
**A Study of Information Needs and Seeking
Behaviour of Residential Students of the
University of Madras, Chennai**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to prospect the information-seeking behaviour of residential students at the University of Madras. A questionnaire survey was conducted with a sample of 52 residential students from various disciplines across the University of Madras's four teaching campuses who are staying in university hostels. The study aimed to explore the information sources and services students use, regardless of form or format; the frequency of information seeking; the barriers they have encountered; and the factors that influence their information-seeking behaviour. The survey also examined students' perceptions of the University's information resources and their level of satisfaction with the resources currently available. The study found that the most commonly used information sources were the internet, books, reference sources, and databases. The study provides insights into the information needs, strengths, and subsystems of the internal library system at various levels, as well as its relative invisibility to residential students at the University of Madras.

Keywords

Information needs; Information Seeking Behaviour (ISB); Usage Patterns; University of Madras.

Electronic access

The journal is available at www.jalis.in
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.20699696



Journal of Advances in Library and Information Science
ISSN: 2277-2219 Vol. 15. No.3. 2026. pp.284-292

INTRODUCTION

User studies are traditional practices and research methods in the library and information science field over the years, which aim to bridge the gap between the knowledge eco-systems' facilities and users' information needs so as to ensure the satisfaction of both in the evolving information dissemination context of libraries and information centres. Academic libraries are not simply storehouses of information or collections of books (Bibliotheca), but dynamic knowledge hubs for community engagement and innovation through information interpretation and exchange. The term 'user' in the context of the information chain may be at the end; the generation of information occurs at the beginning (Kumar, 2012). So, the generators of information stand first, and aggregators, organizers, archivists (conservators), disseminators, and users follow the links of the information chain. In the digital age, information-seeking behaviour has become a critical skill for individuals to navigate the vast amounts of information available to them. University students are no exception, as they require access to relevant and up-to-date information to excel in their studies and research. Residential students at universities have distinct information needs and face unique challenges accessing information due to their on-campus living arrangements. Therefore, it is important to understand residential students' information-seeking behaviour to improve the quality of the information resources and services provided to them.

The University of Madras is a renowned institution of higher education in India, offering a diverse range of academic programs to students from across the country and the world. The University offers a variety of information resources and services, including books, journals, databases, and online resources, to support its students' information needs. However, it is essential to systematically evaluate the effectiveness of these resources and services in meeting the information needs and satisfaction levels of the system's residential students. To achieve the said objective, this research has been carried out by the same people from the same knowledge domain, using the traditional research tools and techniques. The study will also examine students' perceptions of the University's information resources and their level of satisfaction with these resources. The findings of this study will provide valuable insights into the information needs of residential students at the University of Madras.

RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW

Information-seeking behaviour has been the subject of many studies in information science, particularly in higher education. Several studies have examined university students' information-seeking behaviour and the factors that influence it. In the context of residential students, a few studies have also explored the unique challenges that they face in accessing information and these are listed as:

“At the root of the problem of information-seeking behaviour is the concept of information need” (Wilson, 1997) and the relations analyses on literature of information Behaviour and Information Seeking models (Wilson, 1999) are classical studies on this field, which are cited in many succeeding information-seeking behaviour studies across the world. Julien and Barker (2009) depicted “In an *information* society, where access to information and critical evaluation of that information is central to economic and personal well-being, information literacy skills are as essential as basic reading and writing” and they investigated the information literacy skills among the school students with research questions stipulated accordingly. Nazim (2008) investigated the information-seeking behaviour on the Internet among postgraduate students of Aligarh Muslim University using questionnaire and interview methods of data collection. Out of 405 valid responses, the analyses revealed that the most preferred search tool was internet search engines to explore the web information, and Academic Staff spent more time than students in Internet etc. Bates (1996) conducted fundamental research on the information needs and seeking behaviour of scholars and students in interdisciplinary fields and suggested that certain types of resources and services are useful to interdisciplinary scholars, including: one-stop searching, Citation Indexes, selective dissemination of Information, etc. Naveed et al. (2021) explored the everyday-life information-seeking behaviour of postgraduate students at the University of Punjab, Lahore, using the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) and qualitative research methods. Some of the major findings revealed that the internet is one of the major sources of information, mainly social media on the internet, are satisfying the daily current information needs of the resident users of the university. Ikoja-Odongo and Mostert (2006) have conducted an extensive review of major studies on information need and seeking behaviour, drawing on the classical

