



## INFORMATION NEEDS AND SEEKING BEHAVIOUR OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS DURING COVID – 19 PANDEMIC: A CASE STUDY OF LAD COLLEGE FOR WOMEN

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### ABSTRACT:

The pedagogy of education can have a major impact on the information needs and seeking behaviour of students. In view of the dramatic change in the education system during the COVID – 19 pandemic, the aim of this study was to understand the impact of online learning on the information needs and seeking behaviour of undergraduate students of LAD College for Women, Nagpur (India). The study collected empirical data through a structured questionnaire to arrive at the objectives of the study. The questionnaire was mainly consisted of closed-ended questions, covering demographic and different aspects of information needs and seeking behaviour of students, such as purpose and frequency of information seeking, selection of information sources, strategies for seeking information, usefulness of web-based resources, challenges encountered while seeking the information and opinion of the students on the strategy to build self-efficacy on information searching (activities to address the challenges). Data were gathered from 1270 students out of 2560 enrolled undergraduate students. Findings indicate that to enable the students to meet their information requirements more efficiently, periodic user education program is imperative. Based on the findings, a model is recommended for academic libraries to stay relevant in post COVID – 19.

**Key words:** -Information Need, Information Seeking Behavior, Online learning, OER, Digital Information Literacy, COVID – 19, Pandemic

### INTRODUCTION:

Education is fundamental for the growth and development of a nation by achieving full human potential. With the rapid changes in the knowledge environment, the employment landscape and global ecosystem has been changing continuously and hence it is becoming increasingly critical to develop all aspects and capabilities of learners and make education more well-rounded and useful. In formal education along with the cognitive skills, holistic development of the learners has already been in the core of educational reforms of the Government of India. To bridge the gap between the current state of learning outcomes and the requirement of the current age, major reforms are proposed in the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP, 2020).

Libraries are the backbone of all educational institutions that empowers them to generate extremely resourceful individuals to influence progressively on national development (Mahwasane, 2017). Libraries allow students to go beyond what is being taught in the classroom. In a learner-centered model, libraries are committed in a longstanding relationship with learners. It serve an important purpose in developing the required information literacy skills among the patrons enabling them to satisfy their information need efficiently which is crucial for survival in this information age. College library is the vital component of the Higher Education System which facilitates and enhances the teaching, learning and research activities. It serves as a key factor to accomplish the aims and objectives of the higher education.

However the ongoing online education across the country has been setting a disturbing trend unwittingly by letting the learners to become less dependent on the library.

The COVID – 19 pandemic has significant impact on the education system. The sudden outbreak of the virus and subsequent precautionary measures to contain the spread leading to shutdown of educational institutions disrupted the lives of students to a large extent. With students being outside the classroom, many institutions contemplated online teaching as a substitute to keep the learning continued. In India the hasty way of implementation of online education at the initial period of the pandemic paved ways for learning without library. The important role which academic libraries used to play in offline teaching is missing in many ways in the new online learning pedagogy. Though the alternative was adopted as a stopgap measure initially, however the severity and reach of the coronavirus is not giving the chance to resume to regular way of functioning.

Moving towards online teaching and learning was a paradigm shift for the Indian education system. And to make it more effective and accessible, several initiatives have been taken by the Government of India for students, teachers and educational institutions. The LIS professionals should grab these opportunity and find new ways to address the learning crisis and bring about a set of solutions which may previously considered difficult or impossible to implement.

Cognizance of the information needs and seeking behavior of users is paramount in the information service delivery of any academic library. A clear understanding of the information needs is the foundation to design a more proactive and robust service mechanism to

match the users' profile and ensures academic progress (Eke et al., 2019).

At this moment (May 2021), as most parts of the country is under the wrath of the second wave of COVID-19 and as experts are predicting the 3rd wave is not too distant, (economictimes.indiatimes.com/opinion, 2021)(economictimes.indiatimes.com, 2021), (timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 2021), (indianexpress.com, 2021)it is definitely not easy to predict when the normal operations will be resumed. So it is now vital to understand the realms of online education and re-establish that connection with the library users in the digital environment.

#### REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Getting to know the need of the users is crucial for a learner centered academic library system as it enables the professionals to determine exactly how and in what direction changes are required in order to meet the needs of the users. Accordingly Information needs and seeking behavior has always been a sought after area of research. Countless number of studies has focused either the changing information need in the light of the digital movements or on individual library patrons.

(Ibrahim & Perumal, 2018)investigated the information need and information seeking behavior of foreign students studying in University of Madras. Survey method was adopted for the collection of data. The study reports that the respondents need information mainly on academic, daily life, and entertainment purposes. for academic endeavors the preferred source of information were books, journals and databases while for their day to day current information they depend on newspaper, magazines, multimedia and personal network of teachers and friends. The results

show that the university library satisfies maximum information needs of the foreign students.

(Abdul Kadir & Hussin, 2018) have investigated the usefulness of a private university library through a survey of information needs and seeking behaviour of its students. The findings suggest the need of users' awareness program from time to time to enhance the usability of the resources of the library.

(Eke et al., 2019) through an extensive study investigated the pattern of information needs and seeking behavior of students of a Technological University. The study was continued for consecutive three academic sessions and 5885 students were selected through stratified sampling technique. The required data were collected through a questionnaire. The study reports that final year students need for course-related information was highest in comparison to the other years. Secondly Google search engine was the common strategy for seeking electronic information while the purpose for information varied within the years –from examination, self development to selecting project topic.

With the objective to find out usages of library (Mishra et al., 2015) have investigated the study habit of health science students. The authors found that the use of e-resources is higher among all sources of information and are used by the students regularly. Books and e-journals were also used frequently by the students.

#### **OBJECTIVES:**

The main aim of this study is to understand the impact of online learning on the information needs and seeking behavior of students. In specific, the study attempts to reach upon the following objectives:

- To identify the purpose and frequency of information seeking
- To understand their strategies for seeking Information
- To find out the students' awareness about and use of the information sources
- To determine the challenges students encountered while seeking the information
- To ascertain the preferred web-based resources
- To establish the strategy to build self-efficacy on information searching

#### **SCOPE AND LIMITATION:**

The study confined to the undergraduates students of Lady Amritbai Daga College for Women of Arts, Commerce and Science (LAD College for Women). It is a 90 year old premier institution affiliated to Rashtrasant Tukadoji Maharaj Nagpur University, situated in the Nagpur city in the state of Maharashtra in India. It is three times NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council) certified 'A' grade college which is imparting quality education to around 4500 girl students in the faculties of Arts, Science and Commerce ranging from higher secondary to post graduation.

