

Professional Information Needs of University Faculty: Gender Perspective study of North Eastern Hills University and Gauhati University

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Abstract: Every person has the need for information and there are many ways one can satisfy an information need. The way in which University faculty seek information to support teaching, research, and creative activities is changing as new technologies and information delivery systems emerge. To serve effectively the information needs of the university faculty, information providers such as librarians need to know how much the faculty know about finding information, knowledge organization, information use and ability to find information. Using gender as a category of analysis for the professional information needs of the university faculty can open up discussion on the ways and means by which the Library management can exploit this information to meet the information needs of the academic user at large. Findings show that the faculty members of both the universities share almost the same characteristics for the information needs and the methods used to meet those needs, irrespective of gender.

Keywords: Professional Information needs, Gender, North Eastern Hill University, Gauhati University, Faculty members

Introduction:

Information is one of several basic resources that are needed and utilized by human beings for their development and prosperity. Every person has the need for information. Without valid and up to-date information, it is impossible to progress in any field of life. Because of these reasons, information needs of the individual have become both discipline oriented and mission oriented.

Teachers in the University, whatever rank they hold and whatever age, gender and subject they belong to, are placed in a more unique position than those in other academic institutions such as schools and colleges. The students in the University being adults, are more alert and demanding, as a result of which University Faculty need to keep one step ahead of the students. Add to this the competitive atmosphere that exists in order to fulfill standards such as Academic Performance Index (API), and the need to keep up with ever growing literature and fast technology, then the Faculty's task becomes even more challenging. Extensive research and preparation are expected if one is to survive in the University set-up. This situation exists worldwide, maybe more in some countries and less in others. The need for information by University Faculty thus goes without saying. How they go about meeting this need has been a topic of many studies over the years.

A 'gender perspective' of information needs

There is a range of definitions for the term 'gender'. The common understanding of the term is the distinction drawn between differences based on sex (biology) and differences based on social assumptions about masculine and feminine behaviours (social constructs). **International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) (2004)** in its Guidance Document entitled 'Addressing the Needs of Women Affected by Armed Conflict', clearly stated that 'gender refers to the culturally expected behaviours of men and women based on roles, attitudes and values ascribed to them on the basis of their sex, whereas "sex" refers to biological and physical characteristics'. Also in the words of **Charlesworth (1999)** 'the term gender ...refers to the social construction of differences between women and men as ideas of "femininity" and "masculinity" – the excess cultural baggage associated with biological sex.'

On feminist conceptions, **Whitworth (2005)** feels that 'When feminists use the term gender, they are usually signaling a rejection of essentialized categories of women and men. Feminists argue that the assumptions that prevail in any given time or place – about what it is to be a man or a woman, or what is considered appropriately feminine or masculine behaviour – has effects on people's lives'.

For the purpose of this study, the term "gender" refers to the two sexes, male and female, within the context of society. The term "gender" does not indicate any meaning different from the above. As gender is a subject that is both highly personal and strongly public and despite the range of ways men and women are attributed roles in public and private life, using gender as a category of analysis for the

professional information needs of the university faculty can open up discussion on the ways and means by which the Library management can exploit to meet the information needs of the academic user at large.

Objectives:

North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) and Gauhati University (GU) faculty members mainly deal with teaching and researching. Information use is a situation dependent activity where as a seeker's actions are influenced by access to information, perceived quality and trust in the information source. The objectives of the study are:

1. To explore the professional information needs of the faculty members of NEHU and GU based on their gender.
2. To find out the methods used to meet the professional information needs of faculty members of NEHU and GU based on their gender.

Research Questions:

There are many studies related to gender perspective on other areas but no study have been done on the professional information needs of the university faculty with regards to their gender. This literature gap leads to the following research questions:

1. Do the male faculty members have the same professional information needs as that of the female faculty members?
2. Is there any similarity in the methods used to acquire professional information needs between the male and female faculty members?

Methodology:

The study used questionnaire-based survey method. This method is preferred as it is less time consuming and economical for a scattered population. 200 questionnaires were distributed to faculty members of NEHU and 200 questionnaires to the faculty members of GU, from which 114 faculty members of NEHU and 113 faculty members of GU responded. The collected data were analyzed, classified, and tabulated by employing statistical methods.

