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Online information consumption among faculty and students of the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI) during the COVID-19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The study set out to investigate the online information behaviour of faculty and students of the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI) in Ghana during the COVID-19 pandemic. A quantitative approach was used to gather data from the entire population of 317 faculty members and students. Out of the 317 copies of questionnaire administered, 260 were completed, returned and analysed, representing an 81.5% response rate. The study found that the pandemic increased the frequency at which faculty and students access information online, as they spent more hours online than before the pandemic. All the respondents realised a new information need, among which health information was the most mentioned new information need realised by faculty and students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings also revealed that the respondents encountered a number of challenges: information overload, lack of training and skill in the use of online information. It is therefore recommended, among others, that the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI) library should organise training and assistance to faculty and students to enhance their information search and retrieval skills. It is expected that the study will offer perspective on the subject of online information behaviour of a previously unrepresented population during a pandemic.

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KEYWORDS

Online information behaviour; information behaviour; information need; COVID-19; electronic information use

Introduction

The emergence of the coronavirus disease, also known as COVID-19, affected all spheres of human life globally. The outbreak changed the operations of several industries around the world and transformed services offered by banks, hospitals, churches, shopping malls and other businesses; they were forced to adapt to working remotely and providing their clients with online services. The extent to which people use information and use digital media to acquire information increased due to the pandemic.

In the opinion of (Wilson 2000) information use involves the individual's quest for knowledge, including what bothers his or her cognitive mind and issues pertaining to the environment. Various researchers are of the view that users gather and use

information to clear their doubts on most issues (Haider and Sundin 2022; Montesi 2021; Ocloo 2020; Olarongbe et al. 2013). Thus, the provision of more quality information results in fewer uncertainties, a position that confirms Ocloo's (2020) statement that information 'has been described as power'. The reason has been that it 'gives the bearer or receiver knowledge to act to improve upon a situation or develop strategies to cope with situations in instances where solutions do not emerge immediately' (para. 1). The emergence of COVID-19 created a lot of uncertainties as it affected all spheres of life. Organisations, industries and the general public needed information to better understand the nature of the virus, how to possibly prevent its spread and also go about their day-to-day activities. As most countries went under lockdown, people were forced to adopt strategies to survive the pandemic.

Higher education institutions were also greatly affected by the pandemic (Alsulaiman and Rentner 2021). The strategy adopted in higher education institutions across the globe during the outbreak of COVID-19 was to adopt virtual means of interaction. As Alhosani et al. (2023), Daumiller et al. (2021), and Shahzad et al. (2021) determined, a lot of universities moved away from face-to-face to online teaching, changing the information behaviour of faculty and students in universities. Many universities and colleges replaced traditional exams with online assessment tools such as Socrative, Google Forms and Poll Everywhere. Virtual online communication platforms such as Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts and Google Meet enabled lectures to continue amidst the COVID-19 pandemic (Choi et al. 2020). Also, Kuwonu (2020), presents that several universities and schools in countries like Ghana, Rwanda, Egypt and Liberia switched their programmes to online platforms and encouraged students to get connected. In other countries like Nigeria and Morocco, online repositories were created by the governments with education materials for teachers, and the Rwanda education board established a website purposely to support online learning and provide educational content (Kuwonu 2020).

With the drastic shift to virtual means of conducting personal and academic businesses, the researchers deemed it appropriate to investigate the online information needs and their associated challenges of faculty and students of National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI) in Ghana during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI) is the only public tertiary institution in Ghana that provides professional training in film and television production. Since its inception in 1978, The National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI) has providing training programmes that are designed to develop students' scholarly, creative and professional approach to film making and television production. The National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI) before the COVID-19 pandemic, relied on in-person, hands-on activities such as teaching, shooting and editing. The pandemic, however, forced the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI) as a media institute, to move teaching and learning online.

Studying the online information behaviour of academics in the television and media landscape during a period of global pandemic that caused a surge in the reliance on the digital space is very essential. This is because aside from the need for personal information by this population, their area of discipline depends very much on multi-media rich content with regular release of new content all over the world, coupled with the use of current digital platforms to create and share digital content.

A study on online information behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic remains relevant even after the pandemic. The pandemic brought about a shift in information behaviour by accelerating the adoption of online platforms for teaching and learning, thereby altering previous information behaviour patterns and reshaping long-term habits into newly acquired behaviour that may last a lifetime. Though the pandemic is over, research on the changes in information behaviour patterns, especially in an academic setting, provides insight into how the current digital and hybrid academic environment was shaped out of the pandemic, especially in an under-resourced environment like Ghana, hitherto with mostly manual means of transactions.

This research, therefore, provides stakeholders in the current and future information ecology with knowledge to shape policy design and strategies to develop digital infrastructure and digital skills of people to meet the needs of the current digital post-COVID-19 world and preparedness towards future pandemics.

Statement of the problem

It has been noted by Murgor (2015) that online information behaviour enhances teaching and learning in higher education globally, but some developing countries in Africa are deficient. This has been noted by a number of scholars to be caused by the high cost of infrastructure, poor searching and retrieval skills, unstable power supply, limited access to computers, difficulty in navigating instructions, slow internet speed, poor quality of facilities, lack of technical support, and lack of online retrieval and evaluation skills (Jacobs, Amuta, and Jeon 2017; Nkomo, Ocholla, and Jacobs 2011; Shiweda 2013).