#### **METHODOLOGY:**

The study population consisted of 2560 undergraduate students of LAD College for Women. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire prepared via Google forms and circulated through the online learning platforms. The questionnaire was mainly consisting of closed-ended questions, covering demographic and different aspects of information need and seeking behavior of students, such as purpose and frequency of information seeking, selection of information sources, strategies for seeking information, usefulness of web-based resources, challenges encountered while seeking the information and opinion of the students on the

strategy to build self-efficacy on information searching(activities to address the challenges).Out of the 2560total undergraduate students enrolled in the year 2020-2021, 1270 students responded to the online survey, making the rate of return to 49.60%. The required data were collected between 15th February 2021to 2nd April 2021.The responses were downloaded to an excel spreadsheet and analyzed keeping in view the objectives of the study.

## ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION :

### Profile of respondents

The academic background of respondents such as faculty and year of study are presented in Figure 1. Of the total 1270 respondents, 294(23.15%) are from Arts, 432(34.02%) are from Commerce and 544(42.83%) are from Science faculty. The year of study wise breakup of the total 1270 respondents includes 371(29.21%) first year, 458 (36.06%) from second year and 441 (34.73%) from third year of study.

### Purpose and frequency of information seeking

Students need information for a variety of reason. It is mainly related to but not restricted with the academic purpose. Given to the unprecedented time they are going through as a result of the pandemic, a clear understanding of the purpose and frequency of their information seeking behaviour could be useful to address their information needs post pandemic. Keeping this in mind six questions were asked covering different dimensions and students were asked to mark their responses in a four parameter scale namely Always, Occasionally, Rarely and Never to determine the frequency of their needs. Figure 2 and Figure 3 depicts the purpose and frequency of the need of information. Of all the

questions it is found that the information needs of the students are primarily dominated by academic purpose which shows highest mean i.e. 3.70 followed by information on COVID – 19 (Mean 3.41) and for the preparation of competitive examinations (Mean 3.26). Information about higher studies found to be required by less number of students (Mean 2.61). Across the frequencies options information on curricular and co curricular happened to be more frequently required by students as 70.94% (901) students needed those information always followed by 28.11% (357) students needed occasionally and 0.94% (12) rarely. This is the only dimension where never option has registered zero responses.

### Selection of information sources

Selection of the appropriate source is pivotal as the quality of the information depends not only upon the source from where it originates which could be a place, person, or a thing but also on the medium of dissemination. In this information age information is available through a variety of sources namely mass media, social media, print media, digital media and even from personal networks. The selection of source also varies based on the question one trying to answer. To identify the most frequently preferred source of information, seven questions were asked focusing different dimensions of this aspect and students were asked to mark their responses in a four parameter scale namely Always, Occasionally, Rarely and Never. The responses are shown in Figure 4 and Figure 5.From the findings it is found that all the sources are more or less equally preferred by the students as there is a little variation found in the mean which ranges from 3.15 to 3.5. However out of all the sources dependency on the teachers of the college found to be highest (Mean 3.5) followed by the internet (Open access

platforms, official websites, study portals subject gateways etc.) (Mean 3.43). Social media and personal networks show almost equal preference with mean 3.36 and 3.35 respectively. Mobile apps found to be least preferred (Mean 3.15) by the respondents.

#### **Strategies for satisfying information needs**

In this information age, information can be collected virtually from a variety of sources. However the major factors which influence the strategies for fulfilling the information needs are the awareness, affordability and accessibility of the information at the time of need. In light of this nine questions were asked to the students to understand the strategy they followed to fulfill their information requirements. They were asked to mark their responses in a four parameter scale namely Always, Occasionally, Rarely and Never. As illustrated in the Figure 6 and Figure 7, it can be seen that class notes are the dominant information sources (Mean 3.64) selected by the responded students followed by reading materials provided by the teachers (Mean 3.58). Books recommended in the syllabus found to be in the third place of preference (Mean 3.55). Reportedly assistance from college library found to be least preferred source (Mean 1.08) by the students to satisfy the information needs. Further, MOOCs and subscribed electronic resources through N-LIST are also less chosen source of information (mean 2.78 and 2.76 respectively).

#### **Usefulness of web based resources**

Web based resources are invaluable to satisfy every single information need. Even for students it has an add-on value to boost the learning process as well as outcome. To strengthen the online learning during pandemic, The Government of India also launched many digital initiatives for the benefits of both learners and teachers. To find out the usefulness of these

initiatives from the point of view of students, nine online sources were included in the questionnaire and a four parameter scale (Always, Occasionally, Rarely and Never) was given to choose upon. The responses are depicted in Figure 8 and Figure 9. From the responses it can be seen that the variance of responses across the dimensions are low. This shows that, usefulness of web resources as reported by the students is more or less same. Even across the parameters high level of variation in the responses are not visible. National Digital library of India and CEC YouTube channel are rated as most useful by the students (Mean 2.91). Swayam (Indian MOOCs platform) and N-LIST (subscribed electronic resources) are happened to be least preferred source (Mean 2.61 and 2.62 respectively).

#### **Challenges encountered while seeking information**

The present information society which is overloaded with digital information is posing many challenges to deal with. One of the major challenges is “problem of plenty”. Though there is no dearth of sources, collecting relevant and authentic information by their own is not an easy task for students especially undergraduates. This section aims at identifying the challenges encountered by the students under study while satisfying their information needs during remote learning. To find out the problems students confronted with, seven questions were asked and the respondents were asked to mark their responses in a four parameter scale namely Always, Occasionally, Rarely and Never. From the responses illustrated in Figure 10 and Figure 11, it is found that difficulty in selecting the appropriate information due to information overload experienced by majority of students (Mean 3.01)

followed by the difficulty in evaluating the authenticity of the digital information (Mean 3.00). Students were apprehensive while using information from open access platforms (Mean 2.99). By their own admission, many students found their knowledge to be inadequate to browse the internet effectively (Mean 2.9). Even assessment of validity and currency of information challenged many information seekers (Mean 2.95).

