpreted as Agree, this particular issue ranked seventh. While it

ranked almost last, this issue is a lingering one and has been seen to technologically improve over time. Ranked last, the statement It is difficult to know the proper way to cite online sources reflects a waning emphasis on orientation/reorientation or simply the conduct of engaging, sustained, and evolving information literacy programs.

6. CONCLUSION

While students were overwhelmingly exposed and directed to fully utilise available online sources due to the pandemic, the results in this study clearly show that the use of print sources persists over online sources. Nonetheless, it is strongly recommended that library acquisition personnel balance their collections in both types and formats. As this is also reflected in the results that students supplement their print sources with its online versions. Provided of course that the online information sources made available are of current editions or publications to be significant. A clear result from this study reflects the advantage of having a strong “Multimedia” library collection. Oftentimes, multimedia library collection is made synonymous to e/digital sources only, which is completely off-beam. Full reliance to online sources is costly and requires continuous training for staff and a purpose-driven information literacy program. A balanced library collections in both formats and types is therefore recommended for academic libraries especially those with shrinking budget or limited financial capacity.

The study is recommended to be conducted in a more extensive and diverse population to be able to provide a more comprehensive understanding of students’ information source preferences.

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