Additionally, studies also suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic affected the online information behaviour of individuals and institutions. Dadaczynski et al. (2021) in a study found that students mostly have problems searching for information online because they lack certain abilities to search for and evaluate information. Furthermore, Nguyen et al. (2020) in a survey on people's digital communication during the pandemic observed a vast increase in the respondents' digital communication. Many of the studies conducted during the pandemic focused on large universities, with relatively few studies available on special and small institutions in Africa. Also, there is a dearth of research on the online information seeking behaviour of this unique group of academics teaching and learning film and television making, especially in Ghana.

With the identification of existing challenges to online information behaviour as outlined from existing literature above, and also from an earlier finding that the faculty and students at the National Film and Television Institute in Ghana do not have access to adequate training and electronic resources from the library of the Institute (Koranteng and Ocloo 2023), the researchers sought to investigate the online information behaviour of faculty and students at the National Film and Television Institute in Ghana, with the following objectives:

- (1) Determine the online information needs of faculty and students of National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI) during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- (2) Ascertain the kinds of online resources National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI) faculty and students were using during the pandemic.
- (3) Identify the challenges faculty and students encounter in seeking information online during the pandemic.

Theoretical framework

Anchored on Marchionini and White's (2007) model of online information seeking behaviour, this study sought to investigate the extent of online information consumption among faculty and students at the National Film and Television Institute in Ghana during the pandemic. Although the framework is termed online information seeking behaviour, it has components that cover every aspect of online information behaviour. Hence, its adoption. This model was first propounded by Marchionini in his 1995 study, where he described the information-seeking process as a set of activities that people undertake in a progressive and diversely iterative manner (Schamber 1996). According to Marchionini and White (2007), subprocesses that define the online information seeking behaviour framework involve recognizing a need for information, accepting the challenge, formulating the problem, expressing the problem, examining the results, reformulating the problem and using the information. Per the objectives of the research, the study adopted the first three elements of the theory as explained below;

Recognizing a need for information, accepting the challenge and formulating the problem

According to Marchionini and White (2007), this stage reflects when the information seeker realises a need for information and accepts the challenge to take the necessary action to fulfil the need. Therefore, if an individual or user challenges him or herself to look for information, there is always a situation that causes the need for information. That is the situation where the user becomes aware that there is a need to solve a problem, hence looks for information. In that manner, the user recognises and accepts the need for information. For instance, such needs may arise during individual interactions in working environments and learning centres.

Also, accepting the challenge is dependent on time limitations and how close the available information is. Information that is far from the user may diminish the user's desire to go look for it. If a user needs information whilst working online, the electronic sources available make it easier to accept the need for information and help instil some kind of confidence in the user (Marchionini and White 2007). In addition, the problem formulation used here expresses the importance of the problem that is articulated by the seeker, which results in access to the right information. The information seeker considers the kind of information and provides key details that will give answers to his or her needs (Marchionini and White 2007).

As established by the researchers earlier, there is a radical move to online activities by institutions and individuals, which has forced people to depend on information online and perform a lot of work online. Thus, an adoption of Marchionini and White's framework will support the study of faculty and students' online information behaviour at the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI), during a pandemic. Specifically, the model will help identify how researchers and students of The National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI) ascertain their information needs, the extent to which they use online information resources to meet their information needs and how they can express their needs on the online system. Noting that, as scholars in filmmaking, broadcast journalism and multimedia, access to information is not the

only requirement of faculty and students, but the ability to retrieve appropriate information is relevant as an individual's behaviour towards getting the answers to questions and broadening his or her horizon specifies his or her information seeking behaviour.

Literature Review

Online information needs and behaviour of faculty and students before the COVID-19

Information is seen as a basic human need and, therefore, a critical factor for survival. This became more critical during the COVID-19 pandemic. Humans have always exhibited the need for information and this has become more intense due to the availability of online information. Online information behaviour is defined as an active process of obtaining information from the internet (Esew et al. 2016). This definition, according to Esew et al. (2016) stems from the perception that any form of activity a person engages in on the internet constitutes information behaviour.

As has been noted by Dutta and Das (2017), the internet has become the primary source of information, with users relying on different online platforms (S. Kumar, Kumar, and Bhasker 2018). Faculty and students in higher education use the internet to search for information, which is mostly prompted by their academic activities such as examinations, research and assignments (Soyemi and Oshineye 2015). This is confirmed by Arumuru (2021) and Majyambere (2014) that information needs of faculty and students include both academic and personal information needs, which revolve around the learning process, research activities and their everyday life.

A number of research works have been conducted on the online information needs of students and academics before the COVID-19 pandemic. These research works brought to the fore findings on different aspects of the online information behaviour of the participants, including the kind of online materials they used, the amount of time spent online and the purpose of use of online resources.

The findings from these studies revealed that academics need a wide range of electronic resources, including e-books, films, e-language dictionaries, e-language encyclopaedia and language websites (Westwood 2012). The purpose of needing such materials has been widely written about in the literature; Kankam (2017), for instance, discovered that academics sought online information for both personal and academic works. In terms of academic work, respondents access the internet for purposes such as class assignments, information literacy skills, examinations, research projects and class tests. The study further revealed that learners were accessing online information for personal purposes such as communication, entertainment, networking and socialisation, news and general awareness. Similarly, Shiweda (2013), in a study, confirms that learners search for information online for communication/social networking and entertainment. Also, Nkomo (2009) recognised that the main purposes for which students and staff used the web were for research, studies, teaching and communication. It was also revealed that students and staff used the web for other purposes aside from academic, such as searching for employment, banking or making travel and hotel reservations.