studies by Wilson (1981, 1996). Further, this conceptual framework provides a definition and analysis of basic concepts such as information, need, seeking, etc. Tachie-Donkor and Ezema (2023) observed the influence of Information Literacy (IL) on Information Seeking Behaviour and Lifelong Learning skills in Higher Education Learning Institutions in Ghana. The ACRL Model was used for theoretical framework for this study, and a mixed-methods research design was adopted. Furthermore, respondents reported the most preferred sources of information as the Internet first (78%; 217), followed by library resources (15.7%; 44), with just 2.9% (8) preferring information from their lecturers. Che Ahmat and Wan Kamarudin (2014) studied the Information Seeking Behaviour (ISB) among the postgraduate students in the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, UiTM, Shah Alam, Malaysia. 303 full-time master's and PhD students were taken for the study to identify the relationships on Information Seeking Behaviour of the students, and the results were as follows: 1. Books are the most preferred source of information, with a mean score of 3.3, and Abstracts and Indexes in print form occupy 2.85 mean score. 2. Under the informal category of sources, conversation with friends/colleagues obtains a 4.42 mean score, followed by Consultation with experts in the field, which stands with a 3.93 mean score.

METHODOLOGY

To obtain the necessary data for the study, a questionnaire was used as the data collection tool. The questionnaire was assessed to ensure that it met each of the study's goals. The questionnaire collected data at two levels: demographics and the study's subject, including questions about users' information requirements and the services they received, as well as a liker-type scale to gauge their happiness. 70 questionnaires were distributed to users, of which 52 were completed. The obtained data were quantitatively analysed using a descriptive statistical approach, and to provide a clear explanation of the data, frequencies and Percentages were generated and displayed in tables.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

To collect and analyze the information to increase our understanding of the usage of the library. People need information for decision-making. The field of information seeking behaviour concerns the determination of residential students' information

needs, their search behaviour, and their subsequent use of information. To know and understand how people seek and make use of information, the channels they use to get information, and the factors that inhibit or encourage information usage in the library. Libraries are the places where information is acquired, processed, stored, and kept for use and reuse. To meet users' information needs, libraries are working hard to improve by acquiring the necessary methods and methodologies over time. Studies on the information-seeking behaviour of their users will help them formulate policies for acquiring information sources, improving the services rendered, and adopting required technologies.

OBJECTIVES

- To identify the awareness and utilization of the information sources and services by the residential students for their academic and personal information needs.
- To determine the frequency and patterns of information seeking among residential students.
- To assess the perception of residential students regarding the quality and usefulness of the university's information system
- To investigate the level of satisfaction among residential students with the available information resources and services.
- To provide insights into the unique information needs and challenges faced by residential students in accessing information, particularly in the context of the University of Madras.
- To inform the development of policies and strategies to enhance the quality and effectiveness of information systems at the University of Madras.

SCOPE AND PURPOSE

The scope of this study on the information-seeking behavior of residential students at the University of Madras library is limited to the following:

- The study will focus only on residential students of the University of Madras.
- The study will investigate the information-seeking behaviour of residential students in the context of the University of Madras library and information resources and services provided by the University.
- The study will use a questionnaire survey as the primary method of data collection.

