INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOUR (ISB) AND INFORMATION NEEDS SATISFACTION AMONG POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA, MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper fills the gap in understanding the Information Seeking Behaviour (ISB) among the postgraduate students in Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, UiTM, Shah Alam, Malaysia. Specifically, the aims of this paper are to determine the information needs, to identify the main information source in ISB, and to investigate the relationship between ISB and information needs satisfaction. By using self-administered questionnaire adapted from previous researchers, some of the issues of interest were obtained. Result revealed that ISB of postgraduate students were motivated by a wide variety of information needs including the need to fulfil research requirements. Also, internet was found as the main formal source while conversation with friends/colleagues was the main informal source used in seeking and obtaining information needed. It is worth mentioning that ISB was positively correlated with information needs satisfaction. This study could be considered as a starting point for further studies and for comparisons across faculties and disciplines in the University particularly in social sciences disciplines pertaining to ISB of the postgraduate students.

Keywords: information needs, information source, information needs satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

Information has become one of the basic needs and important elements for survival in knowledge-based societies. Looking into the perspective of postgraduate students, they occasionally use information for personal and educational purposes hence their behavior of seeking for information will be dissimilar due to differences in human behavior. Wilson (2000) defined ISB as a learning process and information that people seek, give, and use which are based on different context such as in everyday living, the workforce place or educational institutions while Ajiboye and Tella (2007) described ISB as the means of individual or group of community required and accumulate for information in order to fulfil their personal use, knowledge improvement, and development. There are a number of reasons that lead the behavior of individual in their choice of information, which includes a course of studies, age, level, and religion, particularly among postgraduate students (Owolobi, Jimoh & Okpeh, 2010). There is no comprehensive study on this matter mainly in Hospitality and Tourism courses thus there is a need to fill the gap.

Ajiboye and Tella (2000) stated that existing studies on excellence in higher education, have been modestly taken into consideration in the aspect of the way students in higher institutions manage their learning and its pursue for quality. As well, the enhancement in good services and equipped facilities along with the qualified educators will subsequently lead to improvement in students' academic accomplishment. Conversely, this supposition may seem too ingenuous since it is possible to argue that students' accomplishment may still be vulnerable due to some factors like how the students seek and search academic information. Therefore, it is very crucial to study students' manner on managing their learning skills to seek for academic information to excel in their academic. Past scholars affirmed that when students were being given tasks and assignments about the course requirements, they will automatically seek for the required information independently and confer with the right information sources in relation to academic information. To complete postgraduate programs with flying colors, the right application of ISB is imperative. Not to mention, seeking and searching for effective information requires tremendous effort whereby they must be able to know how to use the correct method of obtaining the information to satisfy their information needs. For that reason, it is important to understand the information needs and ISB of the postgraduate students to help graduates in their research activities for their Master and Ph.D. degrees hence there is a need to fill this gap.

Based on the abovementioned statement, this study aims to investigate the ISB of postgraduate students and specifically, researchers will focus on the behavior in obtaining information on the nature of academic information needed by the postgraduate students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Information

Information is defined as something which students need during their studies when they construct meaning about the subjects in the process of learning (Ajiboye & Tella, 2007). Behaviour of each seeks for information will be different due to differences in human behavior and the environment surroundings (Owolobi et al., 2010; Ajiboye & Tella, 2007). Moreover, Safahieh (2007) described information needs as a gap in a person's knowledge, when an individual experienced an ambiguity at the conscious level as a problem, then attempts to seek for a solution. It is agreed that the search may be taken continuously until the individual contented the unknown matters.

Information Seeking Behaviour (ISB)

Wright and Guy (1997) stated that the activity of ISB could be defined when information is accumulated to recognize a message that satisfied a perceived need. Wilson (1999) describes ISB as a consequence of a need perceived by an information user, who, in order to satisfy that need, makes demands upon formal or informal information sources, which result in success or failure to find relevant information. If successful, the individual then makes use of the information found and may either fully or partially satisfy the perceived need, or if they fail to satisfy the need, they have to restart the search process. In other words, failure to gain desirable information from right information sources will lead to dissatisfaction of information need. However, Bawden (2006) argued that Wilson (1999) should include an explicit consideration of the organizational and cultural environment since Leckie, Pettigrew and Slyvian (1996) postulated that ISB can be influenced by other factors such as personal reasons for seeking information, the type of information required and sources and also ways which needed information is required.

