

## Information Seeking Behaviour of Law Students in the Changing Digital Environment

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### ABSTRACT

The information environment has greatly impacted on teaching, learning and research methods of higher education worldwide and India is no exception. The new technologies have facilitated smooth and systematic transformation of data into digital format. This has changed the process of access, retrieve and use of information by students and researchers. The purpose of this study is to examine the information seeking behaviour of students of two law colleges of Mumbai. To understand the information seeking behaviour of law students the concerned literature has been reviewed and questionnaire was randomly distributed to get the responses. The study mainly concentrates on frequency of visit to the library, purpose of information seeking, computer acquaintance, amount of time spent on information gathering activities, problem faced in information seeking, etc. The results of the study reveal that books are still most heavily used resources by the students. Majority of the students are familiar with using offline and online legal databases. However, the students of both the colleges face the problem of information overload on internet and lack of skills to search information. Hence, the study recommends that formal users training programme shall be conducted to optimise the use of information sources and services.

**Keywords:** Law students, law library, digital library, information seeking behaviour

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Traditional library resources and search tools have been adequately supplemented by the electronic information resources particularly the internet resource. Information and communication technology (ICT) has brought gigantic changes in the representation of information from analog to digital, this shift has led to new information formats, new ways of distributing and accessing information, new information services. Multimedia information can be created, stored, and distributed in digital format as CD-ROM or on hard disks, removable hard disks (external hard disk, pen drives), flash cards and other digital storage media. As a result, the large numbers of publishers have shifted their focus from print to electronic publishing, thereby, enabling libraries to acquire a large number of texts in e-form. This has led to rise in the demands of users particularly academic and research institutes users who are tech savvy and want information instantly. At the educational levels from elementary schools to universities, the students and teachers are accessing information for their teaching and learning process<sup>1</sup>. Now with

new tools, one can access information in full-text and multimedia from remote sites via LANs and WANs, etc.<sup>2</sup>

The new gadgets like the kindle, smart phones have become more popular for reading e-books. This has encouraged the availability of information in digital format in large scale<sup>3</sup>. The growing importance of ICT's, the internet, and the web has given a new dimension to the library and information centers<sup>4</sup>. The convenience of accessing remote information through www has resulted in tremendous popularity for web<sup>5</sup>. At the same time it has thrown many challenges to the users as well as libraries. The higher education system is vastly impacted by the Internet as it provides sea of information. This has led to formation of consortium of institutes with similar interest.

The increased volume of information on the Web has affected user's information-seeking behaviour remarkably<sup>6</sup>. Information-seeking behaviour involves personal reasons for seeking information, the kinds of information which are being sought, and the ways and sources with which needed information is being

sought<sup>7</sup>. The kind of information required by the user, methods adopted in searching information, environment affected, time spent, problems faced and solutions made, the satisfaction/dissatisfaction arising from the information gathered and the relationship of the user with the system—all come under the purview of a user study.

A user study is the means for a systematic examination of the characteristics of information behaviour of the users. The rapid developments in IT have offered different opportunities to today's information seekers to access the information resources in a variety of forms and formats, including commonly-available electronic information resources such as CD-ROM databases, Web-OPACs, and the internet. To some extent these have replaced print-based information sources as the primary media for storage and communication of recorded information.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

The main goals of the study are to:

- (a) Identify the frequency & purpose of visit to the library
- (b) Understand the law students' acquaintance with computer, internet and their usage
- (c) Know the students' knowledge about electronic legal information resources
- (d) Know the purpose of information-seeking
- (e) Verify and know the amount of time spend on information-seeking
- (f) Identify the problems faced by law students in information-seeking
- (g) Understand the need for information literacy
- (h) Suggest suitable ways and means to improve the library resources and services.

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Electronic networks and different information formats are changing information access operations worldwide. Morrison & Stein<sup>3</sup> discussed the role of the universities and colleges in preparing students to handle the rapidly expanding range of information formats. Information and knowledge are the high-value tools of the present age. The rise of the internet has led to 'free information services'. Lennon<sup>4</sup> looks at how 'free' information really is and whether we can continue to expect high-quality information to be available without cost using the internet.