### **Strategy to built self-efficacy on information searching**

Self-efficacy can play an important role in achieving the goal as, it strengthens the self confidence of completing a given task with ease. In the information environment also having a strong sense of self-efficacy can enable the users to address their information needs more effectively and efficiently. In view to understand the activities which will be helpful in building the self-efficacy in students, five questions were asked and respondents were asked to mark their responses in a four parameter scale namely Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. From the responses displayed in Figure 12 and Figure 13, it is found that almost half of the students (46.54%) believe that digital information literacy program will improve the information searching skill while 44.17% respondents strongly agree that guidance on evaluation of digital information will be helpful in selecting the appropriate information. Of the respondents 46.61% agree that library personnel can act as catalysts to enhance the effectiveness of search. Across the parameters highest number of responses are recorded under the head 'Agree' (Mean 2.24) followed by Strongly Agree (Mean 2). Very less students have selected the Disagree and Strongly Disagree options (Mean 0.62 and 0.14 respectively).

### **FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION**

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about new ways of learning. All around the world, educational institutions are transited to online learning platforms to continue with the process of educating students. However, this alternative medium has also brought to the fore a disturbing trend where the use of library has become minimal. As it was a stopgap measure it was difficult to expect the integration of library in the pedagogy of online education. This study was carried out to understand the user behavior and their changing information needs to determine the strategy to establish the facilities to meet them properly. The findings revealed that students are adapted to the online platform to sustain their academic interest and career growth during this pandemic. Yet, they perceived many challenges during online learning to satisfy their information needs.

The massive efforts taken in a short time in implementing the technological solutions to respond to the immediate need of education systems tells us that change is inevitable post pandemic. Hence, instead of planning to resume to normal functioning once situation improves, LIS professionals are required to focus to adopt the "new normal". There is a strong need of dedicated efforts to understand the changed learning environment and to find ways to address the catastrophe of the changing information behavior of the students and bring about the viable solutions. The basic aim should be to develop and implement pedagogic strategies that stimulate self-efficacy among students to empower them to ride the tide in the digital world.

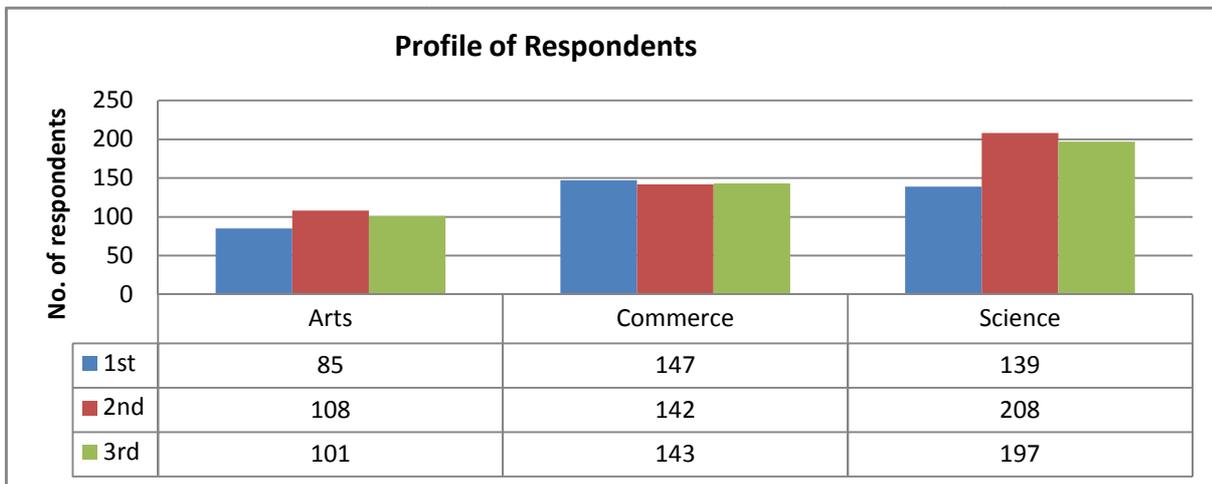
Based on the findings depicted in Figure 14, the study proposes a model for academic libraries as shown in Figure 15 that explains the expected strategies to remain relevant in the post

pandemic period. Though this is not a one-size fits all solution, it can be used as a reference to design a sustainable alternative model for different libraries.

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**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**

