

Navigating Information Formats: A Professional Study of Library Resource Preference Patterns in Academia in Tamil Nadu

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ABSTRACT

This analytical research investigates resource usage preferences among academic professionals in Tamil Nadu, focusing on printed, digital, and hybrid library formats. Using a random sampling method, data was collected from 850 respondents across universities, colleges, and research institutions representing diverse academic backgrounds. Statistical analysis using percentage, mean, and chi-square tools reveals that digital formats are preferred for accessibility and instant retrieval, while printed resources remain valued for in-depth reading and reliability. The study also indicates an emerging inclination toward hybrid usage. The findings have major implications for library policy reform, resource budgeting, technological investment, and training programs.

Keywords: Library Resources, Digital Libraries, Print Resources, Hybrid Access, ICT in Libraries, Academic Users, Information Seeking Behaviour, Tamil Nadu.

INTRODUCTION

Academic libraries play a pivotal role in supporting teaching, research, and lifelong learning. The global shift toward digital transformation in education has reshaped how information is accessed, stored, shared, and consumed. While printed resources have historically been the primary scholarly medium, digital and hybrid formats have become increasingly prominent due to ICT expansion, remote accessibility, and online academic publishing.

Tamil Nadu, being one of India's leading educational hubs with numerous central, state, private universities and colleges, provides a strong foundation for studying evolving scholarly resource preferences among academic professionals.

Background and Rationale of the Study

Recent advancements in digital repository growth, open educational resources (OER), cloud-based digital libraries, artificial intelligence retrieval systems, and federated search services have changed conventional resource usage patterns. Although printed resources maintain historical and cognitive value, digital formats offer convenience and speed. Hybrid models integrating both formats represent an emerging balanced solution. There is insufficient region-based empirical research in Tamil Nadu that captures real-time behavioural trends among professional academic library users; hence, this study addresses that research gap.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse the preference patterns toward printed, digital, and hybrid library resources among academic professionals in Tamil Nadu.

2. To compare demographic factors with resource usage preferences.
3. To identify motivating and limiting factors influencing resource selection.
4. To provide suggestions for improving resource management and infrastructure planning.

Research Questions

1. What is the most preferred information format among academic professionals?
2. How do demographic factors influence resource choice and usage level?
3. What are the perceived advantages and barriers for each resource format?

Hypotheses

H1: There is a significant relationship between academic designation and preferred information format.

H2: Digital format preference is significantly higher among technology-trained respondents.

Scope and Delimitations

- Geographical limitation: Tamil Nadu
- Population: Academic professionals, researchers, faculty members, and librarians
- Sample size: 850 respondents
- Data collection method: Structured questionnaire
- Sampling technique: Random sampling

Review of Literature

The rapid growth of digital information technologies has significantly influenced how academic communities access, evaluate, and utilize information resources. Early studies emphasized the sustained relevance of print resources in higher education, noting that students and faculty preferred print formats for deep reading, comprehension, and long-term retention (Baron, 2015). However, with advancements in digital platforms, more recent studies report a steady shift toward electronic books, online journals, and digital repositories due to their accessibility, search ability, and convenience (Teenier et al., 2020).

Usage of E-Resources in Academic Libraries (Feb 2024) Summary (aim & method): This empirical study examined awareness, access, and use patterns of electronic resources in academic libraries across multiple Indian institutions. It used a survey-based quantitative approach, analysing frequency of e-resource use, satisfaction levels, and perceived barriers (e.g., authentication problems, bandwidth, training).

“Needs of E-Resources and Online Information to the Faculty” — Tamil Nadu (SSRN; 2022–2023) Summary (aim & method): This regionally focused paper surveyed faculty members in Tamil Nadu to document their e-resource needs, preferred resource types, and satisfaction with institutional subscriptions and access. The methodology combined online questionnaires with targeted interviews of faculty from several universities in Tamil Nadu.

Use of E-Resources by Library Professionals in Tamil Nadu: Bibliometric/ Empirical Overview (Academia.edu: 2024–2025) Summary (aim & method): This work reviews publications and empirical studies about e-resource use by library and information science professionals in Tamil Nadu, using bibliometric techniques alongside survey data from practising librarians. It maps authorship patterns, institutional adoption, and common research themes in the Tamil Nadu context.