Information Sources

Information seeking can be performed by formal and informal sources (Majid & Kassim, 2000; Majid & Ai, 2002). Formal sources of information primarily encompass sources from internet and library while informal source of information consist of oral interaction through telephone calls, letters, e-mail, conversations at meeting and conferences (Wilson, 1999). Previous scholars declared the internet as the main formal source to complete research work due to limited service offered by library make them less to visit the library (Vezzosi, 2008; George, Bright, Hurlbert, Linke, Clair & Stein, 2006). The emergence of the internet allows people to search for information conveniently as it is more user-friendly and easy accessibility (Bhatti, 2008). In contrast, Majid and Kassim (2000) contended that books from the university library were ranked as the most important information source for teaching and research. On the other side, for informal sources, Vezzosi (2008) classified people include the

academicians, librarians, and colleagues as the most important informal source in advising and directing to the relevant and needed information. Additionally, other scholars choose colleagues (Bhatti, 2008), and meeting with the experts (George et al., 2006; Marouf & Anwar, 2010) as their main informal sources.

Information Needs Satisfaction

Information is needed because it affects people's lives and people need information to obtain answers to specific questions (Nicholas, 2000). George et al, (2006) stated that information need varies among disciplines and by programs which depended on what the respondent is taken. The used of formal and informal sources of information are based on individual purpose and need of information search. In order to satisfy an information need, the process started from the ISB will lead the user starts to search for formal or informal information sources which result in success or failure to find relevant information. Sheppard (1993) claimed that sources of information used to satisfy information need were the library, other teachers, and their supervisors.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted using a quantitative research method where the empirical investigation was carried out to determine the relationship on ISB among postgraduate students. 303 full-time and part-time students from Masters and Ph.D. programs in the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam were chosen as the sample. The survey was adapted from previous literature and was divided into four sections. Section A with 14-items measured the information needs using ranking from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). Section B was created to measure ISB with 25-items using six-point Likert Scale on the level of agreement from (1) "Never" to (6) "Always" while Section C measuring Information Needs Satisfaction also with 25-items by using six-point Likert Scale on the level of agreement from (1) "Not Applicable" to (6) "Very Satisfied". Section D asking on personal customer data includes gender, age, program specialization, the level of the program, and student status.

A pilot study was conducted among 30 postgraduate students from the total population of postgraduate students in Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management in order to ensure the reliability and effectiveness of the instrument. The survey was conveniently distributed and conducted within two weeks with the help of research assistants. A brief detail about the purpose of the study was mentioned, and participation was voluntary, and all the information provided is strictly confidential. A total of 167 questionnaires was collected, and the data were coded and keyed in Social Statistical Package (SPSS) version 17. The reliability test was undertaken for Section B and C separately. The result showed that the instrument and items used was reliable with coefficient alpha value at 0.899 for Section B, and 0.885 for Section C.

FINDING, ANALYSES, AND RESULTS

Customer's Profiles

From the descriptive statistics, more than 50 percent (n=120) were females and 85.6 percent (n=143) were between 20-30 years old. It was found that 65.3 percent (n=109) were full-time students compared to 34.7 percent (n=58) of part-time. The majority of the respondents belonged to Master by Coursework program which represents by 89.8 percent (n=150) and not to mention, 66 of them were from Hospitality Management program.

Mean Scores and Standard Deviations

It was found that the main information needs of postgraduate students were the need to fulfill research requirements (M=2.19). In addition, Table 1 reflects the formal source of information which revealed Internet search engines ranked the highest (M=5.37; SD=1.021) and more often used by respondents followed by journal online (M=4.37; SD=1.184).

Table 1: Results of mean score and standard deviation for Information Source
(Formal source)

Information Source (Formal source)	Mean (*M*)	Standard Deviation (*SD*)
Books	3.34	1.615
Abstracts and indexes in print	2.85	1.180
Online public access catalog (OPAC)	2.77	1.371
Abstract and indexes on CD-ROM	2.37	1.204
Scanning journal titles in the library	2.76	1.394
Browsing shelves for books	2.91	1.171
Research Articles	4.05	1.173
Abstracting and indexing Sources	3.37	1.292
Journals online	4.37	1.184
Theses and Dissertations	4.23	1.260
Media, TV, radio and newspapers	3.93	1.547
Books reviews	3.08	1.373
Bibliographies	2.81	1.312
The Internet search engine	5.37	1.021
Citation (references in material used)	3.92	1.441
By chance (e.g.: while searching on a specific topic)	3.85	1.096
Website of bookstores (e.g.: Amazon.com)	3.40	1.419
Indexing Journal	3.11	1.458

Internet discussion forums or newsgroups	3.44	1.421
Electronic database	3.92	1.482
Publisher catalogs and flyers	2.83	1.423

On the other hand, for the informal source, Table 2 demonstrated that conversation with friend/colleagues ranked the highest mean score (M=4.42; SD=1.272). Result for information needs satisfaction through their ISB of information sources shows on mean scores between 4.96 and 3.11. Most of the respondents were satisfied using internet search engine as their formal source (M=4.96; SD=0.996) followed by Citations (M=4.50, SD=0.992), while for informal sources, respondents were somewhat satisfied on Consultation with experts in the field with a mean score of 4.61 (SD=1.014).