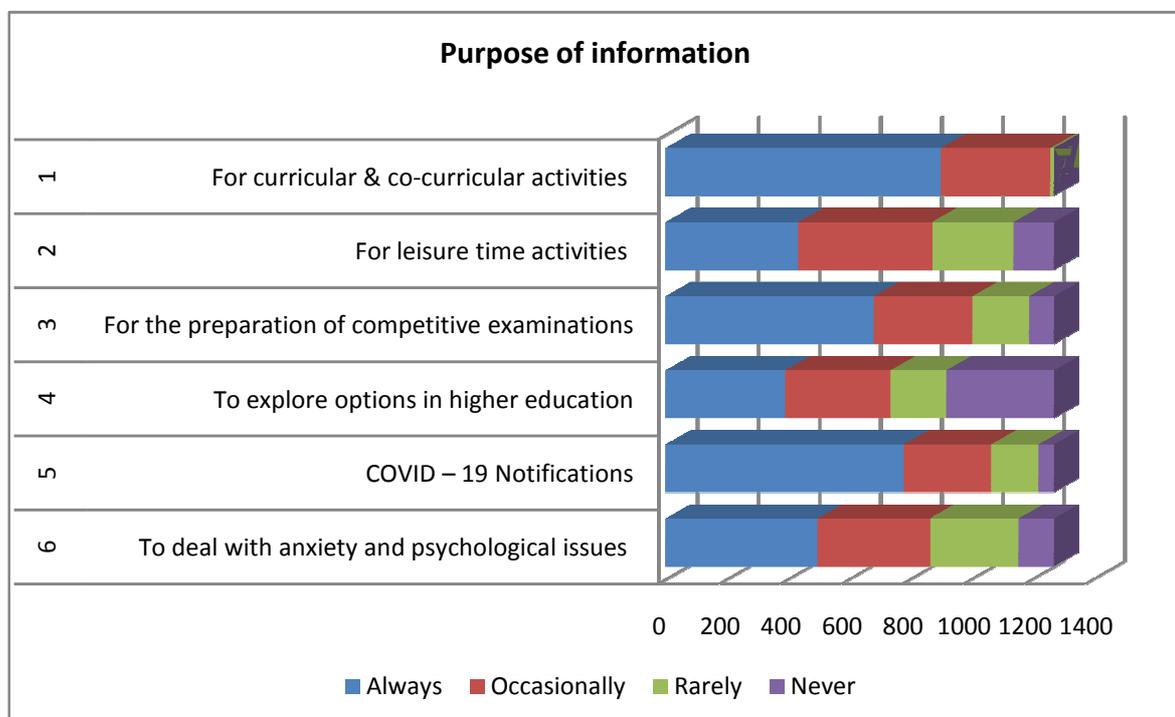


Figure 3

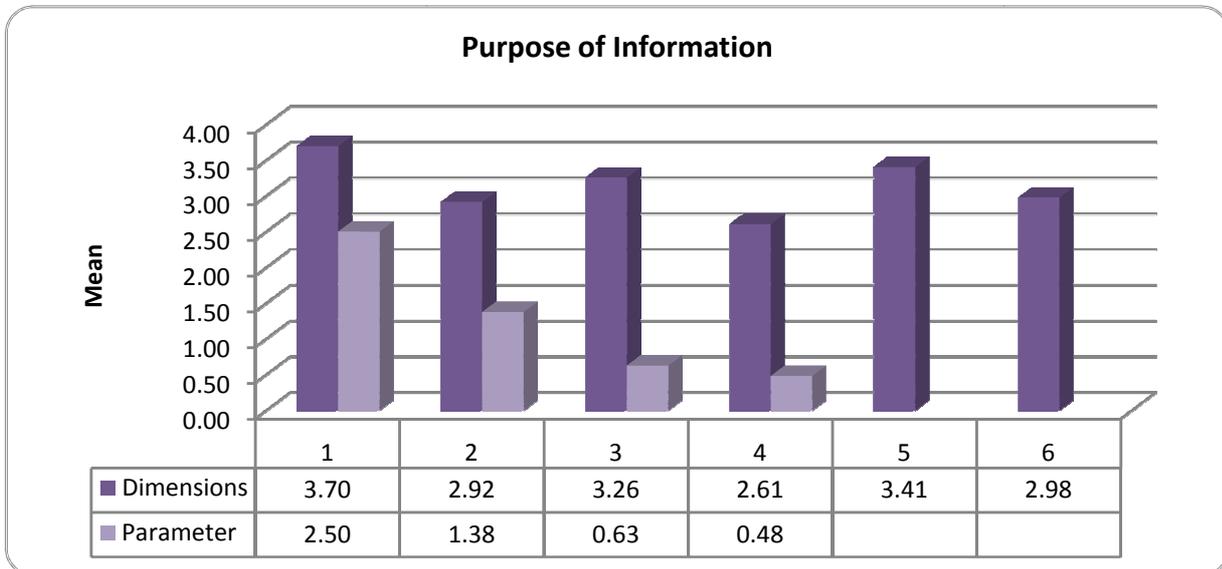