Overall, the literature suggests that academic communities increasingly adopt a **hybrid model** that integrates both print and digital formats. This combined approach appears particularly relevant in Tamil Nadu's academic environment, where a diverse student population, varying digital skills, and evolving library services shape information-seeking behaviour. The existing studies highlight the need for localized investigations to better understand user preferences and enhance academic library services effectively.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

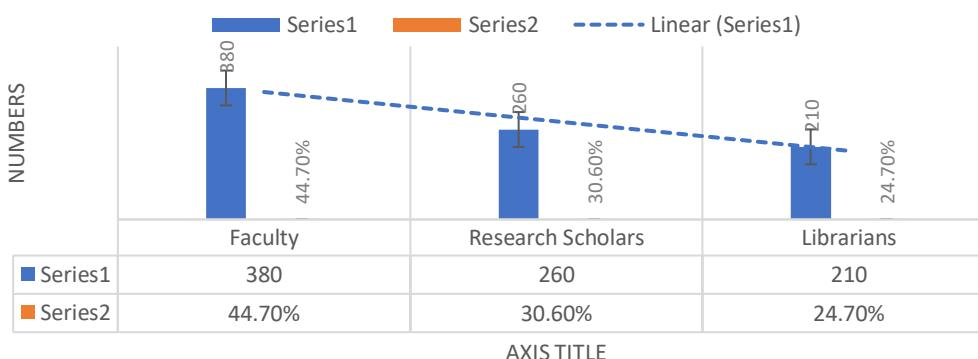
Criteria	Description
Research Design	Descriptive and Analytical
Approach	Quantitative Survey
Tool Used	Structured Questionnaire
Population	Academic Professionals
Sample Size	850 Nos.
Sampling Technique	Simple Random Sampling
Statistical Tools	Percentage, Mean, Standard Deviation, Chi-Square

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Category	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	475	55.9%
	Female	375	44.1%
Profession	Faculty	380	44.7%
	Research Scholars	260	30.6%
	Librarians	210	24.7%

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS



The demographic profile of the 850 respondents indicates that **male participants (55.9%)** form a slightly higher representation than female participants (44.1%). This implies that male academic professionals were marginally more involved in the study, though the overall distribution reflects a near-balanced gender participation, supporting representativeness of the sample in terms of gender diversity.

With respect to professional distribution, the data reveals that **faculty members constitute the largest group (44.7%)**, followed by **research scholars (30.6%)**, and **librarians (24.7%)**. This suggests that teaching professionals were the majority contributors to the study, which may reflect active academic involvement and ease of access to survey participation. Research scholars also formed a significant portion, possibly due to their ongoing dependence on varied resource formats, while librarians added valuable insights from an information management perspective.

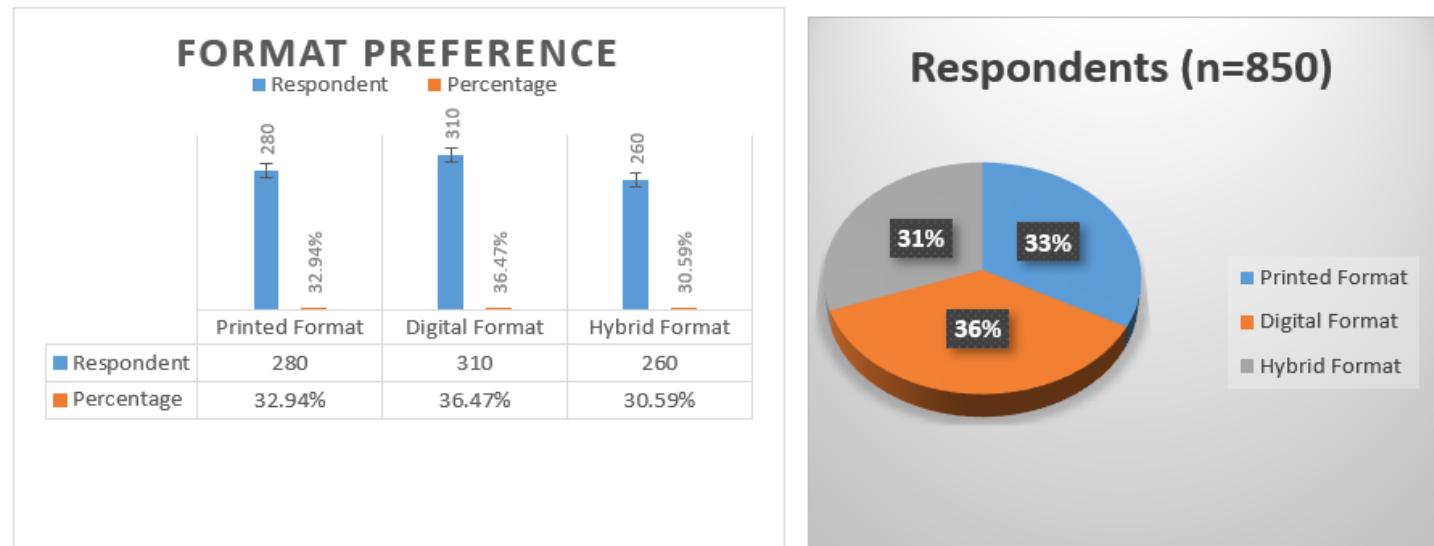
Overall, the demographic results confirm a diverse participation pool comprising teaching, research, and library service perspectives, ensuring a balanced analytical outcome for the resource usage preference study.

