

Academic Libraries and the Role of Information Sources and Services for Societal News: A Comprehensive Study with Special Reference to West Bengal, India

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ABSTRACT

Academic libraries have evolved from traditional repositories of knowledge into dynamic hubs that support education, research, and active engagement in society.

In the current digital era, their role in disseminating accurate news and public information has become increasingly vital, particularly in countering misinformation and fostering critical thinking. This study investigates how academic libraries contribute to the availability of information on social issues, with a specific focus on West Bengal, India. The study employs a mixed-method approach, combining a thorough review of existing literature, content analysis, and an assessment of the library environment in academic institutions across West Bengal, India. It examines the types of information sources available, key services such as Current Awareness Services (CAS) and Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI), and their effectiveness in raising awareness about societal matters. The research highlights the significant role academic libraries play in keeping users informed and supporting research. However, it also identifies challenges such as the digital divide, inadequate funding, and information overload. The study suggests measures to strengthen digital infrastructure, enhance information literacy, and leverage emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, to serve users better.

Keywords: *Academic Libraries, Information Sources, Information Services, Societal News, West Bengal, Information Literacy, Digital Libraries*

1. INTRODUCTION

Academic libraries have always played a vital role in creating, sharing, and preserving knowledge within educational institutions.

Initially, they were mainly focused on providing access to books, journals, and reference materials. Over time, they have transformed into active centers that support teaching, learning, research, and community interaction. The rapid advancement of information and communication technologies has changed how information is created, accessed, and shared. In the digital world, academic libraries are crucial in helping users find reliable and up-to-date information on various social, political, economic, educational, and environmental issues. In modern society, having access to accurate and trustworthy information is essential for making informed decisions and being an active participant in the community. Libraries offer a wide range of information resources, including books, newspapers, e-journals, databases, government documents, institutional collections, and digital media. Through services such as reference services, current awareness services (CAS), selective dissemination of information (SDI), and information literacy programs, libraries assist users in staying updated on current social changes and public matters. The increasing prevalence of misinformation and fake news on digital platforms has made the role of libraries as trusted information sources even more critical. By promoting information literacy and critical thinking skills, academic libraries significantly contribute to the development of informed and responsible citizens. Existing research reviews indicate that many studies have examined digital libraries, information services, information literacy, and user behavior in academic library settings. Several researchers have explored the use of ICT and electronic resources in higher education. However, there has been less attention on how academic libraries specifically assist users in accessing, evaluating, and utilizing information related to societal news and public affairs. Additionally, limited studies have focused on the academic library environment in West Bengal, particularly how they support users in finding, assessing, and applying societal information. This lack of region-specific research creates a gap in understanding how academic libraries support societal awareness and informed citizenship in the context of West Bengal. Given the increasing reliance on digital information and the challenges posed by misinformation, it is essential to understand how academic libraries help users access reliable societal information. Understanding the availability of information sources, the effectiveness of information services, the level of user awareness, and existing challenges can assist libraries in improving their services and better meeting user needs. Consequently, this study aims to explore the role of academic libraries in providing information sources and services for societal news, with special emphasis on West Bengal, India. The findings may assist library professionals, administrators, policymakers, and researchers in developing strategies to strengthen information services and encourage active societal participation.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- I. To review the various information sources available in academic libraries for accessing societal news and related information.
- ii. To identify the information services used by academic libraries to disseminate societal news and current information.
- iii. To assess the level of awareness and usage of these information sources and services among library users.

iv. To analyze the role of academic libraries in promoting societal awareness, informed citizenship, and information literacy.

v. To identify the challenges academic libraries face in providing effective information sources and services for societal news in West Bengal, India.

vi. To suggest ways to improve information sources and services in academic libraries to better provide reliable societal information.

Research Questions

1. What types of information sources are available in academic libraries for accessing societal news?
2. Which information services are most frequently used by library users?
3. What is the level of awareness users have about CAS, SDI, and digital library services?
4. What challenges affect the effective spread of societal information through academic libraries?
5. How can academic libraries enhance their role in promoting societal awareness?