Garrod<sup>5</sup> explains and describes that the academic libraries and library staff need to adapt swiftly to the new learning environment. The changing format of resources is the challenge for the library in preserving and managing, Pandey<sup>6</sup> throws light on the digital library and traditional library resources and Management and Preservation of these resources. Asproth's<sup>7</sup> study also falls in the same line such as some problem domains of long-term preservation.

In his study Corbin<sup>8</sup> defined competencies required for providing Electronic information services. He further described personal, basic, general, and special competencies. In the same way, Gakibayo, Ikoja-Odongo, and Okello-Obura<sup>9</sup> in their study assessed the utilization of electronic information resources in Mbarara University Library by students.

### 3.2 Information Seeking Behaviour

Undoubtedly, the accessibility of electronic information has steadily brought major changes to human information behaviour in all walks of life. Marchionini<sup>10</sup> in his book explains the information seeking behaviour and changing environment. Bates<sup>11</sup> made a survey on decades of research on information needs and information-seeking behaviour. The internet is considered as a potentially excellent tool for teaching and learning. The World Wide Web is a tool for partial information gathering and learning for students. Fidel et al.<sup>12</sup> analyse web searching behaviour of students. Nicholas et al.<sup>13</sup> studied on the impact of the Internet on information seeking in the British Media and the focus was largely on the newspapers. Joinson and Banyard<sup>14</sup> made two studies on information seeking behaviour on the Internet. Both investigated information seeking on the World Wide Web. It is tentatively argued that there is a tendency for people to access information on internet.

Today's knowledge workers rely increasingly on information to get their job done, and the availability of search engines to locate relevant information is thus felt more essential now than ever. Stenmark and Jadaan<sup>15</sup> discuss their study on intranet users' information seeking behaviour by analyzing search log files. Their study found that the shifting trends in the Intranet search behaviour. Thompson<sup>16</sup> has made a study on the information seeking behaviour of distance education students. The author inferred in his article that the distinction in information needs and use by the students over the years is not due to a generation divide, as previously reported in the studies, but it is due to technological immersion.

The online tools and websites are the prominent library services today. Nicol and O'English<sup>17</sup> focused on Information seeking and satisfaction with the library services, the study found that the students and faculty are satisfied with library services and information made available to them by the library staff. A similar study carried by Natarajan<sup>18</sup> describes different types electronic resources. The study further discusses information seeking behavior of students, researchers and faculty in the E-environment.

In a survey conducted by Chidinma<sup>19</sup> on information seeking behaviour of final year law students in Nigeria found that the respondents use print textbooks and Google as major research resources, Academic Law

Libraries and search engines as major research locations. Whereas, OGBA's<sup>20</sup> research findings show that the respondents use the library for print materials and conducts research on Google despite numerous difficulties that they face in Google. He also discusses the barriers viz, inadequate resources from the Internet search, inability to select the right resources needed for research, lack of knowledge on sites navigation and lack of Nigerian online resources.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

The questionnaire is adopted to collect the data which covers qualitative and quantitative in nature. The quantitative method respond to the questions 'what, when, how many', the qualitative methods respond to the questions 'how' and 'why'. Questionnaires were distributed among the students of two law colleges in Mumbai city. A total of 250 questionnaires were distributed randomly in both colleges, 194 completed questionnaires were received and the response rate was 77.6 %. While distributing questionnaires, care was taken that users of different gender were represented adequately in the population. Filled in questionnaires are gathered and numbered in order of arrival. Wherever possible 'closed questions' have been codified and codes turned into data. All collected data have been transferred on to MS-Excel for data tabulation and for drawing charts, figures, etc.

#### 5. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

From the data it is observed that, out of the total 194 respondents, 92 (47.42 %) are male and 102 (52.58 %) are female. It shows that the responses received from both male and female are nearly equal in numbers.