Likewise, Rangaswamy, Manjunatha, and Kumar (2017) in a study on internet use by teachers and students, identified networking, research, communication, entertainment and general awareness as some of the purposes that compel teachers and students to seek information on the internet. In another study undertaken to investigate the use of electronic resources among academics at the University of Karachi in Pakistan, by Ansari and Zuberi (2010), majority of the faculty members had the skills to search for and retrieve information online. The main purpose for which faculty used electronic resources was to enhance their knowledge and to prepare lecture notes. Some challenges noted by the participants were limited knowledge of electronic resources available in the library, internet speed and reliability.

A comparative analysis by Nkomo, Ocholla, and Jacobs (2011) to investigate the web information seeking behaviour of students and staff in rural and urban-based universities in South Africa identified information for teaching/research, communication, self-development, examinations, information for funding, information for class tests, news and general awareness as some of the information faculty and students retrieve on the web. It was also discovered that although most people in academia were familiar with the web, they had difficulties using it to achieve the desired results. Challenges, such as poor internet connectivity, lack of web searching and retrieval skills, were identified in the study.

Purcell et al. (2012) carried out a study to explore the views of teachers on the ways the ever-evolving digital environment is affecting the research and writing habits of students in high and middle schools. Most of the teachers who took part in the study indicated that the internet and digital search tools had a positive impact on their students' research habits. It was positive in that the best students were able to access a wide range of information on topics that interest them and, as a result, become more self-reliant researchers.

Tezer and Yildiz (2017) revealed in their study that the majority of respondents use the internet every day. The study also revealed that most of the students stay connected to the internet for 1 to 2 hours every day. This was confirmed by Nkomo (2009) in a study, students and staff spent one to two hours a day searching for information on the web. R. Kumar and Kaur (2006) also revealed that teachers use internet resources forth nightly whereas students use them daily.

Information use during the COVID-19 pandemic

The central role information played in controlling the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated effects has been noted by (Montesi 2021), it was noted that citizens being well informed made the management of the pandemic possible. The internet was the major source of COVID-19 information (Chen et al. 2022). This has since led to online health information consumption globally Di Novi, Kovacic, and Orso (2024) and Şatır (2023), leading to a call for digital health literacy (Rosario et al. 2020). Aside from online health information consumption during the pandemic, there was an equally upsurge demand for e-commerce, online delivery services (Wang, Shahzad, and Ashraf 2023) and social media use (Abdoh 2022)

In a study conducted by Vogels et al. (2020) in America, among adults, it was realised that the majority indicated that 'the internet has been essential for them during the

pandemic' (p.1) as it became a vital link to their loved ones and the things they need. Also in business, 'the pandemic accelerated digital transformations in unprecedented and unforeseen ways. Digital solutions helped people and businesses to continue some economic and social activities remotely' (UNCTAD 2021, para. 2). Most people also employed the use of social media to communicate and connect with families and friends during the pandemic (Sengupta and Vaish 2023).

Nguyen et al. (2020) in a survey on people's digital communication during the pandemic, a vast increase in the respondents' digital communication as the lockdown was enforced. According to the survey, the respondents saw an increase of 20% in their communication through social media, (21%), video calls (27%) and emails (42%) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, an annual survey carried out by Ofcom (2020) found that adults and children in the UK saw their time spent online increase during the pandemic, with adults spending an average of three hours and 47 minutes and children spending 3 hours and 48 minutes online each day.

Information use during COVID-19 pandemic by faculty and students

One of the most well-documented institutions to transition drastically into online operations is higher learning institutions. There is ample evidence in the literature that students had to rely heavily on digital platforms such as Google Meet, Zoom, Sakai, Canvas and Moodle in order to interact and share information with their lecturers and colleagues, as has been documented in the works of De', Pandey, and Pal (2020); Aboagye, Opoku, and Lawrencina (2021); Hayashi et al. (2020) and Tsevi (2021). They also sought the use of search engines, e-books, e-journals and other online resources to search and retrieve information online for their research, project works, assignments and examinations (De', Pandey, and Pal 2020). All over the world, institutions had to rely on online tools to continue their academic activities throughout the pandemic. For instance, it has been observed by Mishra, Gupta, and Shree (2020) that faculty and students in India adopted online interactive applications (apps) such as Google Classroom, Zoom, Google Meet and Telegram for teaching and learning during COVID-19.

It has been noted by Ifijeh and Yusuf (2020) that Nigerian universities changed their teaching methods from traditional to online teaching during the pandemic and also provided online resources such as e-databases, e-books and e-journals to support teaching, research and learning online. Olaimat et al. (2020) also provided records among undergraduates and postgraduate students from some selected private and public universities in Jordan on their knowledge about COVID-19 and information resources used during the pandemic. It was revealed that the majority of the undergraduate students used the internet and social media while websites and e-journals were the most information resources used by graduate students during the pandemic. Also, Dadaczynski et al. (2021) in a cross-sectional study to investigate 'university students' digital health literacy and web-based information-seeking behaviours during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic', it was found out that online information resources that were most often used by students for COVID-19 and other health-related information were search engines, social media, news portals and websites.

Furthermore, Jahan et al. (2021) in a study on how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted internet use, revealed that students and teachers' daily internet use times

increased from 2 hours to 3 hours to more than 5 hours during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The study further identified some online activities that students and teachers engaged in during the pandemic as educational activities, chatting/texting, online gaming, social media browsing, watching/streaming videos/films, and online shopping.