- The study will analyse the data using descriptive and inferential statistics methods to identify the types, forms, and patterns of information sources used by residential students, factors that influence their information-seeking behaviour, and their perception of the University's information resources and services.
- The study will provide recommendations for improving the quality and effectiveness of information resources and services provided to residential students at the University of Madras library.

However, there are some limitations to the study that need to be considered, such as:

- The study will rely on self-reported data collected through the questionnaire survey, which may be subject to response bias.
- The study will not explore the information-seeking behavior of non-resident students at the University of Madras.
- The study will not investigate the information-seeking behaviour of students in disciplines that require specialised information resources and services.
- The study will not examine the impact of cultural and linguistic differences on information-seeking behavior among residential students.

ANALYSES AND INTERPRETATIONS

1. Gender- wise Distribution

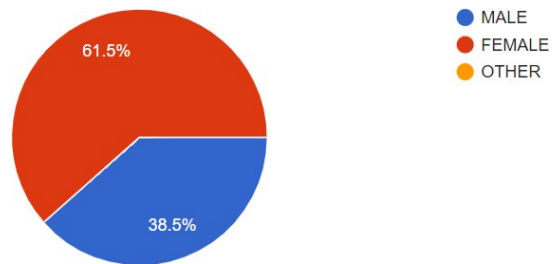


Fig.1: Determination of respondents based on gender

To commence the analysis section of the investigation of this study, this gender-wise categorization of the total samples plays a vital role in portraying the percentage of the respondents in terms of male and female; and the results show (Figure 1) that there are 32 (61.5%) female and 20 (38.5%) male respondents participating in this study.

2. Age-wise grouping of the respondents

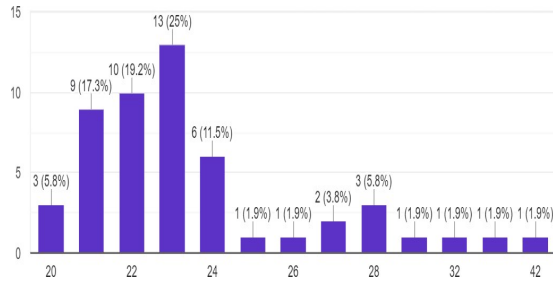


Figure 2: Age groups of respondents

Figure three shows that most respondents (73.3%, n=38) are in the 21-24 age group, followed by 25-28 years (13.4%, n=7), 29-42 years (7.6%, n=4), and 20 years (5.8%, n=3). This distribution indicates that the predominantly postgraduate residential student population belongs to the 21 to 24 age group, and the remaining proportions are accordingly of least concern.

3. Education background analysis

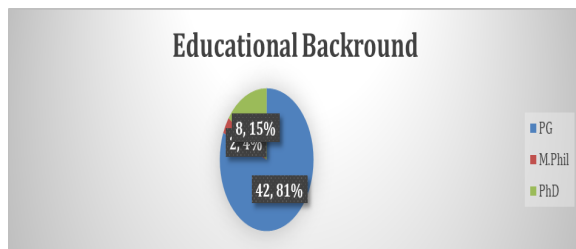


Figure 3: Education status distribution

Figure 3 presents the educational background of the respondents as of the study date, including 84.3% (n=42) pursuing Master's degrees, 15.7% (n=8) enrolled in PhD programs, and 2 enrolled in Master of Philosophy courses.

4. Geographic and Linguistic Diversity

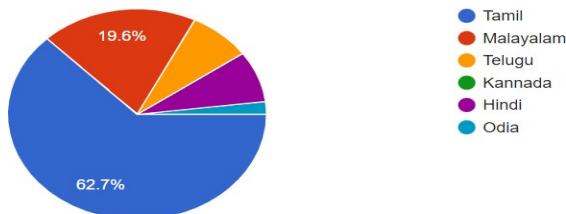


Figure 4: Geographic and linguistic diversity status

Figure 4 is the specimen to distinguish the samples according to their linguistic diversity because the nature of the University of Madras is widely known as "Mother of South Indian Universities," in India to justify this classification as a substance. Out of the whole, Tamil Nadu accounts for the highest

proportion of residential students (62.7%, n=32), followed by Kerala (19.6%, n=10), Andhra Pradesh (7.8%, n=4), and other states including Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Uttar Pradesh shares (9.8%, n=4), and one respondent represented the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (1.9%, n=1).