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 International Studies on Academic Libraries and Information Services

Academic libraries around the world have experienced significant changes because of developments in information and communication technologies.

Christine L. Borgman (2007) noted that academic libraries have shifted from being centered on collections to being concentrated on service, acting as knowledge capitals that grease access to digital information coffers. Also, Luciano Floridi (2010) stressed the added significance of reliable information sources in a digital society that's swamped with information and also suffers from misinformation.

Studies from developed countries show that academic libraries play a pivotal part in supporting informed citizenship by offering access to dependable information.

Experimenters have emphasized the significance of digital collections, institutional depositories, and information knowledge programs in helping druggies navigate complex information surroundings. The rise of fake news and misinformation has further corroborated the role of libraries as trusted providers of verified information.

3.2 Indian Studies on Academic Libraries

In India, academic libraries have experienced considerable modernization through public enterprises such as the INFLIBNET Centre and the National Digital Library of India.

These enterprises have vastly enhanced access to scholarly coffers and digital information services.

Arora (2015) bandied the development of digital library services in India and their impact on perfecting the vacuity of information.

Colourful studies have reported an increase in the use of electronic coffers, online databases, and institutional depositories in Indian universities. Experimenters have also noted that academic libraries are increasingly offering remote access services and digital reference services to help users beyond the physical library terrain.

Yet, studies suggest that challenges like inadequate backing, technological constraints, and differences in digital knowledge continue to impact the quality of library services, especially in underdeveloped areas.

3.3 Studies on Academic Libraries and Societal Information

Academic libraries are not only centers for academic communication but also important institutions that provide information on social, political, economic, educational, and environmental matters.

Experimenters have stated that libraries help in raising public mindfulness by furnishing access to journals, government publications, policy documents, reports, and digital news sources.

Recent literature indicates that libraries support popular involvement and informed decision-making by ensuring equal access to accurate information.

Through precisely named collections and information services, libraries help druggies understand current developments and public issues. The growing reliance on digital information sources has further expanded the role of academic libraries in supplying timely and accurate societal information.

3.4 Studies on CAS, SDI, Information, Knowledge, and Digital Libraries

Services similar to Current Awareness Service (CAS) and Picky Dispersion of Information (SDI) have long been honored as crucial tools for delivering applicable information to researchers.

W. Lancaster (1993) underscored the significance of stoner-focused information services in perfecting access to and use of information.

Current mindfulness Services help addicts stay updated on recent developments through newsletters, cautions, bulletins, and electronic announcements.

Picky Dispersion of Information offers customized information grounded on individual stoner requirements and interests.

Information knowledge has become another major area of study.

Exploration shows that knowledge programs help druggies develop the capability to fete, assess, and effectively use information coffers. Scholars argue that education in information and knowledge is especially important in reducing the spread of misinformation and fake news.

The rise of digital libraries has further changed how information services are delivered.

Digital libraries offer 24/7 access to electronic books, journals, databases, and multimedia coffers, thereby perfecting convenience and information availability.

3.5 Recent Trends in Academic Libraries, News Literacy, and Artificial Intelligence.

The rapid growth of digital technologies has significantly transformed the role of academic libraries in providing access to information and supporting informed citizenship. In recent years, the spread of fake news, misinformation, and disinformation through digital platforms has emerged as a major challenge for information users worldwide. Academic libraries have increasingly assumed responsibility for helping users identify reliable information sources and critically evaluate news content. According to Cooke (2021), libraries play a crucial role in combating misinformation by promoting information literacy skills and encouraging evidence-based information practices.

News literacy has become an important component of academic library services. News literacy refers to the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create news content in various formats. Academic libraries support news literacy through user education programs, workshops, and access to credible news resources. These initiatives help users distinguish between trustworthy information and misleading content, thereby contributing to informed decision-making and democratic participation.