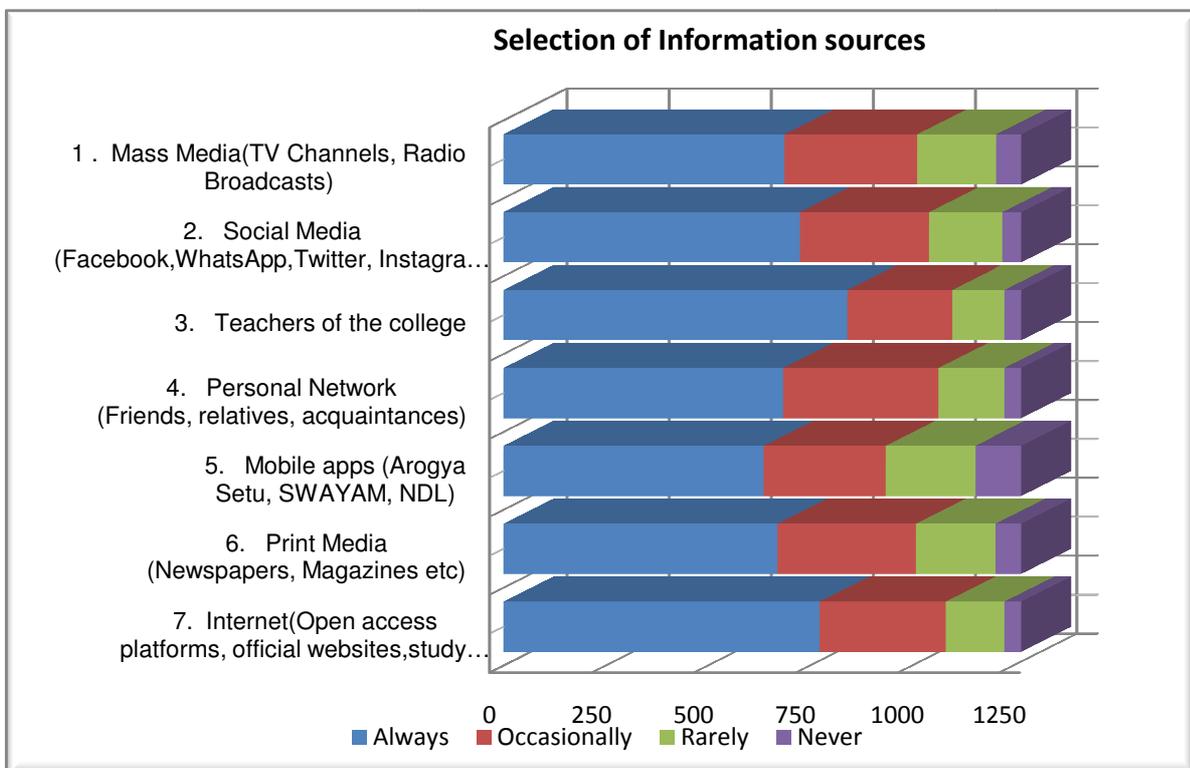
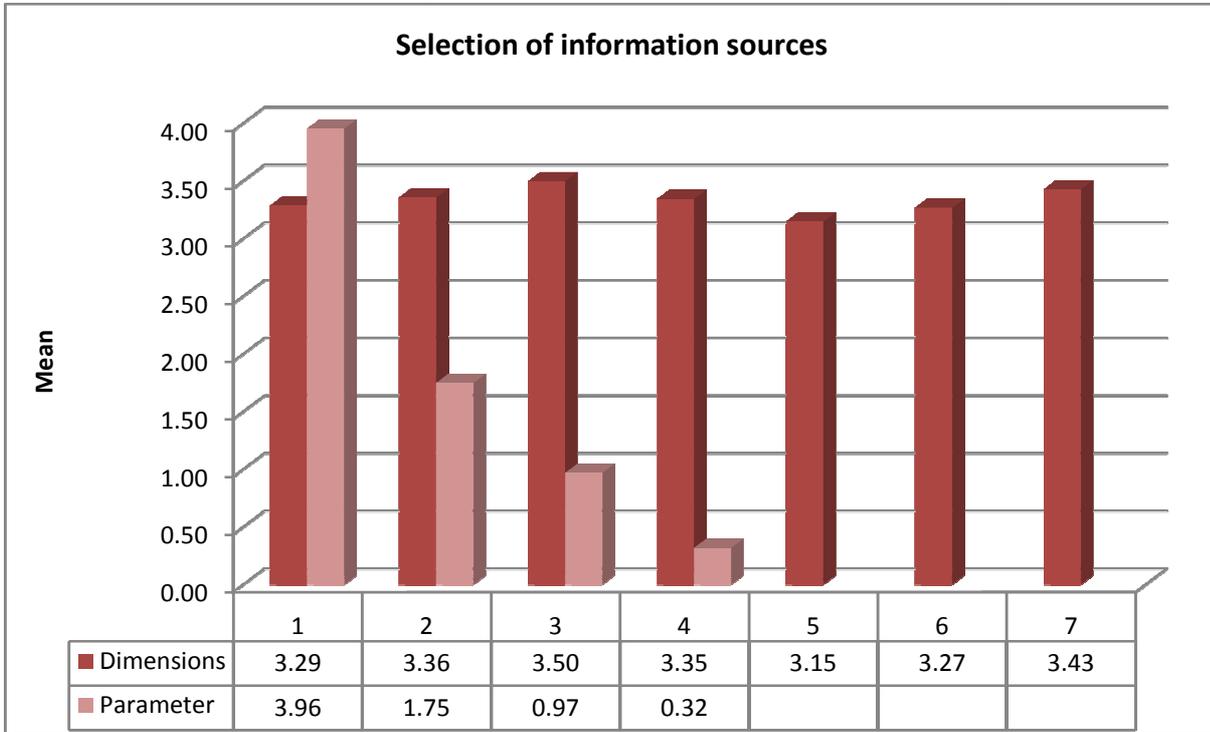