##### 5.1 Frequency of Visit to Library

Table 1 indicates that 60 (47.62 %) students from the Gopaldas Jhamatmal Advani Law College (GJALC) visit library 'everyday' whereas a few number, i.e., 8 (11.76 %) Lala Lajpat Rai College of Law (LLRCL) students visit the library everyday. Nearly, a similar percentage of students visit the GJALC and LLRCL

Table 1. Frequency of visit to library

Frequency	GJALC (n=126)	LLRCL (n=68)	Total (n=194)
Everyday	60 (47.62 %)	8 (11.76 %)	68 (35.05 %)
Once in Two days	35 (27.78 %)	20 (29.41 %)	55 (28.35 %)
Once in a Week	20 (15.87 %)	30 (44.12 %)	50 (25.77 %)
Once in Fortnight	11 (8.73 %)	10 (14.71 %)	21 (10.83 %)
Total	126 (100 %)	68 (100 %)	194 (100 %)

library 'once in two days' from both the colleges i.e. 27.78 % and 29.41 % respectively. The majority (44.12 %) of LLRCL students visit library 'once in a week' as compared to a few (15.87 %) of GJALC students. However, there is not much difference between the two colleges in the case of students visit to library 'once in a fortnight' category.

Table 1 reveals that, there is a difference in frequency of visit to libraries from both the college students except once in two days, where it is almost similar in both colleges.

##### 5.2 Purpose of Visit to Library

Table 2 describes different purposes of students' visit to library. Out of 126 respondents from GJALC, 126 students visit the library 'to issue/ refer books', 74 students visit the library 'to read periodicals' and followed by 65 students visit 'to search online databases'. Nearly equal number of (i.e. 25 and 26) students visit the library 'to use computers' and 'internet respectively'. Similarly, out of 68 respondents from LLRCL, all the students (i.e., 68) visit library 'to issue / refer books'. Then followed by 50 students who visit 'to use internet', 45 students visit 'to use computers', and 35 visits 'to read periodicals'. Whereas, equal number of students visit the library 'to browse CD-ROM databases' and 'online databases' (i.e., 5 each).

The results of the survey consequently disclose that, all the students from both the college visit library for issue/refer books thereby indicates that still students have depended on print resources. It is also observed that, more number of GJALC students visit the library to use CD-ROM databases and online databases than the LLRCL students. It is also observed that, most of the students from the LLRCL visit library to use computers and to use Internet than the students of GJALC.

##### 5.3 Purpose of Information Seeking (Using Sources)

Table 3 shows that an equal number of responses (i.e. 126) by the students of GJALC are received

Table 2. Purpose of visit to library

Purpose of library visit	GJALC (n=126)	LLRCL (n=68)
Issue/refer books	126 (100 %)	68 (100 %)
Use computers	25 (19.84 %)	45 (66.17 %)
Browse CD-ROM databases	30 (23.81 %)	5 (7.35 %)
Search online databases	65 (51.59 %)	5 (7.35 %)
Use internet	26 (20.63 %)	50 (73.53 %)
Read periodicals	74 (58.73 %)	35 (51.47 %)

**Table 3. Purpose of seeking information**

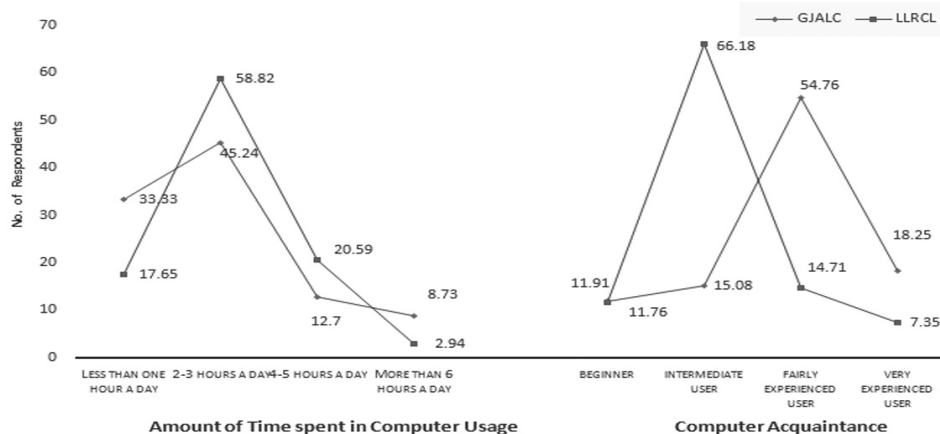
Purpose of using sources	GJALC (n=126)	LLRCL (n=68)
To keep oneself up-to-date	126 (100 %)	68 (100 %)
To prepare for examination	126 (100 %)	45 (66.18 %)
To prepare for Elocution, Debate, Essay competitions etc.	48 (38.10 %)	10 (14.70 %)
To Prepare for Moot Court competitions	126 (100 %)	68 (100 %)