Challenges encountered by faculty and students in online information seeking before the pandemic

Faculty and students are confronted with several challenges in online information seeking. In a study by (Mostofa 2013) on information needs and seeking behaviour of faculty members of Darul Ihsan University in Bangladesh, it was identified that the cost of data, lack of time for searching for online information, inability to locate sources and wrong use of keywords were some of the problems faculty members faced while seeking information online.

El-Maamiry (2017) investigated web search behaviour of university students of the University of Dubia. The study showed that students faced difficulty in locating relevant information due to poor information retrieval skills.

Another research conducted by Nkomo, Ocholla, and Jacobs (2011) on web information seeking behaviour of students and staff in rural and urban-based universities in South Africa identified challenges, such as connectivity problems, lack of web searching and retrieval skills.

Shiweda (2013) also identified lack of time to search for online information, slow internet speed and inadequate resources as challenges faced by High School students in Namibia. A similar problem was identified by Nkomo (2009) including slow internet speed, access restrictions, web filtering and censoring, inadequate facilities, lack of evaluation and searching skills, inability to reference internet sources and information overflow.

Challenges encountered by faculty and students in online information seeking during the COVID-19 pandemic

Studies have shown that, during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, faculty and students were faced with a number of challenges while seeking information online (Dadaczynski et al. 2021; Pokhrel and Chhetri 2021; Sahito et al. 2022). As asserted by Dadaczynski et al. (2021) students found it difficult to evaluate the quality and reliability of the information they retrieved online during the pandemic. A study by Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021), identified low internet access and lack of ICT skills as some of the challenges teachers and students faced. Similarly, Anwar, Khan, and Sultan (2020) reveal that teachers and students in higher education during the COVID-19 crisis faced difficulties when seeking online information due to slow internet and connection problems. According to Katz, Jordan, and Ognyanova (2012) undergraduates college students were faced with challenges that made it difficult for them to communicate with their teachers during the pandemic due to poor internet connectivity and a lack of digital devices. A study among Russian higher education teachers during COVID-19 revealed a lack of time to prepare and a lack of digital literacy as some challenges encountered during the transition to online teaching (Almazova et al. 2024). Students were also noted by (Gu et al.

2022) to have inadequate internet search skills, which affected their ability to retrieve information online during the pandemic. This caused a lot of struggle with misinformation during the period (Abdoh 2022). Acheampong (2023) also identified poor internet connectivity, inadequate internet bundle and lack of digital competence as some of the challenges encountered by students in seeking online information during the crisis. Aside from challenges that had to do with self-efficacy and connectivity, research also discovered that excessive use of the internet led to self-isolation, which affected the health of the people (Lee et al. 2023).

Methodology

The study utilised a survey research method and a quantitative research approach. National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI) in Ghana at the time of the study had a faculty population of 33 and a student population of 284, giving a total of 317. The researchers selected the entire population as participants in the study.

Two sets of questionnaires were developed, one for faculty and the other for students, to collect data from the 33 faculty members and the 284 students. The questionnaire had sections on demographic information, online information needs and use before and during the pandemic and challenges encountered. The questionnaire for the study comprised mainly closed-ended questions with itemise responses, Likert scale ratings of 1–5, 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest and a few open-ended questions. A pre-test was carried out at the Ghana Institute of Journalism to ascertain the validity of the research instrument using 10 faculty members and 15 students as subjects. The pre-test revealed no challenges with the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed with the help of student leadership and unit administrators to students and faculty, respectively. Out of the total 317 copies of questionnaires administered, 260 questionnaires were completed and returned, representing an 81.5% response rate. The data collected for this study were analysed using IBM SPSS to generate frequencies and percentages.

Presentation of findings

Demographic representation of respondents

Gender of respondents

Responses show that 20 (69.0%) of the faculty respondents were males, while 9 (31.0%) were females. Responses from students indicate that out of a total of 231 respondents, 156 representing 67.5% were males, while 75 of the respondents representing 32.5% were females, as presented in Figure 1.

Age of respondents

Figures 2 and 3 depict the age distribution of respondents. Out of the 29 faculty respondents, 12 (41.1%) were between the ages of 30 and 39, 12 (41.1%) were between 40 and 49, while 5 (17.2%) were between the ages of 50 and 59 years. The age distribution of student respondents shows that out of the total of 231 student respondents, 171 (74.0%) were between the ages of 20 and 29, 49 (21.2%) of the respondents were between the ages of 30 and 39, 11 (4.8%) of the respondents were below the age of 20. None of the students was above 40 years.

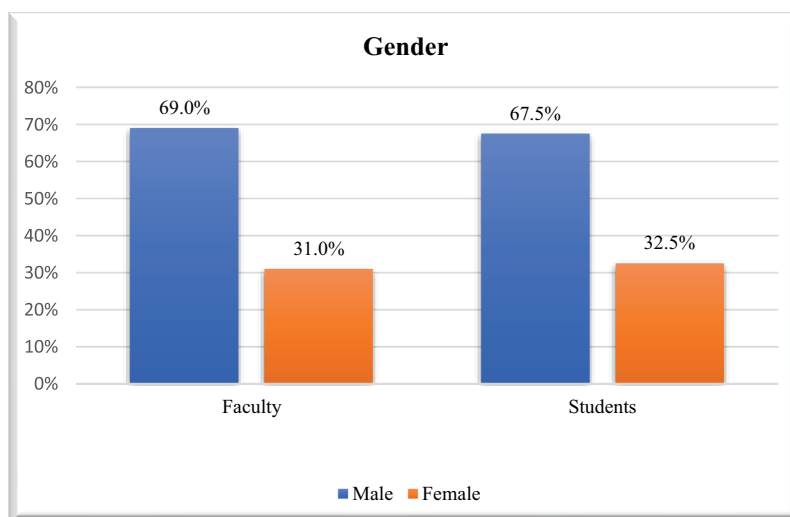


Figure 1. Gender of respondents.