Figure 4



**Figure 5**



**Figure 6**

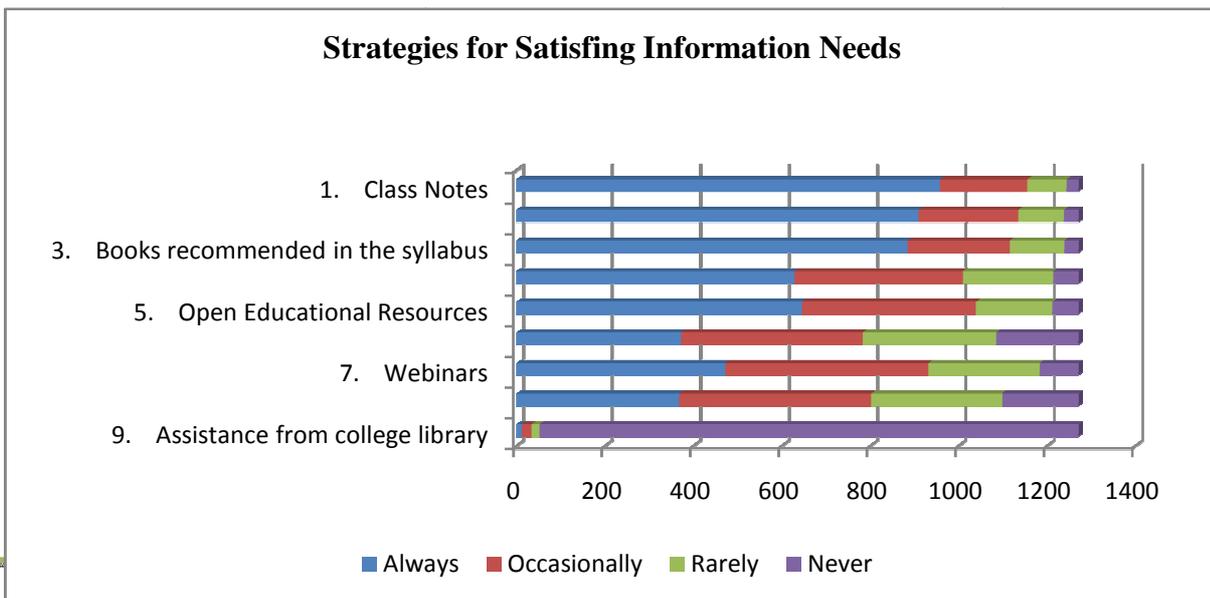


Figure 7

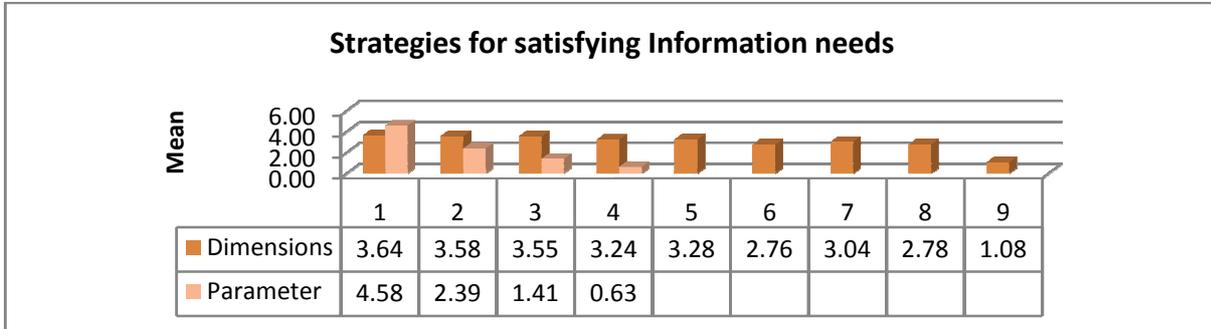
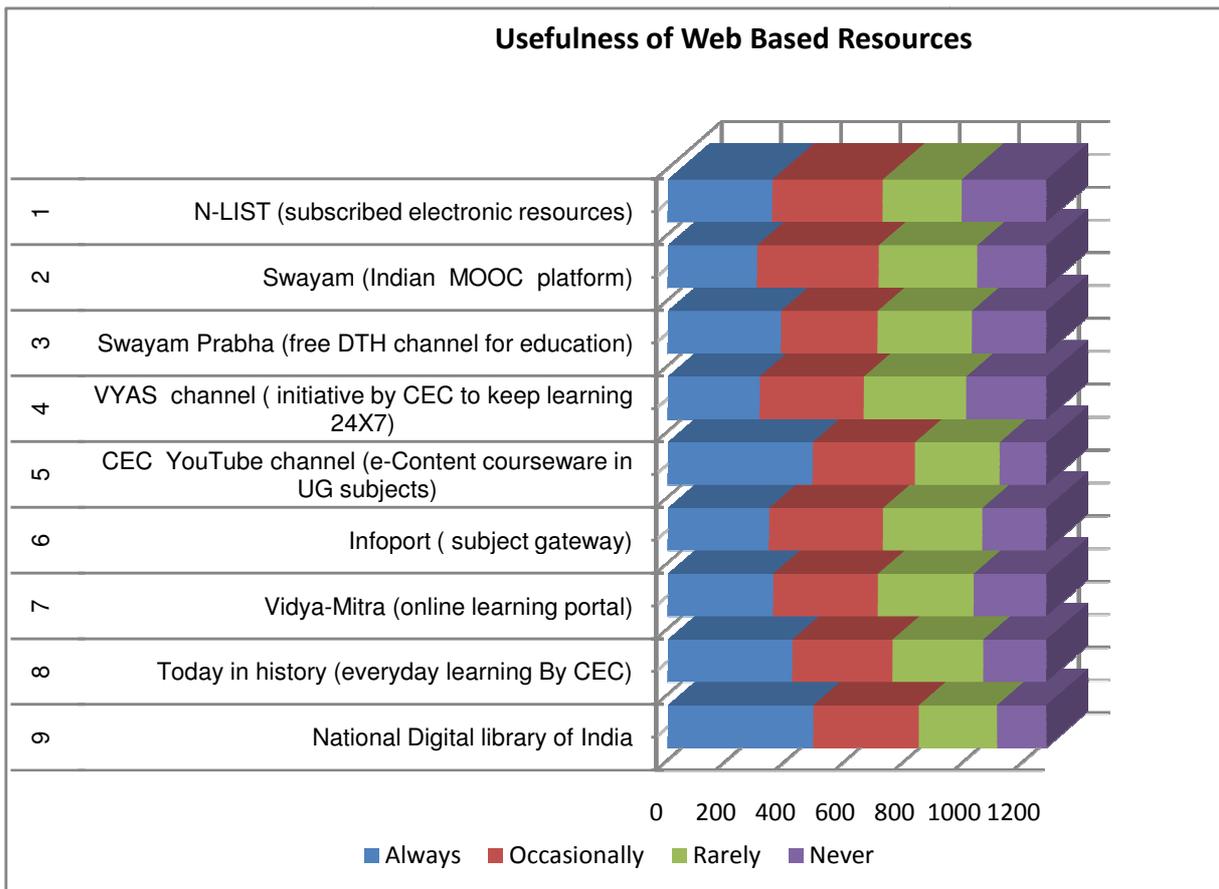
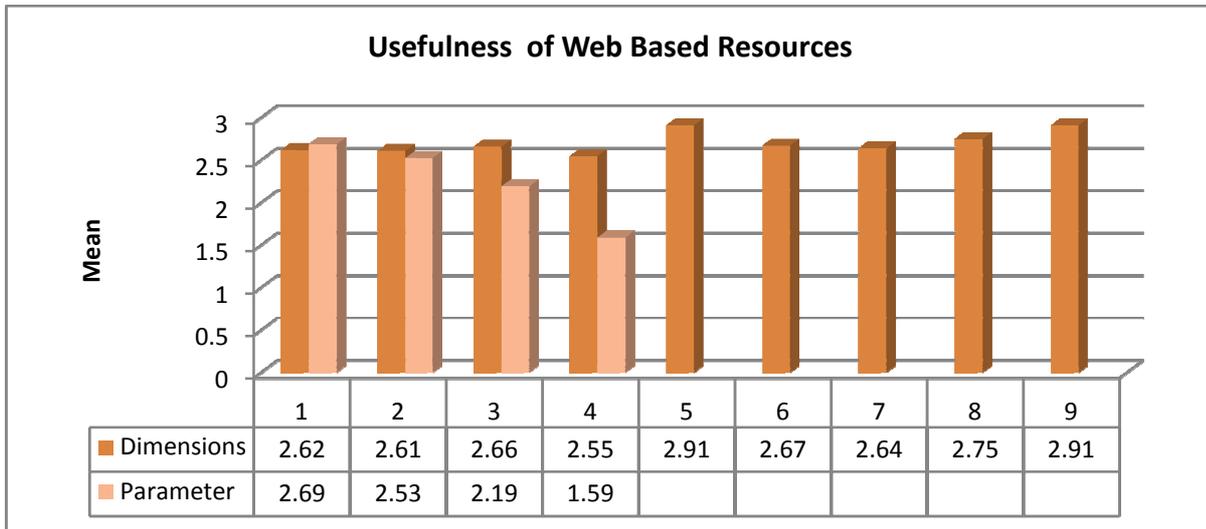