in the category 'to keep myself up-to-date, 'to prepare for exams' and 'to prepare for moot court competitions' followed by 48 (38.10 %) students who use information sources 'to prepare elocution, debate, essay completion etc.' Similarly, in LLRCL equal percentage of students (i.e., 100 %) use information sources 'to keep their knowledge up-to-date' and 'to prepare for moot court completions' and followed by, 45 (66.18 %) students use sources 'to prepare for exams' and 10 (14.70 %) students use 'to prepare for elocution, debate, essay completion etc.'

Table 3 discloses very significant data that all students (100 %) from both the colleges use information sources to keep themselves up-to-date and to prepare for moot court completions.

**5.4 Computer Acquaintance and Amount of Time Spent in Computer Usage**

Figure 1 shows the usage of computer and the acquaintance with computers by the students. Among the students of GJALC out of 126 (100 %) students, highest 45.24 % of students use computers for '2-3 hours in a day', followed by 33.33 % of students who use computers 'less than one hour', 12.7 % of students use '4-5 hours' and 8.73 % of students use 'more than 6 hours in a day'. Similarly, out of 68 (100 %) LLRCL students, highest 58.82 % of students use computer '2-3 hours in a day', followed by 20.59 % of students who use computer '4-5 hours in a day' and 17.65 students use 'less than one hour'.



**Figure 1. Amount of time spent in computer usage & computer acquaintance.**

Whereas, with regard to acquaintance with computers among GJALC students, more number of students 69 (54.76 %) have said that they are 'fairly experienced user' followed by 23 (18.25 %) students 'more experienced users', 19 (15.08 %) students 'intermediate users' and a very negligible number 15 (11.91 %) of students are 'beginners'. In case of LLRCL, a majority of students 45 (66.18 %) are 'intermediate', 10 (14.71 %) students claim they are 'fairly experienced user', 8 (11.76 %) students are 'beginners', and a very negligible number of 5 (7.35 %) students 'very experienced users' of computers.

It is observed that, highest number of the students from each college spends 2-3 hours in a day on the computer, in that again the rate of response from LLRCL is higher as compared to GJALC.

Figure 1 also revealed that nearly equal number of students from both colleges is beginners in the use of computers. The response rate for the category 'intermediate and fairly experienced user' is scattered and unequal among both the colleges. Very less student population is using computers for 'more than 6 hours a day', however, the response rate is slightly higher in case of GJALC than LLRCL.

**5.5 Access to Paid and Free Online Legal Databases**

Figure 2 presents the responses received from the students of both GJALC & LLRCL. All students 126 (100 %) of GJALC said that they access 'Legalpundits database' and 90 (71.43 %) students said they access 'Manupatra database', more or less equal number of students said they access 'West Law India', 'West Law International databases', 'LexisNexis India' and 'LexisNexis Academic Universe'. Whereas, in case of LLRCL majority of students i.e., 45 (66.18 %) said that they access 'Manupatra', which is followed by 'legal pundit' with 30 (44.12 %) students. Then followed by 'LexisNexis India', 'West Law India', 'West Law International' and 'LexisNexis Academic Universe'.

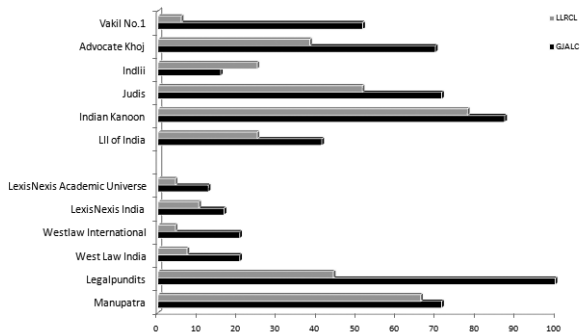


Figure 2. Access to paid and free online legal databases.