5. Preferred Library for seeking information

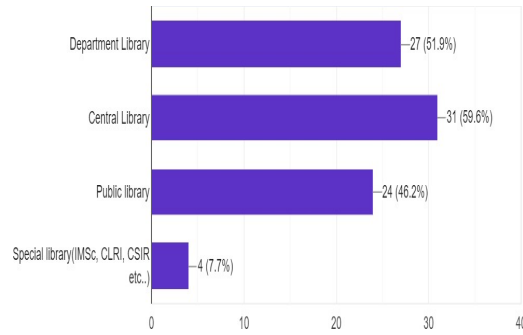


Figure 5: Preferred library for seeking information

Figure 5 shows that the most preferred library is the one used by residential students of the University of Madras for their day-to-day information needs. Out of 52 respondents, the first preferred Library and Information Center is Central Library (31 students and n=52), the second preferred library is their respective department libraries (27 respondents), and the third most preferred library they used to visit is public libraries around Chennai, because Chennai is occupied with world-class public libraries including Anna Centenary Library, Connemara Library, Madras Literary Society (MLS) and The Adyar Library & Research Center. Interestingly, very few (4 respondents) expressed their visits to some popular subject-specific special libraries like IMSc library, CLRI Library, and CSIR libraries for their thirst for information and satisfaction.

6. Information-Seeking Media

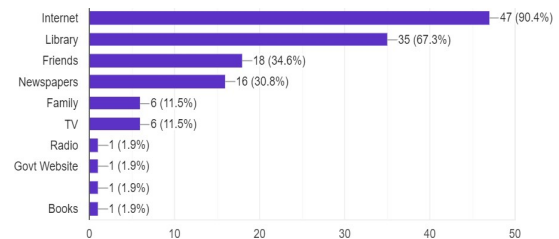


Figure 6: Preferred Media for information

Figure 6 portrays the statistics of the most preferred media and their order by the test respondents during the study period. It is quite natural to learn that most of the students select the internet by their handheld electronic devices (laptop, mobile, tablet, etc.) By 47 respondents, followed by libraries play a major role (35 students), and the third place is occupied by friends and subject experts (18 people). Further, the mass media, government websites, and their own books also share a small portion.

7. Form-wise distribution of information

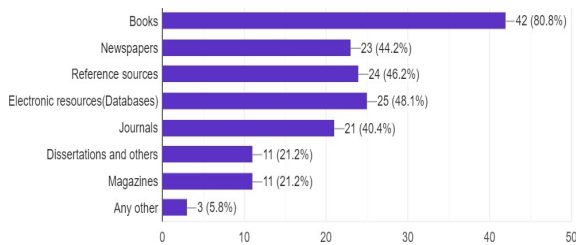


Figure 7: Preferred reading materials

Figure 7 shows that the books are the most preferred source of information by the respondents (n=42), followed by newspapers (23 students) and reference sources (mainly instructional), and so on.

8. Purpose of Information Seeking

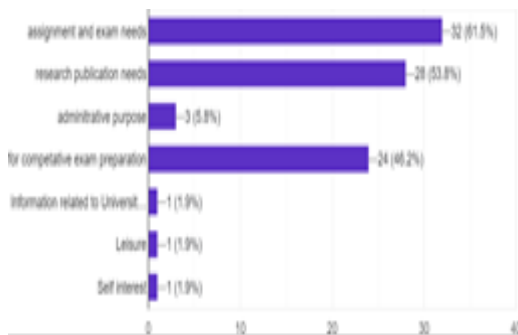


Figure 8: Purpose of information seeking and retrieval

Primary purposes for information seeking include: assignments and exam needs (32), research publication needs (28), competitive exam purposes (24), and others (6). This particular analysis predicts the primary need for information to the students, and the secondary and tertiary needs are put forth.