Figure 8



**Figure 9**



**Figure 10**

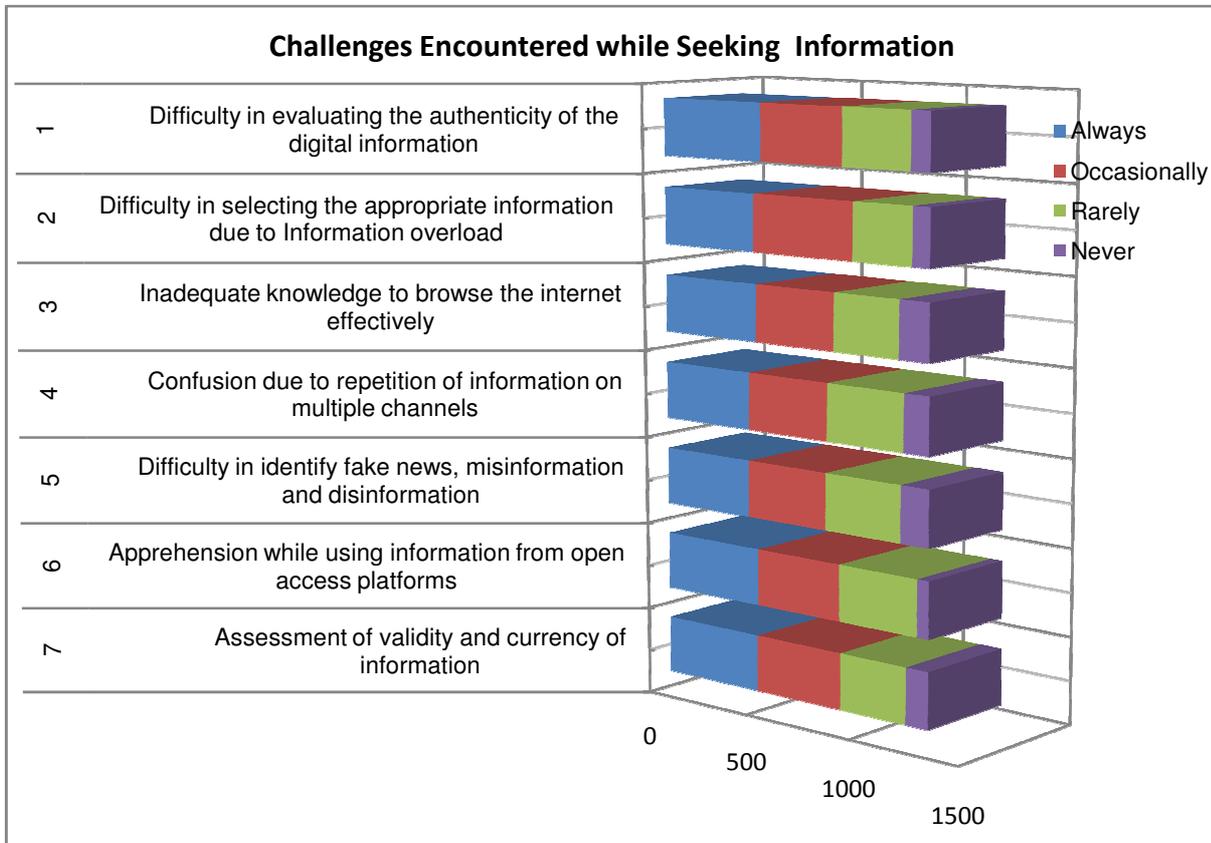
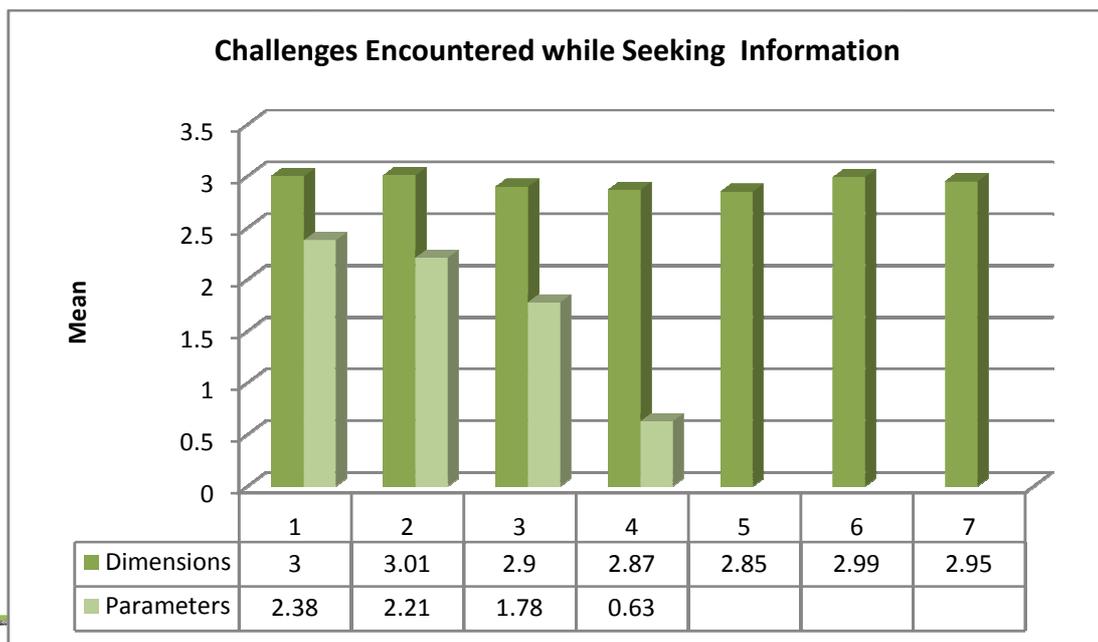
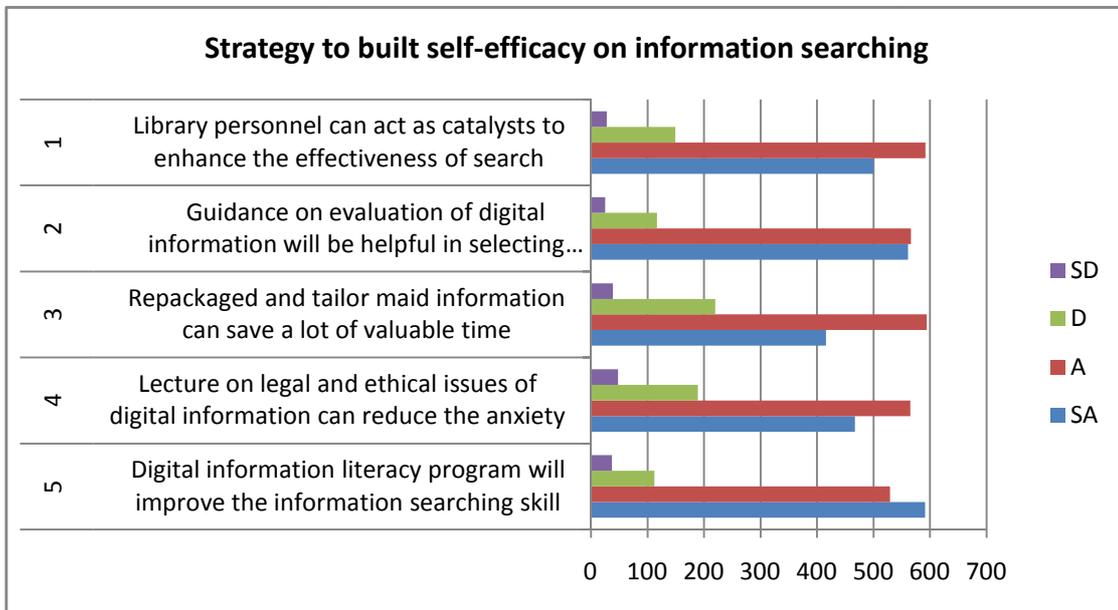