Sample Frame:

A sample frame is defined by Neuman (2006) as a list of cases in a population or the best approximation of a given population. The table below presents the sample frame used in the study.

North Eastern Hill University (NEHU)					Gauhati University (GU)				
Faculty	Strength of Faculty Members	Questionnaires Distributed	Response Received	Response %	Faculty	Strength of Faculty Members	Questionnaires Distributed	Response Received	Response %
Science	149	92	53	57.61%	Science	140	80	48	60%
Social Science	114	77	41	53.25%	Social Science	118	75	37	49.33%
Humanities	39	31	20	64.52%	Humanities	75	45	28	62.22%
Total	302	200	114	57%	Total	333	200	113	56.50%

Table 1: Survey Population and Samples

Age	NEHU						GU					
	Gender						Gender					
	Male			Female			Male			Female		
	Asst. Prof.	Assc. Prof.	Prof.	Asst. Prof.	Assc. Prof.	Prof.	Asst. Prof.	Assc. Prof.	Prof.	Asst. Prof.	Assc. Prof.	Prof.
25-35	50	-	-	10	-	-	26	-	-	15	-	-
36-45	8	6	-	6	5	-	-	7	-	5	3	-
46-55	-	7	6	-	4	2	4	15	7	-	6	5
56-65	-	8	2	-	-	-	-	5	9	-	-	6
Total	58	21	8	16	9	2	30	27	16	20	9	11

Table 2: Survey Population based on Gender

Data Analysis

The responses to the questionnaires that were handed out to the faculty members of NEHU and GU were collected and analyzed using SPSS 12.0 and also employing other statistical tools to get a better representation of the results.

Results

This report provides a summary of the professional information needs and the methods used to satisfy those needs by the faculty members of both the Universities i.e. NEHU and GU. The faculty members were asked to indicate the professional information needs and the methods used to satisfy those needs for their profession based on the objectives of the study.

Objective 1: To explore the professional information needs of the faculty members of NEHU and GU based on their gender.

On comparing the professional information needs versus the gender of the faculty members of NEHU and GU as shown in table 3 & fig. 1, it was found that both the male and female faculty members of NEHU, their professional information need is mainly for research work with the highest response rate of 89.66% & 85.19% respectively and followed by general awareness of which the response rate are 71.26% & 59.26%.

Professional Information Needs	NEHU				GU			
	Gender				Gender			
	Male	Resp. %	Female	Resp. %	Male	Resp. %	Female	Resp. %
Research Work	78	89.66	23	85.19	71	97.26	40	100.00
General Awareness	62	71.26	16	59.26	57	78.08	24	60.00
State of the Art Investigation	23	26.44	8	29.63	17	23.29	8	20.00
Preparing Answer to Questions	27	31.03	7	25.93	24	32.88	9	22.50
Reading/Thinking Purpose	61	70.11	12	44.44	42	57.53	20	50.00
Preparing Class Notes	43	49.43	15	55.56	34	46.58	17	42.50
Observation and Experiments	34	39.08	9	33.33	24	32.88	16	40.00
Preparing/Supplementing Lectures	46	52.87	15	55.56	45	61.64	20	50.00
Discussions	47	54.02	12	44.44	42	57.53	15	37.50
Other Needs (Spiritual Development	14	16.09	5	18.52	5	6.85	8	20.00
No. of Response	87	100.00	27	100.00	73	100.00	40	100.00