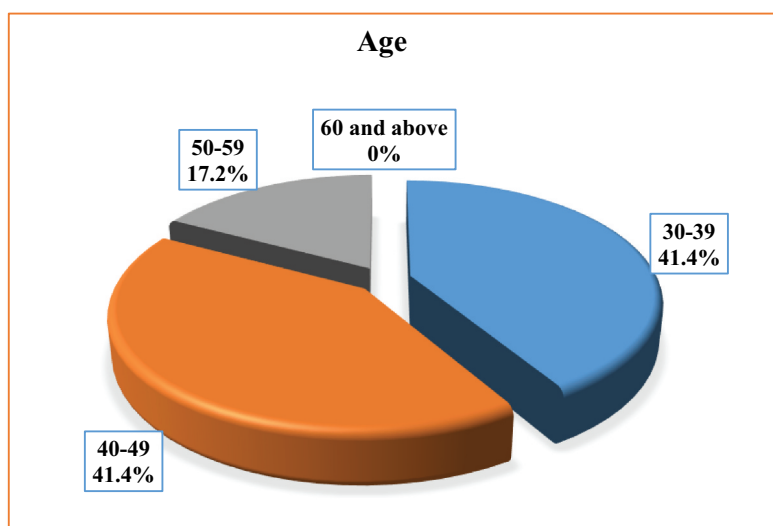


Figure 2. Age of faculty respondents.

Frequency of online information resources used before the pandemic by respondents

Distribution of responses in terms of the frequency at which online resources were used by respondents before the pandemic as illustrated in Figure 4 shows that for faculty, 12 (41.4%) of the respondents indicated that they used online information resources daily, followed by 10 (34.5%) of the respondents who indicated weekly and 7 (24.1%) of the respondents who indicated forth nightly.

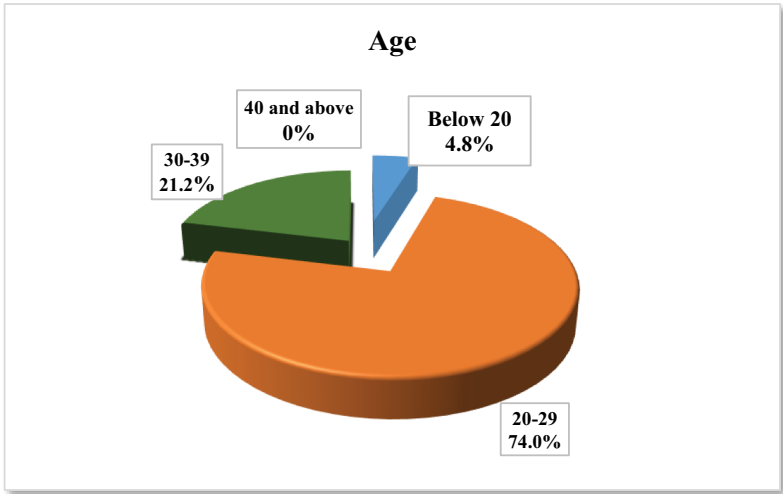


Figure 3. Age of student respondents.

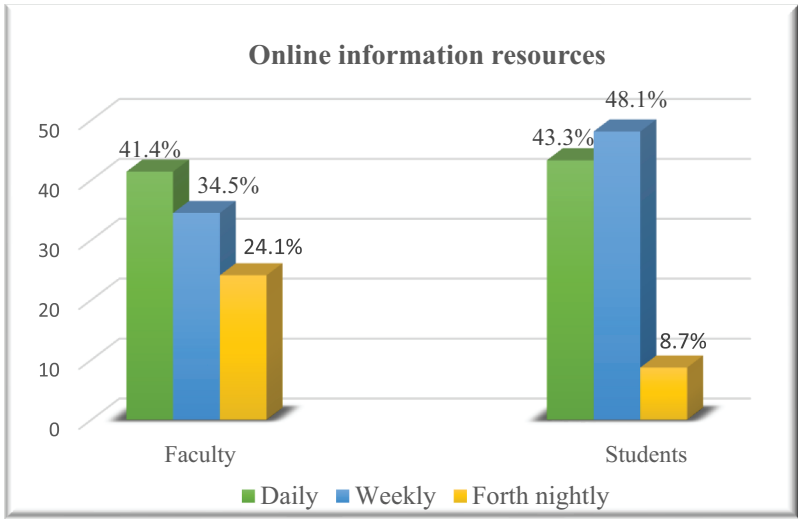


Figure 4. Frequency of online resources used before the pandemic.

The distribution of student responses in terms of the frequency at which online resources were used before the pandemic as shown in Figure 4 indicate that, out of the 231 student respondents, 111 representing (48.1%) of the respondents used online resources weekly, 100 representing (43.3%) of the respondents indicated daily, while the remaining 20 representing (8.7%) of the respondents indicated forth nightly.

Table 1. Time spent online before the pandemic.

Time spent	Faculty Responses		Student Responses	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
2 hour – 3 hours	16	55.2	134	3.0
1 hour – 2 hours	11	37.9	85	58.0
3 hours or more	2	6.9	7	3.0
Below 1 hour	0	0	7	35.9
Total	29	100	231	100

Table 2. Average time spent daily online during the pandemic.