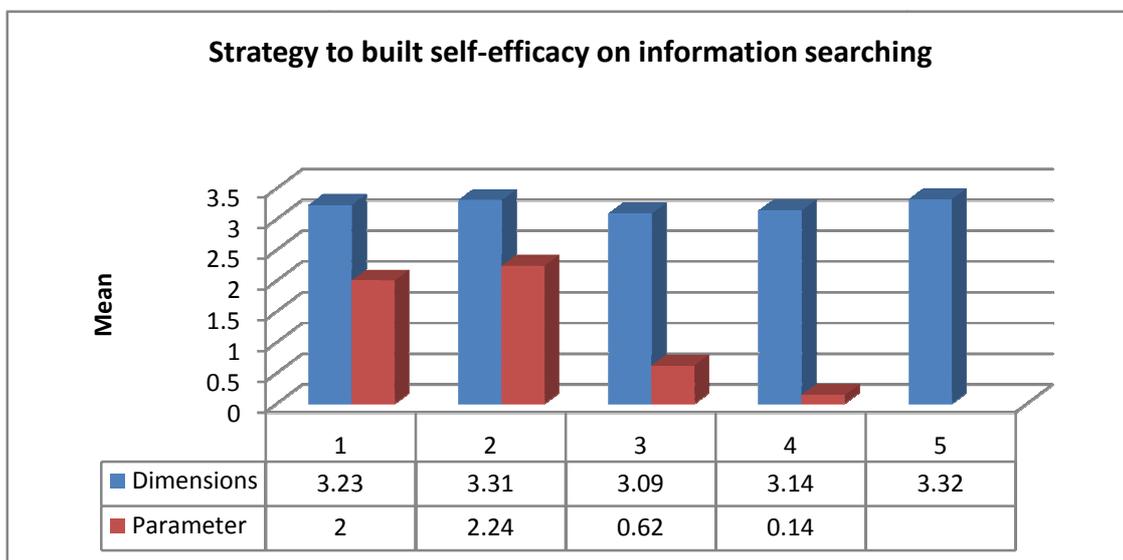
Figure 11



**Figure 12**



**Figure 13**



**Figure 14 : Key Findings of the Study**

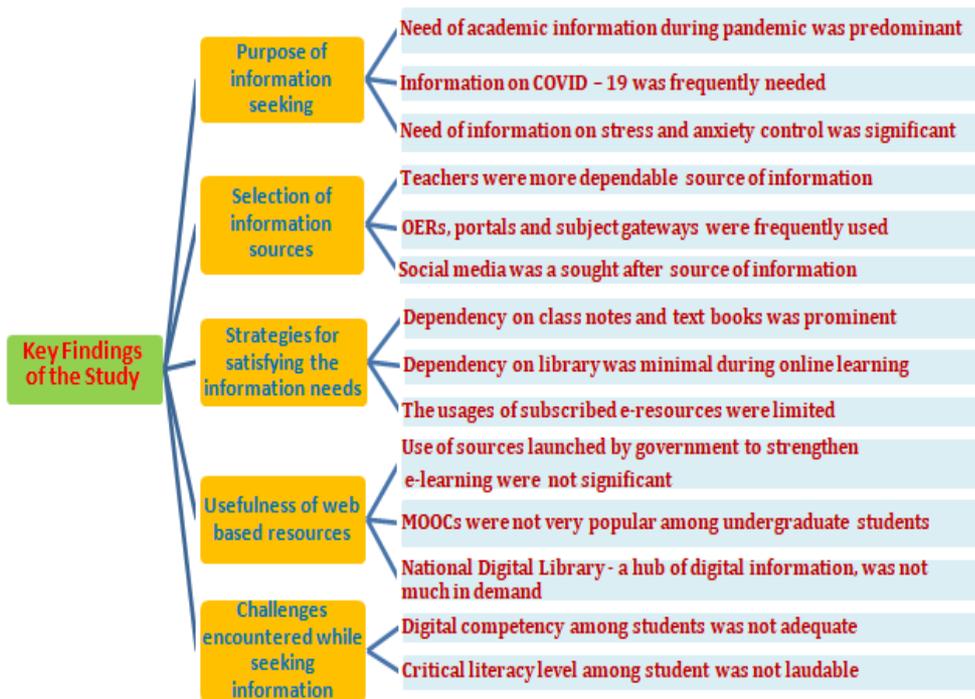


Figure 15 : Model for Post COVID – 19 Academic Libraries