Table 3: Professional Information Needs Vs Gender Cross tabulation

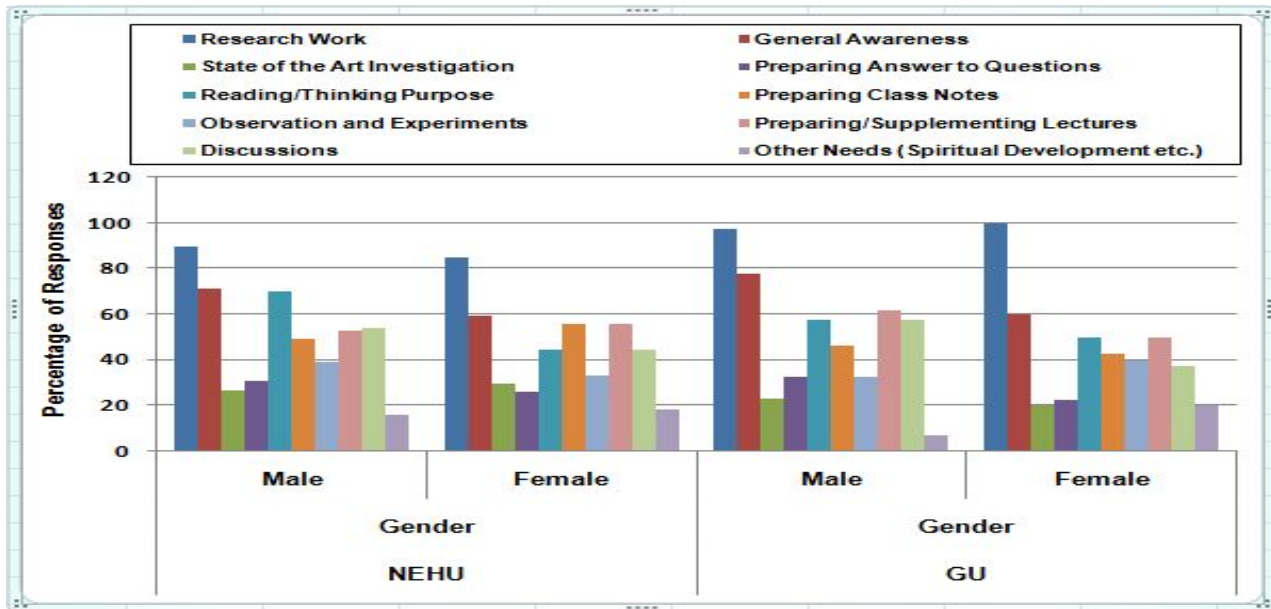


Fig. 1: Professional Information Needs Vs Gender of the Faculty Members

Whereas for GU, the main professional information needs of both the male and female faculty members is also research work with the highest response rate of 97.26% & 100% respectively and followed by general awareness with the response rate of 78.08% & 60% respectively.

Objective 2: To find out the methods used to meet the professional information needs of faculty members of NEHU and GU based on their gender.

Methods used for acquiring professional information needs	NEHU Gender				GU Gender			
	Male	Resp. %	Female	Resp. %	Male	Resp. %	Female	Resp. %
Scanning of Current Issues of Print/Online Journals	72	82.76	24	88.89	69	94.52	32	80.00
Scanning Recent Issues of Abstracting Tools	26	29.89	8	29.63	27	36.99	13	32.50
Attendance at Conferences	44	50.57	13	48.15	39	53.42	20	50.00
Internet/E-mail Alerts	74	85.06	18	66.67	66	90.41	33	82.50
Through Services from Library such as CAS & SDI	29	33.33	8	29.63	21	28.77	14	35.00
Personal Communication	34	39.08	11	40.74	43	58.90	12	30.00
List Server, E-archive, Databases etc.	23	26.44	7	25.93	17	23.29	10	25.00
Others (Mobile Apps, LIS Forum, Lislink etc)	4	4.60	2	7.41	3	4.11	1	2.50
No. of Response	87	100.00	27	100.00	73	100.00	40	100.00

Table 4: Methods used for acquiring professional information needs Vs Gender Crosstabulation

From Table 4 & Fig. 2 it is clear that for the male faculty members of NEHU, Internet/E-mail alerts is the highest method used to meet the professional information needs with 85.06% response rate followed by scanning of current issues of print/online journals with 82.76%.