Time	Faculty Responses		Student Responses	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
3 hours or more	18	62.1	149	64.5
2 hours – 3 hours	10	34.5	76	32.9
1 hour – 2 hours	1	3.4	6	2.6
Below 1 hour	0	0	0	0
Total	29	100	231	100

Average time spent daily online before the pandemic by respondents

As portrayed in Table 1, over 50% of faculty respondents spent between 2 and 3 hours a day, while over 50% of student respondents spent 1 and 2 hours a day online. Less than 10% of the respondents spent more than 3 hours a day before the pandemic.

Average time spent daily online during the pandemic by respondents

The responses from Table 2 below reveal that during the pandemic, over 60% of both faculty and students spent more than 3 hours online, with no respondent spending below an hour online daily.

Information retrieved online before the pandemic

The responses from the frequency distribution Table 3 below, with multiple responses, show that the type of information retrieved online before the pandemic by faculty and students were varied, with faculty and students showing different rates of use of specific

Table 3. Information retrieved online before the pandemic.

Information retrieved online before the pandemic	Faculty Responses		Students Responses	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Information for teaching/research/assignments	27	93.1	212	91.8
Communication/Networking (e.g. net meeting, chatting, email)	22	75.9	173	74.9
Self-development	23	79.3	107	46.3
Information for examination			163	70.6
Information for class tests			114	49.4
General awareness	18	62.1	15	6.5
Entertainment	13	44.8	127	55.0
News	13	44.8	16	6.9
Information for funding	12	41.4	67	29.0
Online purchase	10	34.5	74	32.0
Health	8	27.6	137	59.3

Table 4. New information needs realised during the pandemic.

New information	Faculty Responses		Student Responses	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Health	28	96.6	217	93.9
Online Purchase	26	89.7	214	92.6
Information for funding	25	86.2	197	85.3
Self-development	25	86.2	145	62.8
Communication/Networking (e.g. net meeting, chatting, email)	24	82.8	211	91.3
Information for teaching/research	23	79.3	211	91.3
Entertainment	18	62.1	203	87.9
General awareness	17	58.6	204	88.3
News	16	55.2	145	62.8
Information for examination			176	76.2
Information for assignments			168	72.7
Information for class tests			163	70.6

types of information. However, both sets of respondents had over 90% response for information regarding their core needs, i.e. teaching/research/assignments. Information retrieved for communication and networking had over 70% responses from both faculty and students.

Realization of new information needs and the type of new information needs realised during the pandemic

Responses from both faculty and students indicate that they all had new information needs due to the emergence of the COVID 19 pandemic. The research revealed that the new information needs realised were varied.

The researchers compared the data in [Table 3](#) on online information needs before the pandemic with the data in [Table 4](#) on new information needs realised during the pandemic. It was revealed that though somehow natural, it is interesting to note that over 90% of respondents realised the need for information on health, as only 27.6% and 59.3% of faculty and students, respectively, retrieved health information online before the pandemic. The comparison also shows that even the people who retrieved health information before the pandemic realised they needed more or new health information. Information on online purchases also saw a surge during the pandemic from 34.5% and 32.0% to 89.7% and 92.6% for faculty and students, respectively. It is interesting to note that all the information needs listed in [Table 4](#) recorded higher frequencies than before the pandemic (see [Table 3](#)), and none recorded below a 50% retrieval rate during the pandemic.

The rate at which the pandemic increased the need for information among faculty members

Responses from respondents in rating how the pandemic has increased their need for information, as shown in [Table 5](#), corroborate the responses they provided on the need for new information during the pandemic. While 77.1% of students rated the increase in their information at the highest rate of 5, 58.6% of faculty also rated at the highest rate of 5.

Table 5. The rate at which the pandemic increased the need for information.

Rate	Faculty Responses		Student Responses	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
5	17	58.6	178	77.1
4	7	24.1	39	16.9
3	5	17.2	7	3.0
2	0	0	7	3.0
1	0	0	0	0
Total	29	100	231	100

Table 6. Purpose for seeking online information related to work.

Faculty Responses			Student Responses		
Work-related purposes			Academic-related online information use		
	Frequency	Percentage		Frequency	Percentage
Personal study	28	96.6	Examination	228	98.7
Teaching	28	96.6	Communication/networking	226	97.8
Research	27	93.1	Class Assignment	182	78.0
Communication/ Networking	21	72.4	Class test	163	70.6
Online purchase of academic resources	16	55.2	Research/project	141	61.0
Others	1	3.4	Online Purchase	24	10.4

Purpose for seeking online information related to work

Respondents provided the purposes for seeking online information for work and academic-related activities. Table 6, with multiple responses, presents the distribution of responses provided. From the responses, over 90% of faculty members used online information for personal study, teaching and research. The data from the student respondents similarly show that close to 100% of them used online information for examination purposes. While close to 100% of students used online resources for communication purposes, the figure for communication was a bit lower (72.4%) among faculty members.

Purpose for seeking online information aside from work-related issues during the pandemic

The research data, as shown in Table 7, also revealed that aside from work-related functions, respondents heavily depended on electronic information for a number of

Table 7. Other purposes for which respondents used online information during the pandemic, aside from work-related purposes.

Purposes	Faculty responses		Student responses	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Communication/Networking (e.g. chatting, email, net meeting)	27	93.1	210	90.9%
Online purchase	25	86.2	216	93.5%
Health	23	79.3	218	94.4%
General awareness	23	79.3	196	84.8%
Entertainment	21	72.4	197	85.3%
News	20	69.0	150	64.9%

Table 8. Challenges with the use of online information.