Closely related to news literacy is the concept of Media and Information Literacy (MIL). UNESCO (2021) emphasizes that MIL enables individuals to understand the role of media and information in society while developing the skills necessary to evaluate information critically. Academic libraries have increasingly integrated MIL programs into their information literacy activities to help users navigate complex digital information environments. Through training sessions, online tutorials, and awareness campaigns, libraries contribute to the development of responsible and informed citizens.

Another emerging trend is the adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in academic libraries. AI technologies are increasingly being used to improve information retrieval, personalized recommendation systems, virtual reference services, and automated cataloging. Recent studies suggest that AI can enhance user experience by providing faster and more accurate access to information resources. However, researchers also highlight concerns related to privacy, algorithmic bias, and ethical use of AI in library services. Despite these challenges, AI offers significant opportunities for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of information services.

The concept of digital citizenship has also gained prominence in contemporary library discourse. Digital citizenship involves the responsible and ethical use of digital technologies and online information. Academic libraries contribute to digital citizenship by educating users about information ethics, online privacy, intellectual property rights, and responsible participation in digital communities. Such initiatives are particularly important in an era characterized by information overload and increasing reliance on digital communication platforms.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the digital transformation of academic libraries worldwide. During and after the pandemic, libraries expanded remote access services, digital collections, online reference assistance, virtual information literacy programs, and electronic resource delivery systems. These developments demonstrated the ability of academic libraries to adapt to changing user needs while ensuring uninterrupted access to information. Post-

pandemic studies indicate that many of these digital services have become permanent components of modern academic library operations.

In India, academic libraries have continued to modernize through initiatives such as the INFLIBNET center and the National Digital Library of India (NDLI). Between 2020 and 2026, significant progress has been made in expanding access to electronic resources, institutional repositories, digital learning platforms, and remote information services. Indian academic libraries are increasingly adopting innovative technologies and user-centered approaches to improve information accessibility and support academic as well as societal information needs. Nevertheless, challenges such as funding constraints, digital literacy gaps, technological infrastructure limitations, and unequal access to digital resources continue to affect the quality of library services in many regions.

These developments demonstrate that academic libraries are evolving beyond their traditional role as information repositories and are becoming active participants in promoting information literacy, news literacy, digital citizenship, and informed societal engagement. Their contribution is particularly significant in helping users access reliable societal news and navigate the increasingly complex digital information landscape.

3.6 Research Gap

Although previous studies have extensively examined digital libraries, information literacy, ICT applications, and user services in academic libraries, limited research has specifically investigated the role of academic libraries in providing access to societal news and public affairs information. Furthermore, existing studies have given comparatively less attention to issues such as fake news, news literacy, media and information literacy, digital citizenship, artificial intelligence-based library services, and post-pandemic digital information practices within academic library environments. Research focusing specifically on academic libraries in West Bengal remains scarce. Most available studies concentrate on library automation, digital resource usage, and electronic information services rather than examining how academic libraries contribute to societal awareness, informed citizenship, and access to reliable societal information. Therefore, the present study seeks to address these gaps by investigating the role of academic libraries in providing information sources and services for societal news in West Bengal, India, within the contemporary digital information environment.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

The study uses a descriptive survey research design to explore the role of academic libraries in providing information sources and services related to societal news and current affairs. The descriptive approach is appropriate as it allows for the systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of data regarding users' awareness, usage patterns, and views on library resources and services. The study also includes analytical components to assess the effectiveness of information services in promoting societal awareness.

4.2 Population of the Study

The population consists of users of selected academic libraries in West Bengal, India, including undergraduate students, postgraduate students, research scholars, and faculty members. These groups represent the main stakeholders who regularly access library resources and services for academic and general information purposes.

4.3 Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents from academic institutions in West Bengal, India.

This technique was chosen to ensure representation from different categories of library users who actively make use of library information sources and services. Respondents were chosen based on their availability and willingness to take part in the survey.

4.4 Sample Size

A total of 150 respondents participated in the study.

Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Undergraduate Students	70	46.66
Postgraduate Students	50	33.33
Research Scholars	20	13.33
Faculty Members	10	6.66
Total	150	100%

The sample size was considered adequate to obtain a general understanding of users' perspectives on information sources and services related to societal news.

4.5 Data Collection Procedure

Primary data were collected by distributing questionnaires to library users at selected academic institutions in West Bengal, India. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their participation was entirely voluntary. Completed questionnaires were collected, reviewed for accuracy, and prepared for further analysis. Secondary data were obtained from books, academic journals, conference papers, government documents, reports, and electronic databases that focus on academic libraries, information services, and the dissemination of societal information.

4.6 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire consisted of 15 structured questions, divided into four sections.

Section A: Included demographic details such as age, gender, and academic position.

Section B: Covered the use of information sources, including frequency of library visits, preferred formats (print or digital), and utilization of news-related resources.

Section C: Dealt with awareness of library services, such as Current Awareness Services (CAS) and Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI), usage of digital services, and participation in information and knowledge-related programs.

Section D: Addressed challenges and suggestions, including difficulties encountered, level of satisfaction, and recommendations for improvement.

4.7 Statistical Techniques Used

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Frequency counts and percentage analysis were applied to summarize the characteristics of respondents and their usage patterns.

4.8 Limitations of the Study

The study has the following limitations:

It is confined to selected academic institutions in West Bengal, India

- i. The number of respondents was limited to 150.
- ii. The findings are based on self-reported data, which may be affected by personal bias.
- iii. The study primarily focuses on information sources and services related to societal news and does not cover all aspects of library operations.
- iv. Time and resource constraints restricted the geographical reach of the survey.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 Frequency of Library Use

Frequency	Respondents	Percentage
Daily	65	43.33%
Weekly	55	36.66%
Occasionally	20	13.33%
Rarely	10	6.66%

Interpretation: The data reveal that 40.33% of the respondents visit the library on a weekly basis, while 36.66% use the library daily. Only 7% of the respondents reported rare use of library services. The findings indicate a high level of engagement with academic libraries among users, reflecting the continued importance of libraries as information centres.

5.2 Preferred Information Sources for Societal News

Table 5.2: Preferred Information Sources

Source Type	Respondents	Percentage
Digital Sources	80	53.33%
Print Sources	45	30%
Both	25	16.66%

Interpretation: The majority of respondents (53.33%) prefer digital sources for accessing societal news due to their convenience, accessibility, and real-time updates. Print sources are preferred by 30% of respondents, while 17% use both print and digital sources. This demonstrates the growing dependence on electronic information resources in academic environments.

Table 5.3: Types of Societal News Accessed

Category	Percentage
Political	35%
Economic	20%
Social Issues	25%
Educational	15%
Environmental	5%

Interpretation: Political news is the most frequently accessed category (35%), followed by social issues (25%) and economic news (20%). Educational and environmental news receive comparatively lower attention. This indicates that users are particularly interested in current affairs that directly influence governance and social development.

5.4 Awareness and Utilization of Library Services

Table 5.4: Awareness and Utilization of Library Services

Service	Awareness	Usage
CAS	65%	50%
SDI	40%	25%
Digital Library Services	75%	60%
Information Literacy Programs	55%	35%

Interpretation: Digital library services show the highest level of awareness (75%) and usage (60%). CAS is moderately known among users, whereas SDI exhibits the lowest awareness and utilization rates. The findings suggest the need for greater promotion of personalized information services such as SDI.

5.5 Purpose of Accessing Societal News

Table 5.5: Purpose of Accessing Societal News

Purpose	Percentage
Academic Research	35%
General Awareness	15%
Competitive Exams	40%
Personal Interest	10%

Interpretation: Competitive examinations are the primary reason for accessing societal news (40%), followed by preparation for Academic research (35%). The results demonstrate that societal information plays an important role in supporting both academic and career-related activities.

