

Information Seeking Behaviour and Resources Utilisation in the Digital Age: Implications for Library Services in Public Libraries in Oyo State

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Abstracts

This study investigated the information-seeking behaviour and resource utilisation patterns of users in public libraries within Oyo State, Nigeria, in the context of the digital age. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 236 respondents across five major public libraries in the state. Collected data were analysed using simple percentages and tables. The findings show that the respondents actively search for information using both print and digital means; despite a strong preference for print information resources, the results showed that there is a growing preference for digital resources among students and young adults. However, utilisation of digital tools and services remains limited due to infrastructural deficiencies, low digital literacy, and inadequate awareness of existing electronic resources; the findings revealed that the digital age has significantly influenced the information-seeking behaviour and resource utilisation patterns of users in public libraries. The paper concluded with strategic recommendations for improving the effectiveness, inclusiveness, and relevance of public library services in Oyo State.

Keywords: Information-seeking behaviour; Resource utilisation; Digital age; Public libraries; Oyo State; Digital literacy; Library services; User behaviour

Introduction

In the 21st century, the proliferation of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed how individuals seek, access, and utilise information. Aboyade (2020) averred that the digital age has brought about unprecedented access to information resources through the internet, digital libraries, and various online platforms. However, Makri, Blandford and Cox (2021) opined that this transformation has also introduced new challenges related to information overload, digital

literacy, and equitable access to digital resources. Public libraries, particularly in developing regions like Oyo State, Nigeria, play a critical role in providing access to information for education, personal development, and civic participation. These libraries serve as community hubs that bridge the digital divide by offering both traditional and digital resources to users. Understanding how users in public libraries seek and utilise information in this digital context is essential for improving library services and ensuring that they remain relevant in a rapidly evolving information landscape.

Information seeking behaviour refers to the various strategies and actions individuals employ to identify, locate, and use information to satisfy specific needs. It encompasses conscious efforts such as searching online databases, asking experts, or browsing library shelves, as well as passive information reception through social media or interpersonal interactions. In public library settings, this behaviour can vary depending on the user's age, educational background, digital literacy, and the availability of resources. According to Aina and Adedokun (2023) on commenting on Wilson (1999), noted that information-seeking behaviour includes the totality of human behaviour in relation to sources and channels of information, both formal and informal. In the digital age, this definition extends to include virtual search engines, online forums, e-resources, and mobile applications as critical tools for seeking information.

Information resources can be broadly categorized into traditional (print materials such as books, newspapers, and magazines) and digital (e-books, online journals, databases, and multimedia resources). Resource utilisation, according to Ifijeh and Yusuf (2020), refers to the frequency and manner in which users access and apply these materials to meet their information needs. In Nigerian public libraries, especially in Oyo State, there remains a heavy reliance on traditional materials due to limited ICT infrastructure. However, with increasing mobile and internet penetration, Eze (2021) reported that there is a growing shift towards digital formats. Understanding the extent and factors influencing this utilisation is vital for tailoring library services to user needs.

The digital age is characterized by widespread access to information through digital technologies. It has made information more abundant, immediate, and accessible globally. However, it has also introduced challenges such as misinformation, information overload, and digital exclusion. Thus Aboyade (2020) advised that public libraries must adapt by providing access to digital resources and training users to navigate this complex information environment. The shift from physical to digital resources affects not only how users seek information but also how they perceive the role of the library in their daily lives.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the growth of digital information resources, there is limited empirical knowledge about how users in Oyo State's public libraries navigate this new landscape. Many public libraries still struggle with outdated infrastructure, limited funding, and insufficient ICT facilities. As a result, there may be a mismatch between the information-seeking behaviour of users in the digital age and the services currently provided by these libraries. This study seeks to explore the nature of

information-seeking behaviour and the utilisation of information resources in public libraries in Oyo State, with a view to proposing strategies for enhancing library services.

Research Questions

- i. What are the common patterns of information-seeking behaviour among users of public libraries in Oyo State?
- ii. What types of information resources are most frequently utilised?
- iii. How has the digital age influenced information-seeking and resource utilisation?

Theoretical Models

This study is anchored in two key theoretical frameworks: Wilson's (1999) Model and Ellis' (1989) Model.

Wilson's Model of Information Seeking Behaviour (1999)

Wilson's model is a comprehensive framework that explains how users move from identifying an information need to engaging in active seeking behaviour. It considers intervening variables such as personal motivation, environmental context, and available resources. This model is useful in analyzing the behaviour of public library users in Oyo State, particularly in identifying barriers to digital resource use.

Ellis' Behavioural Model (1989)

Ellis's model identifies key features of information-seeking behaviour, including starting, chaining, browsing, differentiating, monitoring, and extracting. This behavioural approach helps in examining how library users navigate both traditional and digital information landscapes.