Challenges	Faculty Response		Student Response	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Slow Internet connection	28	96.6	221	95.7
Cost of data	27	93.1	218	94.4
Information overload	26	89.7	218	94.4
Lack of training	14	48.3	163	70.6
Lack of devices	12	41.4	118	51.1
Lack of skills in finding online information	9	31.0	218	94.4
Lack time	9	31.0	169	73.2

functions. At the top of the list for faculty which recorded above 90% responses is communication and networking, with online purchase, health, general awareness and entertainment also recording above 70%. Student responses recorded higher percentages for the functions. Communication and networking, online purchase and health recorded over 90%. With only news recording a lower score of approximately 65%.

Challenges with the use of online information

Respondents enumerated the challenges that confronted them while using online information to meet their information needs during the pandemic. Slow internet connection and cost of data were listed by over 90% the respondents as the topmost challenges for both faculty and students. Information overload and lack of information retrieval skills were also listed by 94.4% students as major challenges they encountered in the use of online information resources among other challenges as provided in [Table 8](#).

Discussion of findings

To ascertain the online information needs of faculty and students during the pandemic, certain questions about their online information behaviour before and during the pandemic such as the frequency at which online information resources were used before the pandemic, time spent averagely daily online before the pandemic, time faculty and students spent averagely daily during the pandemic, information retrieved online before the pandemic, the realisation of new information needs during the pandemic, type of new information needs realised during the pandemic and the rate at which the pandemic increased the need for information

The findings generally revealed that both faculty and students used online information resources less frequently before the COVID-19 pandemic. The results show that less than half 12 (41.4%) of faculty members and 111 (48.1%) of students used online resources daily before the pandemic. This is an indication of a low rate of usage. The study, however, revealed that 1.6% more of the students were using online information resources than faculty members before the pandemic. This affirms the findings of R. Kumar and Kaur (2006) that teachers use internet resources less than students to meet their information needs. Though the data indicate a low rate of online information usage before the pandemic, it, however, indicates the existence of almost an average online information behaviour of both faculty and students before the pandemic, having in mind the definition of online information behaviour of Esew et al. (2016) as an active process of obtaining

information online. Respondents therefore exhibited positive online information behaviour before the pandemic.

The study indicates that, even before the pandemic, all the respondents spent some amount of time online daily, showing how reliant both students and faculty have become on the internet, confirming the assertion of (Shiweda 2013; Soyemi and Oshineye 2015). It was also discovered that before the pandemic, faculty members spent more hours daily online, an average of 2 hours to 3 hours, than students, who spent 1 hour to 2 hours daily online. This is an indication that as educators, they require more information to prepare adequately in order to impart knowledge to the students. The findings corroborate that of Tezer and Yildiz (2017) who also discovered that the majority of students spent between an hour and two hours online before the pandemic. This finding also corresponds with that of Nkomo (2009); Tezer and Yildiz (2017) who revealed that the majority of students spent less hours online in a day searching for information than on academic.

This study revealed that the frequency at which faculty and students sought information online daily increased greatly during the pandemic. This affirms the assertion of (Montesi 2021) that information played a critical role in managing the pandemic. Over 60% of both faculty and students spent more than 3 hours a day online, and none of the respondents spent less than an hour. This is a clear indication that COVID-19 has increased the online activities of both faculty and students, and there is a surge in the number of hours spent online by them. This affirms the findings of other scholars such as Di Novi, Kovacic, and Orso (2024), Jahan et al. (2021), Montesi (2021), Nguyen et al. (2020), Şatır (2023) and Vogels et al. (2020) that both the online activities and the amount of time spent by people during the COVID-19 pandemic increased. This was confirmed by the majority of respondents themselves, who rated the effect of the pandemic on their information needs at the highest.

The data collected on the type of information respondents retrieve online before the pandemic gives an indication of a high rate for information retrieval for the purposes of teaching, research and assignments. Information for communication purposes was recorded by over 70% of both sets of respondents. This finding agrees with the findings of others, such as Kankam (2017), Nkomo (2009) and Shiweda (2013) whose research before the pandemic revealed that academics mostly retrieve information online for research, teaching and examination. This research also discovered that over 70% of faculty members retrieve information for self-development purposes.

Interestingly, all respondents agreed that the pandemic affected their information needs. Over 90% of respondents realised they needed information on health from the recorded figures of 27.6% and 59.3% of faculty and students, respectively, before the pandemic. Giving an indication that even the people who retrieved health information before the pandemic realised they needed more or new health information. Information on online purchases also recorded an increase in figures during the pandemic. Interestingly, all the information needs listed during the pandemic recorded over 50% retrieval rate. This confirms the findings of Jahan et al. (2021), Nguyen et al. (2020) and Vogels et al. (2020) that digital information consumption increased during the pandemic in every aspect, including health, e-commerce and social connections, as was noted by Di Novi, Kovacic, and Orso (2024), Şatır (2023), Wang, Shahzad, and Ashraf (2023) and Abdoh (2022) as people depended on information as a critical tool in helping them cope with the effects of the pandemic (Montesi 2021).

Also, during the pandemic, the main purposes that compelled faculty to seek online information for their work-related needs were teaching, personal studies and research, while the purposes for which students sought online information related to their academic needs were examination, communication/networking purposes. This finding correlates with that of Olaimat et al. (2020) and Ifjeh and Yusuf (2020) who also identified that faculty and students used online platforms to meet their information needs during the pandemic. Besides work-related and academic purposes, faculty were accessing online information for communication/networking and online purchase purposes, while students were accessing online information for health and online purchase purposes. This affirms the findings of Kankam (2017), Nkomo (2009) and Shiweda (2013) that besides academic work, faculty and students use the internet for personal activities.