It is observed from the results of the survey that the students of both the colleges are accessing the paid legal databases, whether it could be at home or at the office or at the library. The rate of access to Legalpundit and Manupatra databases is higher among the students of both the colleges and it is significant note that the rate of access by GJALC students is higher than LLRCL. However, it is pertinent to note that the equal percentage of GJALC students (i.e., 20.63 %) access both 'West Law India' and 'West Law International'. Similarly, equal percentage of LLRCL students (i.e., 4.41 %) access 'West Law International' and 'LexisNexis Academic Universe'.

To ascertain the knowledge of the students about free law resources, students were asked a question about the use of free legal databases. There are many students who know free online legal databases. Both the college students rated high for *IndianKanoon* online database (Fig. 2) and followed by *Judis*, *Advocate Khoj* and *LII of India*. It is observed from the results of the survey that the number of students accessing the free online resources is increased and students are not only aware about these sources but are also using them.

**5.6 Mode of Awareness of Free Online Databases**

Figure 3 reveals that the students get awareness about free online databases through friends, teachers,

library staff, library website, library blog, library brochure. The students from both colleges have given the highest rating for library blog, website and brochures in spreading the awareness about free online legal resources.

The responses of the students of both colleges are nearly equal in all modes of awareness except library staff where it is 44.44 % and 22.05 % from GJALC & LLRCL, respectively.

**5.7 Opinion on Digital Resources**

Figure 4 shows that most of the students appreciated the digital resources w.r.t. search facilities, time saving, and links to the other sources. The figure unravels the students' positive attitude in embracing the technology in helping them to conduct quick and accurate legal research with many search facilities and further links to similar subject matter, particularly in case of searching case laws.

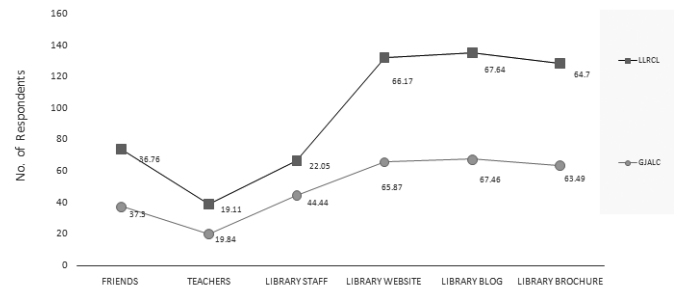


Figure 3. Students' mode of awareness.

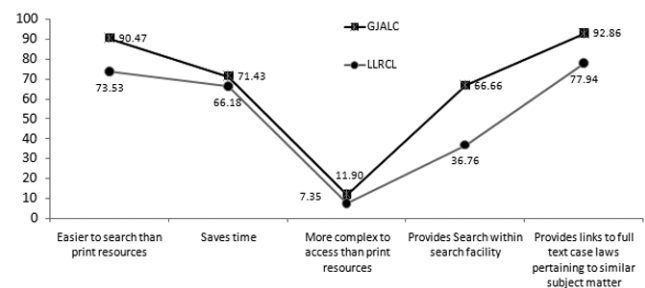


Figure 4. Users opinion on digital resources.

Table 5. Amount of time spent while gathering information

Information gathering activity	Up to 2 hrs		3-4 hrs		5-6 hrs		More than 7 hrs	
	GJALC n=126 (%)	LLRCL n=68 (%)	GJALC n=126 (%)	LLRCL n=68 (%)	GJALC n=126 (%)	LLRCL n=68 (%)	GJALC n=126 (%)	LLRCL n=68 (%)
Browsing e-journals on internet	6 (4.76)	25 (36.76)	5 (3.96)	5 (7.35)	3 (2.38)	25 (36.76)	0	0
Searching online databases	10 (7.93)	15 (22.05)	32 (25.39)	28 (41.18)	49 (38.89)	15 (22.05)	35 (27.78)	10 (14.7)
Using Social Network Sites	32 (25.39)	28 (41.18)	24 (19.04)	23 (33.82)	0	7 (10.29)	0	0
E-mail alerts, correspondence	92 (73.01)	2 (2.94)	34 (26.98)	12 (17.65)	0	54 (79.41)	0	0
Accessing e-books	26 (20.63)	12 (17.65)	38 (30.16)	29 (42.65)	21 (16.67)	0	27 (21.43)	0

**5.8 Amount of Time Spent on Information Gathering Activity**

Table 5 provides an overall picture about the time spent by the student's in gathering information. The students said that they spend 'Up to 2 hours' and '5-6 hour' in a week in gathering information, majority of the respondents i.e., 73.01 % from GJALC and 79.41 % from LLRCL spend their time on 'e-mail alerts and correspondence' respectively. The response rate for these categories from both colleges is very high compare to other mode of activities as less than 50 % responses are received for other activities.