9. Frequency analysis

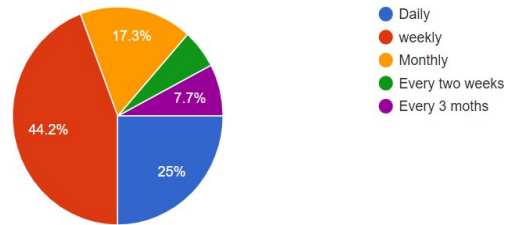


Figure 9: Number of visits made by students' analysis

The resident students of the University of Madras visit the library frequently; one question was asked to mention the frequency of library visits. In this question, the residential students can select more than one option provided. According to the results, the most frequent visits were weekly (44.2%), daily (25%), monthly (17.3%), and every 3 months (7.7%).

10. Preferred form and its distribution

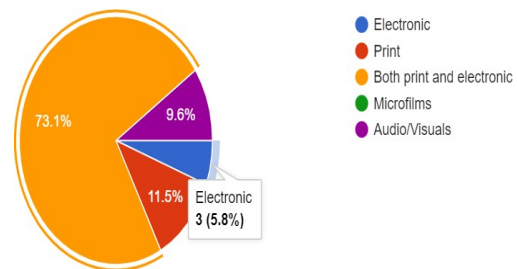


Figure 10: Preferred forms for information seeking

INFERENCE: The chart enunciates the preferred form for information seeking by the residential students according to the acquired results. Most of the residents from the University of Madras prefer to use both print and electronic forms for information seeking, with a greater percentage of 73.1% (38), print form with 11.5% (6), audio/visuals with 9.6% (5), and electronic sources with 5.8% (3).

11. Remote Access Facility

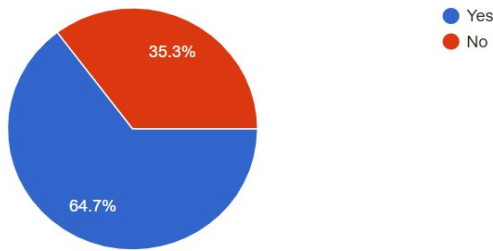


Figure 11: Awareness of remote access analysis

A question has been asked of the residential students about awareness and usage of remote access facilities provided by the library of the University of Madras. The results show that, out of 52 samples, 34 respondents (64.7%) said that they are aware of the INFED remote access system by Madras University Library System, and only 28 of them (35.3%) are still not aware of and do not use the remote access facility. It insists that the need for a proper user education system and its vitality enormously.

12. Research Support Services

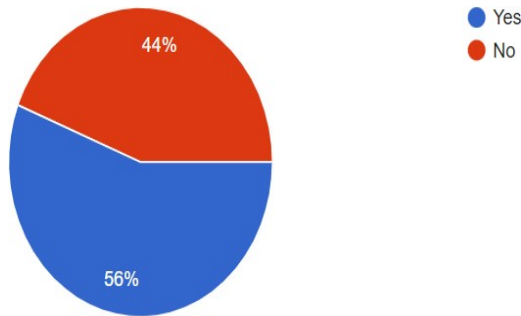


Figure 12: Awareness of Research Support Service analysis

Figure 12 depicts the awareness of research support services provided by the University of Madras Library. From the results, most residential students are aware of the research support services provided by the University of Madras, with 56% and 44% of residential students unaware of these services. It is quite alarming, and all students, including postgraduate students at the university level, must be

aware of the research support services these days provided by major academic and special libraries, with expert library professionals offering bibliometrics and research guidance in plenty.