Existing literature has noted that the use of electronic platforms by students and faculty during the pandemic brought several challenges to them (Alqahtani et al. 2023; Dadaczynski et al. 2021). This study equally identified many challenges that affected faculty and students while seeking online information during the pandemic. The most identified challenges by faculty were slow internet connection (96.6%), cost of data (93.1%) and information overload (89.7%). Other challenges identified were lack of training (48.3%), lack of devices (41.45%), lack of skills in finding online information (31.0%), and lack of time (31.0%).

And that of the students were slow internet connection (95.7%), lack of skills in finding online information (94.4%), information overload (94.4%) and cost of data (94.4%). Other challenges identified were lack of time (73.2%), lack of training (70.6%) and lack of devices (51.1%). These findings are consistent with Sahito et al. (2022) and Anwar, Khan, and Sultan (2020), who also identified similar challenges faculty and students faced seeking online information during the pandemic.

The findings of the study confirmed Marchionini and White's online information seeking behaviour, which indicated that the first two steps in the model are to recognise the need for information and accept the challenge to take action to fulfil that need. The results from the study revealed that faculty and students during the pandemic realised new information needs pertaining to their work/academic, and personal needs such as health information, information for funding, information for self-development, communication/networking entertainment, general awareness, and information on online purchases. According to the model, once the problem has been accepted in the mind of the information seekers, they must perform several activities: they must select the collection they are going to search, and the search system they are going to use. The results from the study, as have been noted by other scholars (Di Novi, Kovacic, and Orso 2024; Jahan et al. 2021), show that faculty and students mostly consulted online sources to retrieve work/academic and health-related information during the pandemic. However, the study showed that the respondents encountered a number of challenges, most of which could possibly be because they did not have the requisite online search skills.

In the current educational landscape, faculty members are burdened with the ever-growing workload of large student numbers and information overload. Effective online information retrieval and use provide a means to mitigate this challenge. However, the findings of this study reveal that faculty members encounter systematic challenges such as slow internet connection, high cost of data, and a lack of training. These

challenges lead to an increase in their workload and time spent on online activities, negating the benefits of the digital information environment on the work of faculty and students.

Conclusion

The study investigated the online information behaviour of faculty and students of the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI) during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study brought to the fore the fact that the pandemic had increased the frequency at which faculty and students access information online, as they spent more hours online than before the pandemic. There is so much evidence that the pandemic has affected every sphere of life, and online information behaviour is no exception. As evident in the study, there was realisation of new information needs pertaining to work/academic and personal needs. This may be attributed to two main reasons. The first is the quest of the respondents to obtain information to clear their uncertainties during the pandemic and to help individuals understand the COVID-19 and develop personal strategies for their survival. The second is the drastic surge in online activities by almost all academic institutions globally. Thus, faculty and students were left with no choice but to engage in online activities to fulfil their obligations either as faculty members or students to the institution of their affiliation.

The internet and social media, in particular, served as a 'savior' to most people who could afford and access them. This was the case of the respondents in the study. This study therefore concludes that information needs and online information behaviour of people are not static but continue to evolve; they vary depending on the situation at hand. As humans, we tend to adjust our information behaviour as and when necessary. The COVID-19 pandemic, therefore, caused an increase in the online information consumption pattern of the people studied in order for them to access information to perform their individual roles. Information use was seen as a survival strategy during the pandemic.

Even though the severity of COVID-19 has subsided, this research remains relevant today because it reveals how faculty and students had to abruptly adapt to online activities due to the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted challenges such as slow internet connection, high cost of data and information overload. By examining the online behaviour of people in academia during the pandemic, researchers can have a better understanding of their training needs, the digital divide and the role information literacy plays in effective learning. These insights are crucial for building educational systems and strategies that can respond to future pandemics.

Recommendations

As has been revealed in this research, the respondents have indicated a heavy dependence on the internet as a means of survival during the pandemic. The internet has therefore become a social good and a utility. The government and other stakeholders must take necessary steps to reduce the cost of data, as it has actually become a means of survival in order to make this utility more accessible and affordable to students and faculty and even to the general public.

The majority of respondents in this study indicated they had challenges with skills in retrieving information online, information overload and lack of training. It is therefore recommended that the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI) library, as a matter of urgency, organise training programmes on information retrieval skills for both faculty and students. It will be appropriate to make this a regular program for the academic community to continue to develop the information retrieval skills of the users. This is relevant to information professionals within the academic space as they need to continue to provide information literacy skill training to help users cope with their evolving information needs and the advances in the technological space, which serve as the main platform for accessing information. Continuous information literacy skill training is the major means by which life-long learning skills can be achieved as part of the global agenda for sustainable development and a technology-driven post-pandemic world.

Research implications

The findings of the research provide evidence of how the pandemic increased the information needs of faculty and students who had to depend on the internet as their main source of information. The findings, however, revealed the respondents were confronted with some challenges, most of which related to inadequate online search skills. This provides evidence that both faculty and students need digital literacy training.

The researchers applied only the first three elements of the Marchionini and White's model of online information seeking behaviour; further studies need to be carried out to investigate the other elements of the theory (formulating the problem, expressing the problem, examining the results). This will help both researchers and information professionals determine the specific areas of need in the online information search habits of users to continue to develop digital literacy training that will be tailored towards the needs of the users.

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