Literature Review

Information-seeking behaviour has evolved significantly with the proliferation of digital technologies. Case and Given (2016), posited that global users are increasingly shifting towards digital platforms for accessing information due to their speed, convenience, and ubiquity. In developed countries, mobile devices, digital libraries, and AI-powered search engines have become the dominant tools for information retrieval. In contrast, many regions in Sub-Saharan Africa still face infrastructural and economic limitations that hinder digital information access. Studies conducted in Ghana (Mensah and Okyere, 2019) and Kenya (Omwoyo, 2020) reveal that public library users often combine traditional and digital methods, with digital adoption growing primarily among younger users and students.

Public libraries are increasingly integrating ICT tools to stay relevant in the digital age. These tools include internet-enabled computers, e-books, online public access catalogues (OPACs), and digital reference services (Ifijeh and Yusuf, 2020). Such innovations allow libraries to serve as digital learning hubs, especially in underserved communities. In Nigeria, Eze (2021) noted that initiatives such as the National Virtual Library Project and Worldreader's e-library services aim to modernize library offerings. However, limitations in funding, internet bandwidth, and

technical expertise often impede full implementation. Public libraries in Oyo State face similar challenges, struggling to offer consistent digital services to their patrons.

Understanding user preferences is key to designing effective library services. Studies have shown that users' choices of resources are influenced by factors such as relevance, ease of access, trustworthiness, and format (Kakai, Ikoja-Odongo and Kigongo-Bukenya, 2004). In many Nigerian libraries, students and researchers often prefer digital resources when they are available, but revert to print due to reliability and accessibility issues. A study by Ajayi and Ojo (2022) on public libraries in South-West Nigeria revealed that while many users expressed a preference for digital materials, only a few libraries had the infrastructure to support this demand. The study emphasized the need for policy interventions to improve resource availability and staff training.

The shift to digital information sources has not been without its challenges. Key barriers include: digital illiteracy, a state where library users lack the necessary skills to efficiently navigate online resources (Aboyade, 2020); inadequate infrastructure, as poor internet connectivity and lack of computers hinder effective digital access; language and content relevance, as most digital content are not localized or tailored to the needs of indigenous users. These challenges disproportionately affect rural library users and older adults, leading to a persistent digital divide that undermines equitable access to information.

In recent years, a number of studies have examined information-seeking patterns within Nigerian public libraries. For instance, Oduwole and Sowole (2021) investigated users' behavioural patterns in Lagos State public libraries and found a high reliance on print materials due to limited ICT access. Similarly, Aina and Adedokun (2023) highlighted the disconnect between user expectations and available resources in libraries across Oyo and Osun States. These studies underline a recurring theme: although the digital age presents new opportunities for enhancing library services, actual utilisation remains constrained by structural and systemic factors. A targeted exploration in Oyo State will further expand the body of knowledge on these critical issues.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive research design, which allows for the systematic collection of data from a representative sample of public library users in Oyo State to explore their information-seeking behaviour and resource utilisation in the digital age. The target population of the study comprised all registered users of selected public libraries in Oyo State, including major libraries located in Ibadan, Oyo, Ogbomosho, Iseyin, and Saki. These libraries serve diverse users such as students, researchers, civil servants, artisans, and general community members. Purposive sampling was used to select five public libraries across different zones of Oyo State to ensure geographical representation; within each library, a systematic random sampling technique was used to select library users for the study. A total of 250 respondents (50 from each library) were selected to participate in the study. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire. To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in library

and information science, as well as in educational measurement. A pilot test was conducted with 20 users from a public library outside the study sample to assess reliability. The instrument yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82, indicating high internal consistency. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviation.

Data Presentations and Discussion of Findings

The total number of retrieved copies of the distributed questionnaire was 236, making it a response rate of 94%. These data were used for the analysis of the study.

Patterns of Information-Seeking Behaviour

Information-seeking Behaviour	% Responses in Agreement
Search for information using both print and digital means	68%
Searching for information with mobile devices	42%
I seek information for academic needs	63%
I seek information for job-related purposes	21%
I seek information for general knowledge	14%
I seek information from librarians when in need	73%

Findings revealed diverse patterns in information-seeking behaviour. About 68% of respondents reported actively searching for information using both print and digital means. A significant number (42%) preferred starting with mobile devices such as smartphones to locate needed information before consulting the library's print resources. Motivations for information-seeking included academic needs (63%), job-related needs (21%), and general knowledge or personal development (14%). Notably, 73% of respondents indicated that they sought help from librarians when they faced difficulties locating resources, highlighting the continued relevance of professional support in information navigation.