Format Preference Among Respondents

Resource Format	Respondents (n=850)	Percentage
Printed Format	280	32.94%
Digital Format	310	36.47%
Hybrid Format	260	30.59%

Figure 1 – Bar Chart Representation (Description)

A bar graph containing three vertical columns showing:



The data reveals that among the 850 academic respondents, **digital format resources** were the **most preferred** option, accounting for **36.47% (310 respondents)**. This indicates a growing inclination towards electronic information sources, likely influenced by factors such as ease of accessibility, remote availability, rapid search features, multi-device compatibility, and continuous updates.

The **printed format** was the second-most preferred choice, selected by **32.94% (280 respondents)**. Despite the digital shift, traditional print materials continue to hold significant value among academic professionals, particularly for **in-depth reading, comprehension clarity, reduced screen fatigue, and perceived**

authenticity of printed scholarly works. This suggests that print resources retain relevance and cannot be completely replaced by digital media.

The **hybrid format**, which represents a combination of both print and digital resource usage, was preferred by **30.59% (260 respondents)**. This demonstrates that a considerable segment of academic users adopt a **balanced, multimodal approach** to information seeking, selecting formats based on task type, accessibility, convenience, and content nature. Digital shows the highest bar representation.

Motivating Factors for Format Selection

Factors	Printed	Digital	Hybrid
Ease of Use	High	High	Moderate
Accessibility	Low	Very High	High
Reliability	Very High	Moderate	High
Reading Comfort	Very High	Low	High
Cost	Medium	Low	Medium

The comparative analysis of motivating factors influencing library resource format preferences shows that **each resource type has distinct strengths that appeal to different user expectations and information-seeking behaviours**.

Ease of Use was rated *High* for both printed and digital formats, suggesting that users find **familiarity, simplicity, and accessibility of content navigation** satisfactory in both mediums. However, the *Moderate* rating for hybrid format indicates that although integrated usage is beneficial, **managing two formats simultaneously may require additional effort**, such as toggling between physical and digital access points.

With respect to **Accessibility**, digital formats scored *Very High*, highlighting their **24/7 availability, instant retrieval, remote access, and device-based flexibility**. Hybrid access was rated *High*, showing that combining both formats increases convenience, whereas printed resources were considered *Low* in accessibility due to **physical location dependence and limited availability outside library premises**.

In terms of **Reliability**, printed resources received a *Very High* rating, reaffirming the belief that **traditional scholarly sources are more credible, authentic, tamper-proof, and stable**, particularly for deep research, citation, and long-term reference. Hybrid formats also scored *High*, indicating that combining both mediums improve trust and verification, while digital resources ranked *Moderate*, likely due to **variability in quality, digital manipulation risks, and paywall barriers**.

Reading Comfort was highest for printed resources (*Very High*), demonstrating a consistent preference for **eyefriendly, distraction-free reading environments**. Hybrid formats ranked *High* since users can alternate between formats based on convenience, while digital reading comfort was *Low*, likely due to **screen fatigue, scrolling difficulty, and ergonomic challenges**.

Finally, regarding **Cost**, digital formats scored *Low*, showing they are perceived as **economically favourable**, especially with open-access repositories, institutional subscriptions, and freely available academic platforms. Printed and hybrid formats scored *Medium*, reflecting the **financial investment associated with printing, binding, physical maintenance, and dual-format support**.

Overall, these motivating factor trends demonstrate that **no single format fulfils all academic expectations**, and users evaluate resources based on context-specific needs. Printed sources are preferred for **credibility and reading comfort**, digital resources for **speed and accessibility**, and hybrid approaches for **balanced, flexible, and comprehensive research experiences**.

Research Hypotheses for The Study

H1: There is a significant relationship between academic designation and preferred information format.

H0₁: There is *no* significant relationship between academic designation and preferred information format.

H2: Digital format preference is significantly higher among technology-trained respondents.

H0₂: Digital format preference is *not* significantly higher among technology-trained respondents.

Major Findings

1. Digital format is the leading preference among academic professionals (36.47%).
2. Printed resources are still valued especially for deep research and examination preparation.
3. Hybrid access reflects a growing transitional trend.
4. ICT infrastructure strongly influences format adoption.
5. Young researchers prefer digital access more commonly than senior faculty.

Suggestions

- Improve high-speed internet and e-resource authentication systems
- Implement blended resource subscription models
- Provide ICT literacy and digital training workshops
- Strengthen digital preservation and archival policies
- Allocate balanced budget for print and digital formats

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that digital formats are becoming dominant while printed resources remain relevant for comprehensive reading and conceptual understanding. Hybrid solutions represent the future of academic resource delivery in Tamil Nadu. Academic libraries must adopt strategic digital integration policies without compromising traditional scholarly value.

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