13. Usage pattern of Research Support Service

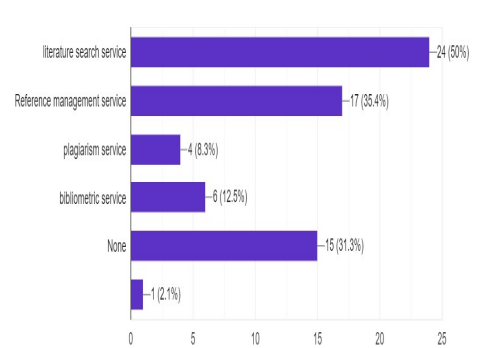


Figure 13: Usage pattern of research support service

As per the acquired data, most of the residential students are using the research support services. In this question, we provided respondents to choose more than one option. Most of the residential students use literature search services (n=24), reference management service (n=17), plagiarism service n=4), and bibliometric service (n=6), and residential students who are not using these services are 15.

14. Mode of Information Search Analysis

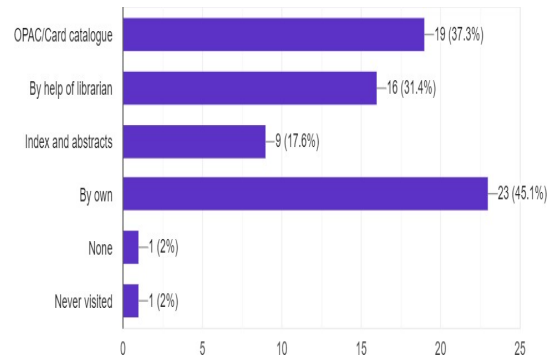


Figure 14. Channels for searching the documents

Figure 14 presents the method for searching the library's documents. The students can select multiple answers here, also. The students using many modes of channels to search for documents from the library, out of which the majority of the respondents searched

on their own with 45.1%, it means users are selecting the documents on their own way of searching and approaching the documents straight away, a significant number use OPAC and Card catalogue as finding tools (37.3%), and a notable number of students approach the librarian (31.4%).

15. Quantum of time spent in libraries

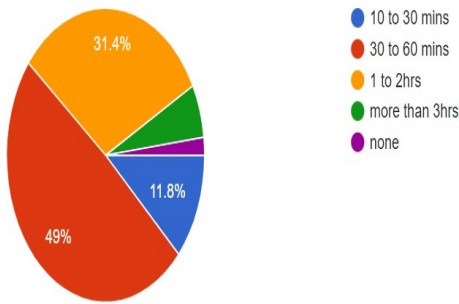


Figure 15: Duration of time spent in libraries

Figure 15 shows that the residential students spent 30-60 minutes, invariably much more than in other time spans (49%); the 1-2 hrs category stands at 31.4%, the 10-30 minutes category at 11.8%, and so on. The general time students spend in libraries is 30-60 minutes, and this investigation also found the same results.

16. Barriers to information seeking

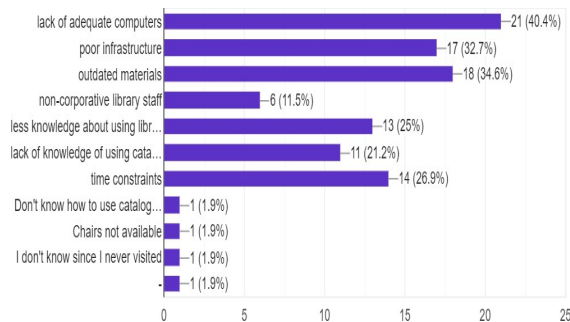


Figure 16: Barriers to information seeking

Figure 16 indicates the barriers faced by the Residential Students while meeting their information needs. According to the acquired data, many of the students faced constraints with the proper computers with internet connections in the library (21). 18 people mentioned outdated materials, 17 respondents pointed out the poor infrastructure facilities,

including heat, air-conditioning, and ventilation; notably, 6 respondents said non-cooperative library staff are some of the important constraints while seeking information and retrieval in the library system.