The findings agree with Ajegbomogun and Salawu (2023) and Ford and Mansourian (2022) who postulated that most users, especially younger patrons, rely heavily on smartphones and internet-enabled devices to access information via search engines, social media, and online databases before or in lieu of consulting physical library materials. The findings also align with Makri, et. al (2021) showing a shift towards convenience and immediacy in information retrieval.

Table 3: Types and Frequency of Information Resources Utilised

Types and Frequency of Information Resources Used	% Responses in Agreement
Print textbooks and reference materials	78%
Newspaper and magazines	644%
Internet search engines	55%
e-books and online databases	34%
mobile apps for study and research	22%

Despite a strong preference for print, there is a growing use of digital resources among users with access to smartphones or personal devices. However, many expressed concerns about inconsistent access to digital facilities in the library, such as computers or Wi-Fi.

The findings align with prior studies (Ajayi & Ojo, 2022; Aina & Adedokun, 2023), which confirm that while digital awareness is growing among public library users in Nigeria, actual utilisation remains limited. Factors such as poor infrastructure, low digital literacy, and inadequate promotion of digital services continue to restrict user engagement. Nevertheless, the significant role of librarians in supporting users was affirmed, underscoring the need to empower library staff through regular ICT training. Furthermore, the preference for hybrid use of print and digital materials suggests that public libraries must maintain a balanced approach in resource provision.

Table 4: Influence of Digital Technologies

Influence of Digital Technologies	% Responses in Agreement
The internet made it easier to find up-to-date information	61%
Utilisation of online platforms to supplement the library	46%
Utilisation of the library's OPAC or subscribed e-resources	30%

Digital tools have reshaped how users interact with information. The data suggests that while users are engaging with digital tools, the full potential of digital library services remains under-utilised due to infrastructural and capacity limitations. The findings from this study reveal that the digital age has significantly influenced the information-seeking behaviour and resource utilisation patterns of users in public libraries across Oyo State, Nigeria.

A key finding is the growing reliance on internet-based resources and mobile technologies by public library users in Oyo State. This shift reflects the findings of Ford and Mansourian (2022) who reported that broader national and international patterns where users prefer digital sources for their speed, convenience, and breadth of access. Conversely, libraries in rural or semi-urban regions struggle with poor internet connectivity, outdated hardware, and a lack of digital literacy among staff and patrons (Ajegbomogun and Salawu, 2023; Ifijeh and Yusuf, 2023).

Implications for Library Services

The findings of this study have several important implications for the planning, management, and delivery of services in public libraries across Oyo State. These implications span policy, infrastructure, staffing, and user engagement strategies.

- **Need for Digital Infrastructure Development**

The limited availability of digital tools and internet connectivity in many public libraries directly affects users' ability to engage with online resources. To remain relevant in the digital age, public libraries must:

- Upgrade ICT infrastructure, including computers, internet access, and digital catalogues.

- ii. Partner with local government and ICT firms to provide sustainable digital access solutions.
- iii. Ensure regular maintenance and updating of digital facilities.
- iv. Improving infrastructure will enable libraries to support a wider range of digital learning and information-seeking activities.

- **Capacity Building for Librarians and Staff**

Librarians remain central to guiding users through both traditional and digital information landscapes. The study shows that many users still rely on librarians for help, especially in digital navigation. Thus:

- i. Continuous professional development in digital literacy, user education, and online resource management is essential.
- ii. Staff should be trained to deliver digital reference services and virtual assistance.
- iii. Librarians should also be empowered to curate relevant digital content for users based on emerging needs.
- iv. This capacity enhancement will allow library staff to serve as effective mediators between users and information in all formats.

Conclusion

This study examined the information-seeking behaviour and resource utilisation patterns of users in public libraries across Oyo State in the context of the digital age. Findings revealed a strong interest among users in accessing both traditional and digital information resources. However, actual utilisation of digital resources remains limited due to infrastructural deficiencies, digital literacy challenges, and low awareness of available e-services.

Despite these constraints, the presence of a digitally inclined user base, especially among younger and more educated patrons, offers a promising outlook. Public libraries continue to play a vital role in information access, learning, and community development. To remain relevant in the digital era, libraries must adapt their services, tools, and strategies to align with changing user expectations and technological advancements.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance library services and user experience in public libraries within Oyo State:

- i. The public library board should invest in reliable internet connectivity, computer systems, and digital content platforms.
- ii. The library board should collaborate with government agencies and NGOs for funding and technical support.
- iii. The library board should organize regular training workshops and user education programs for both library staff and users.

- iv. The public library board should incorporate digital skills training as part of library outreach and literacy initiatives.



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