**5.9 Problem Faced while Seeking Information**

Table 6 provides the responses received from the students of both colleges with regard to the probable problems. The students of the both colleges 'Often' face the problem of the 'information overload on

**Table 6. Problem faced while seeking information**

Problems faced while seeking information	GJALC	LLRCL
Incomplete information in sources	4	4
Information scattered in too many sources	3	2
Do not know how to use electronic resources	4	4
Information overload on internet	2	2
Lack of information skills to search	2	2
Low internet speed	3	4

internet' and 'lack of information skills to search'. Both the college students 'Rarely' believe that, there is 'incomplete information in sources' they consult. It is also observed from the results of the study that the majority of them know how to use electronic resources. However, the response of the students of both the colleges is varied for 'information scattered in too many sources' and 'low internet speed'.

**6. FINDINGS**

- (a) All the students from both the college visit library for issue/refer books thereby it indicates that, still students depend on print resources. It is also observed that, more number of GJALC students visit the library to use CD-ROM databases and online databases than the LLRCL students. More significant to note that most of the students from the LLRCL visit library to use computers and to use the Internet than the students of GJALC.
- (b) All students (100 %) from both the colleges use information sources to keep themselves

up-to-date and to prepare for competitions, viz., Moot court, etc.

- (c) It is observed that, highest number of students from each college spends 2-3 hours in a day on the computer. But, very less number of students uses computers for 'more than 6 hours a day'.
- (d) The response rate for the category 'intermediate user' and 'fairly experienced user' is scattered and unequal among both the colleges. A nearly equal number of students from both the colleges are beginners.
- (e) The students of both the colleges are accessing paid legal databases, whether it could be at home or at the office or at the library. The rate of access to Legalpundit and Manupatra databases is higher among the students of both the colleges. We may attribute this mainly because of subscription to these databases by both the colleges.
- (f) It is significant to note that the equal number of GJALC students access both 'West Law India' and 'West Law International'. Similarly, equal number of students from LLRCL access 'West Law International' and 'LexisNexis Academic Universe'.
- (g) There are many students who know free online legal databases. Both the college students rated high for IndianKanoon online database and followed by Judis, Advocate Khoj and LII of India. It is observed from the results of the survey that the increasing number of students is accessing free online resources, they are not only aware of these sources but also using them.
- (h) The students get awareness about free online databases through friends, teachers, library staff, library website, library blog, library brochure. The students from both colleges have given the highest rating for library blog, website and brochures in spreading the awareness about free online legal resources.
- (i) Most of the students appreciated the digital resources with respect to search facilities, time saving, and links to the other sources. This shows that, the students' positive attitude in embracing the technology. Further, the majority of students from both colleges spend time in information gathering on 'e-mail alerts and e-mail correspondence', browsing e-journals on the internet, using social network sites, accessing e-books, etc.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study revealed that the law students use IT-based library sources and facilities more frequently along with printed sources. Similarly, it is also noted that e-mail is the most popular internet application used by the students, whereas other Internet-based services and applications are used moderately. This is a matter of concern, as presently, electronic information sources and the Internet are considered extremely important tools for effective teaching, learning and research. Therefore, both the college libraries need to review its policy on electronic information resources. Generally, students depend upon a variety of information sources to complete assignments, project work, journal writing and for the exams. The students of both the colleges 'often' face the problem of the 'information overload on internet' and 'Lack of information skills to search'. Therefore, library staff should be trained to render quality services and train users to find the needed information on their own.

To improve the services and facilities of the library it is recommended that the libraries shall adopt the practice of taking feedback from the users by circulating an online questionnaire which will certainly help strengthen the library resources and services. Finally, it is suggested that the law librarians need to work in collaboration with the teaching faculty to influence students' information seeking behaviour by re-evaluating the collection development policy, instructional programmes, services and facilities based on the needs of the current users.

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