FINDINGS

The findings emerging from this investigation yield significant scholarly insights into the information needs and resource utilisation patterns of the residential student population at the University of Madras. These findings are anticipated to inform and guide the formulation of institutional policies and strategic frameworks to enhance library resources and services.

- The overwhelming majority of residential students maintain active membership in the University Library, reflecting a high degree of institutional engagement with library services.
- Residential students at the University of Madras demonstrate a pronounced preference for the concurrent utilization of both print and electronic resources in fulfilling their academic information requirements, indicative of a hybrid approach to scholarly inquiry.
- The study reveals that a substantial proportion of residential students possess awareness of the remote access facility extended by the University of Madras; however, the actual utilization of this facility remains considerably limited among the resident population, signifying a notable gap between awareness and practical adoption.
- The findings indicate that the Web of Science database constitutes the most predominantly utilized bibliographic and citation database among the residential student community.
- Residential students encounter considerable impediments while navigating and exploiting library resources, with an inadequacy of computational infrastructure emerging as the most prevalent and significant barrier to effective library use.
- The predominant motivation underlying library visits among the residential student population is academic necessity, particularly the completion of assignments and preparation for examinations, underscoring the instrumental role of the

library in supporting formal academic pursuits.

Recommendation of the study to the authorities of the University of Madras

The residential community of the University of Madras has put forth the following recommendations aimed at augmenting the quality and accessibility of library resources and services:

- **Expansion of Computational Infrastructure:** A significant augmentation of the existing computer facilities is imperative to accommodate the growing demands of the residential scholarly community.
- **Implementation of WebOPAC and Institutional Repository:** The adoption of a Web-based Online Public Access Catalogue (WebOPAC) alongside a comprehensive institutional repository is strongly advocated to facilitate seamless retrieval and dissemination of academic resources.
- **Procurement of Competitive Examination Literature:** The acquisition of an extensive collection of texts pertaining to competitive examinations is recommended to address the diverse academic and professional aspirations of the residential population.
- **Integration of RFID Technology:** The incorporation of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology is proposed to modernize library operations, enhance inventory management, and streamline resource circulation.
- **Continuous Updating of Library Holdings:** A systematic and periodic revision of the library's collection is advocated to ensure that the available resources remain contemporaneous with current academic and research developments.

CONCLUSION

In alignment with its predefined objectives, the present study undertook a systematic examination of the information needs and information-seeking behaviour of the residential student population enrolled at the University of Madras. The University Library has unequivocally demonstrated a pivotal and indispensable role in facilitating academic research and in rendering a diverse spectrum of scholarly services to its student constituency. Given the multifaceted academic responsibilities incumbent

upon this population, it is reasonable to posit that residential students are predisposed to respond affirmatively to institutional initiatives aimed at improving and advancing library services.

The findings of this investigation reveal that residential students exhibit a considerable degree of dependence upon a tripartite constellation of information sources, namely library resources, academic faculty, and the Internet. Notably, the Internet has emerged as the primary source of information among the residential student community, surpassing both conventional library resources and other auxiliary sources in both frequency and preference. This escalating reliance upon digital networks is further substantiated by the widespread proliferation of smartphone technology among the student population, which has engendered unprecedented ease of access to information through online platforms. Notwithstanding this pronounced orientation toward digital resources, residential students continue to use the physical library infrastructure to procure tangible print materials, including monographs, periodical journals, and reference compilations, thereby underscoring the enduring and complementary relevance of traditional library holdings in the contemporary academic milieu.

Furthermore, a segment of the respondent population articulated specific challenges encountered during their information-seeking endeavors, most notably the difficulty experienced in the efficient location and retrieval of requisite information — a finding that highlights the necessity for enhanced information literacy programs and improved resource navigation mechanisms within the institutional library framework.

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