**Table 2: Results of mean score and standard deviation for Information Source (Informal source)**

Information Source (Informal Sources)	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Conversation with friends/colleagues	4.42	1.272
Consultation with experts in field	3.93	1.432
Attending conference, seminars, and workshops	3.24	1.465
Conversation with library staff	2.34	1.292

Analyzing the Relationship between ISB and Information Needs Satisfaction.

The Pearson's Correlation Analysis was conducted to test the relationship between the independent and dependent variable. It was found that there was a positive relationship with the large correlation between ISB (Independent Variable) and Information Needs Satisfaction (Dependent Variable) (r=.737, p<0.01). The correlation between formal source and information needs satisfaction showed that there was a positive relationship with a large correlation (r=.692, p<0.01) while for the informal source, it was found that there was a positive relationship with a medium correlation (r=.460, p<0.01). All in all, correlation analyses support the hypothesis testing mentioned in preceding paragraphs.

Table 3: Correlations among Variables

Measures	Information Needs Satisfaction	Information Needs Satisfaction (Formal Source)	Information Needs Satisfaction (Informal Source)
Pearson Correlation	.737**	.692**	.460**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
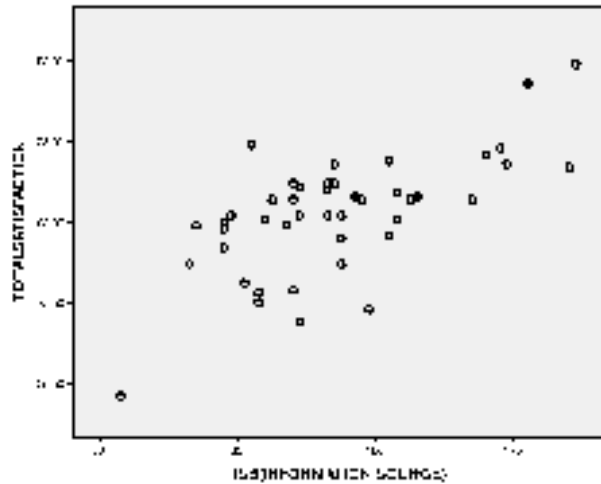
Figure 1: Scatterplot for Information Needs Satisfaction (Dependent Variable)

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

This study has investigated the ISB of postgraduate students through formal and informal sources in the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management at UiTM, Shah Alam, Malaysia. Findings depicted that the needs to fulfill research requirement were the most important to be the main information need compared to other items which corroborated well with the existing literature (Maarof & Anwar, 2010; Nicholas, 2000; Kakai et al., 2004). Hence, not counted into different levels which were Ph.D., Master by Research and Master by coursework, the conclusion can be done by saying that the nature of the postgraduate students was research based with different complexity of research requirements depending on different program levels. Again, for main formal information source, internet search engines with the highest mean score overwhelmed other formal sources and this supported findings by George et al. (2006), Vezzosi (2008) and Bhatti (2008). Indubitably, the era of information technology slightly affects the ISB of the postgraduate students. Moreover, for informal source, conversation with friends/colleagues simultaneously supported the other researchers (George et al., 2006; Marouf & Anwar, 2010).

Furthermore, finding revealed that most of the postgraduate students were depend on informal sources of information rather than formal sources and this statement opposed to Marouf and Anwar (2010) as they believed students mainly depending on and more satisfied with journals and books (formal source). The level of information needs satisfaction with an informal source for a conversation with friends and colleagues is lower than satisfied, and it was somewhat positively lower than formal source level of satisfaction and this aligned with Marouf and Anwar (2010). This study contributes to the very limited research literature about this topic in Malaysia. Ergo, it can be used to educate and create awareness on the information sources available for the postgraduate students besides declares the importance of ISB in providing benefits to the knowledge of the postgraduate students' academic. There is a need to conduct further research in other faculties as this study were limited to the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management only and the result cannot be used to generalize in ISB studies. It could be considered as a starting point for further studies to make comparisons across faculties in social science disciplines.

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