5.6 Challenges Faced by Users

Table 5.6: Challenges Faced by Users

Challenge	Percentage
Poor Internet Connectivity	20%
Lack of Digital Skills	30%
Limited Resources	25%
Information Overload	10%
Lack of Awareness	15%

Interpretation: Lack of digital skills is identified as the most significant challenge (30%), followed by limited availability of resources (25%) and poor internet connectivity (20%). These findings highlight the need for digital literacy training and improved technological infrastructure in academic libraries.

5.7 User Satisfaction Level

Table 5.7: User Satisfaction Level

Level	Percentage
Highly Satisfied	20%
Satisfied	50%
Neutral	20%
Dissatisfied	10%

Interpretation: A majority of respondents (70%) are either satisfied or highly satisfied with the information sources and services provided by academic libraries. However, 10% expressed dissatisfaction, indicating opportunities for service enhancement, particularly in digital access and user awareness programmes.

6. FINDINGS

Based on the analysis of data from 150 respondents, the study presents the following key findings:

- i. Academic libraries continue to play a major role in providing access to information sources related to societal news and current affairs.
- ii. Digital information sources are the most preferred medium for accessing societal news, with 53.33% of respondents mainly using electronic resources.
- iii. A large number of users visit libraries regularly, showing that academic libraries remain relevant even in the digital age.
- iv. Political and social issues are the most commonly accessed categories of societal news among library users.

- v. Academic research and preparation for competitive examinations are the main reasons users access societal information.
- vi. Awareness and use of digital library services are higher compared to traditional information services.
- vii. Current Awareness Service (CAS) has moderate awareness and usage among respondents.
- viii. Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) has lower awareness and usage, suggesting that this service is not sufficiently promoted.
- ix. Information literacy programmes are not widely used, despite their importance in helping users evaluate information critically.
- x. Lack of digital skills, limited resources, and poor internet connectivity are the main challenges users face when accessing information.
- xi. Most respondents are satisfied with the information services provided by academic libraries.
- xii. Academic libraries help society by providing access to authentic and reliable information resources.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are suggested:

i. Strengthen Digital Infrastructure

Academic libraries should improve internet connectivity, computer facilities, and access to digital resources to better deliver information services.

ii. Expand Digital Resource Collections

Libraries should add more e-journals, databases, and online news sources that are relevant to societal issues.

iii. Promote Current Awareness Services (CAS)

Libraries should regularly provide news alerts, newsletters, and bulletin services to keep users informed.

iv. Enhance Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) Services

Libraries should actively promote personalized information services that fit the academic and research needs of users.

v. Strengthen Information Literacy Programmes

Regular training sessions should be held to help users identify credible information sources and combat misinformation.

vi. Improve User Awareness

Libraries should run introductory sessions and awareness campaigns about the available information sources and services.

vii. Increase Financial Support

More funding should be allocated for modernizing technology, acquiring resources, and developing staff.

viii. Develop Staff Competencies

Library staff should receive ongoing training in digital librarianship, information management, and new technologies.

ix. Encourage Collaborative Initiatives

Academic libraries should work with universities, government bodies, and information networks to enhance resource sharing.

x. Integrate Emerging Technologies

Technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI), machine learning, and data analytics can be used to improve information retrieval and personalized services.

8. CONCLUSION

Academic libraries have become dynamic information hubs that support teaching, learning, research, and societal development.

This study shows that academic libraries in West Bengal play a significant role in supplying information and services related to societal news and current affairs. By using both traditional and digital resources, libraries help in promoting informed citizenship, academic growth, and social awareness.

The study indicates a growing preference for digital information sources, which shows changing user habits in the modern information environment.

While digital library services are well-known and used, services like Selective Dissemination of Information need more promotion. Challenges such as a lack of digital skills, limited resources, and poor internet connectivity still hinder effective access to information.

To overcome these challenges, academic libraries need to improve digital infrastructure, expand information literacy programs, enhance user awareness, and adopt new technologies.

By doing so, they can better provide timely and reliable information related to societal issues.

Future research could explore the impact of artificial intelligence, digital transformation, and new information services on the spread of societal news in academic libraries across different parts of India.

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