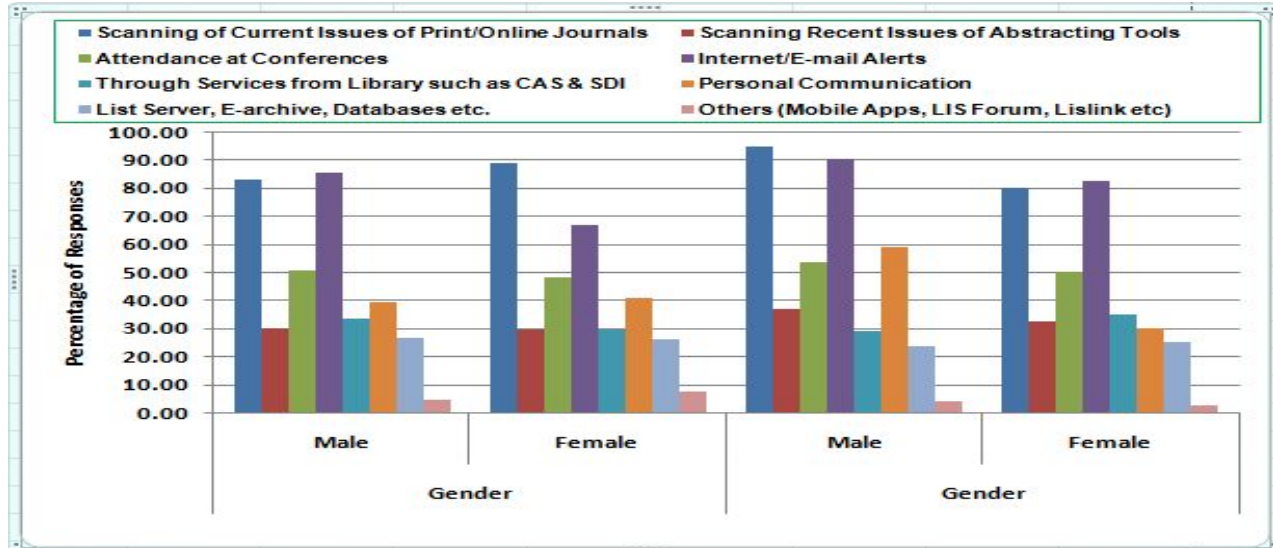


Fig. 2: Methods used for acquiring professional information needs Vs Gender of Faculty Members

Whereas the female faculty members of NEHU find scanning of current issues of print/online journals (88.89%) as the highest method for meeting professional information needs followed by Internet/E-mail alerts with 66.67% of the response rate. The male faculty members of GU also finds scanning of current issues of print/online journals (94.52%) as the highest method for meeting professional information needs followed by Internet/E-mail alerts with 90.41% of the response rate. On considering the female faculty members of GU, Table 4 & fig. 2 show that Internet/E-mail alerts is the highest method used to meet professional information needs with 85.06% of the response rate and then followed by scanning of current issues of print/online journals with 82.76%.

Discussions & Conclusion:

Studies on professional information needs of the university faculty members are many and the present one only adds to the bulk. Most studies are done in general but the present study is done specifically on the gender perspective of the university faculty members. Based on the reviewed of the

literatures, it was found that there is rarely any previous study done on professional information needs of the university faculty members with regards to their gender.

As the study is done based on the objectives stated, table 3 & fig. 1 shows that the most required professional information needs of the faculty members of NEHU and GU with regards to their genders are (1) for research work and followed by (2) for general awareness with an overall highest response rate.

Regarding the methods used for acquiring professional information needs with regards to the gender of the faculty members, table 4 & fig. 2 shows that the male faculty members of NEHU mostly used Internet/E-mail alerts to meet the professional information needs and followed by scanning of current issues of print/online journals, whereas the female faculty members find scanning of current issues of print/online journals as the most preferred method for meeting professional information needs and then followed by used Internet/E-mail alerts to meet the professional information needs. Whereas for GU faculty members, the situation is vice versa.

The study also tries to answer the following research questions:

1. Do the male faculty members have the same professional information needs as that of the female faculty members?
2. Is there any similarity in the methods used to acquire professional information needs between the male and female faculty members?

As discussed above, the study shows that there is little or no difference in the professional information needs of the faculty members in NEHU and GU with regards to gender. And also the findings based on table 4 & fig. 2 shows that irrespective of the genders, the faculty members indicate that there are similarities in the methods used to acquire professional information needs.

Hence we can conclude that irrespective of the gender, the faculty members of both the universities share almost the same characteristics in respect to their information needs and the methods used to meet those needs.

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