

Information Seeking Behaviour of Kuwaiti Journalists

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This study investigated the information seeking behaviour of working journalists in Kuwait using a self-administered questionnaire. The 92 respondents were mostly male, Arabic speaking, and expatriates. In terms of the type of information, they place emphasis on fact-checking, general and background information. Information is obtained by using a wide variety of both informal and formal sources. 'Human' sources, Internet, and 'press releases' are considered high in

terms of both importance and satisfaction. The availability and use of 'in-house electronic library of stories / reports generated by their colleagues' is not only very limited but is also not satisfying. They consider their information searching skills very important for their work and are willing to go through training if it were provided to them. Lack of time is their top ranking problem. Several recommendations are made for improving the existing situation.

Introduction

Information need, seeking and use are areas of fundamental concern to LIS professionals. During the past 30 years or so, a considerable body of literature has been produced dealing with the information needs and seeking behaviour of both individuals and groups in a variety of contexts. "It is understood that information needs arise when an individual finds himself in a problem situation, when he or she no longer can manage with the knowledge that he or she possesses" (Talja 1992, 72). It is the information need that triggers information seeking which is caused by "uncertainty due to a lack of understanding, gap in meaning, or a limited construct" (Kuhlthau 1993, 347). We, as individuals and groups, "repeatedly find ourselves in situations where information is needed, gathered, sought, organized, retrieved, processed, evaluated, and used" (Solomon 1996, 292).

Earlier studies have found that information seekers use a variety of formal and informal sources with varying emphasis from one dis-

cipline to another. Journalists seem to be different from other professional and discipline-oriented groups. First, they are not a homogenous group and their approach to information is different from others. Second, while using the services of information professionals, journalists do not communicate their need in clear and precise terms. According to Nicholas and Martin (1997), journalists do this because of the confidentiality of their interest, their own uncertainty as to what they want and a certain professional arrogance as to why information professionals should want to know more about their work. Full understanding of this approach is critical in order to design information systems and services that will enable journalists to meet their information needs.

Literature review

Journalists, important as they are as information consumers as well as producers at the same time, were not investigated to understand their information needs and seeking behaviour up to the mid-1980s (Herron 1986). Over two dozen studies

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have been conducted during the past 18 years to understand journalists' information seeking behaviour and its various aspects. Some of the recent studies are reviewed below.

Nicholas and Martin (1997), studying British journalists using semi-structured interviews, concluded that the journalists needed information for five broad functions: fact checking; current awareness; researching; to obtain a context; and stimulus. In addition to function, the chief characteristics of journalists' information needs were identified as: "the sheer size of their information appetites; their requirement for authoritative and current information and the speed with which they need information" (1997, 51). The obstacles faced included: time, access to information sources and systems, information overload and training. They concluded that IT was causing a major change in the journalists' information need and seeking behaviour.

The extent of use of online information sources for newsgathering by American newspapers as reported by Garrison (1999, 2000) was 57.2% in 1994, 89.8% in 1997, and 92.0% in 1999. The major problems identified for website use were: no verification (54.1%), unreliable information (44.9%), badly sourced information (44.3%), and lack of site credibility (43.8%). Poteet (2000) studied the use of online sources by 175 journalists working at two American metropolitan newspapers using a questionnaire. All of her respondents used the Internet, with 93.0% of them feeling comfortable using it. A large majority (96.5%) considered online sources important for information gathering. The purposes for using online sources were: finding background information (91.4%), finding facts (90.3%), reading news sources (84.6%), finding experts (51.4%), and identifying sources (50.9%).

Ross & Middleberg (1999), who surveyed American daily newspapers, reported that 80.0% of their respondents used the Internet daily and another 13.0% used it two to three times weekly. The Internet was used for article research (89.0%), e-mail (83.0%), reading publications online (65.0%), finding news sources and experts (57.0%), getting story ideas (50.0%), downloading data tables (36.0%), and newsgroup communication (16.0%). Nicholas et al (2000) investigated the impact of the Internet by surveying both journalists and media librarians. They reported that 68.0% of their respondents used the Internet. However, in

terms of the total population, they estimated that "it is unlikely that more than one in five journalists used the Internet" due to "[l]ack of access, the richness of existing information provision, suspicion of the new resource ..., and a shortage of time" (2000, 112). A study of American journalists concluded that the extent of change in information needs brought about by the emerging technologies "depends on the perception of the journalist involved and the environment in which they work" (Chinn 2001, 45).

Attfield & Dowell (2003) studied information seeking and use of 25 journalists working at The Times in London by conducting interviews. They show that journalistic work was uncertain as a function of an uncertain context and their continually evolving plans. They presented their findings "in the form of a model of the newspaper report research and writing process" that consisted of "initiation, preparation and production in the context of a set of dynamic product and resource constraints" (2003, 199-200).

The present fast changing information environment necessitates that users possess some information searching and database use skills. In 1992, the delegates to a European Journalists Training Association meeting "agreed that teaching electronic research techniques to journalist trainees was a priority" (Stanbridge 1992, 46). Several years later a study of Scottish journalists found that there was no clear-cut policy on the teaching of information skills to them and concluded "it was apparent that journalists were unaware of the basics of information retrieval, searching electronic databases, applications of search logic and search terminology and syntax" (Campbell 1997, 62). Poteet (2000) found that only 10.9% of her American respondents felt 'very satisfied' whereas 64.9% of them felt 'somewhat satisfied' with their current skills for using online information sources.

No study of journalists for any Arab country has so far been reported in the professional literature. It was, therefore, considered important to conduct this research in order to understand the information seeking behaviour of journalists in Kuwait.

Research objectives

The purpose of this study was to investigate the information seeking patterns of working jour-

Table 1. Types of Information and Their Importance

Type of Information	n	Rank	Mean	SD
Fact checking and verification	90	1	4.61	.631
General information	88	2	4.33	.769
Background information	89	3	4.12	.850
Ideas for future articles	86	4	3.58	1.100

Scale: 1, Not important to 5, Critically important

nalists in Kuwait. It specifically focused on the following questions:

1. What type of information sources do the journalists use and how satisfied are they with these sources?
2. For what purpose do they use the information gathered from various sources?
3. To what extent do these journalists make use of electronic information sources?
4. What is the level of information searching skills of these journalists?
5. What problems do these journalists encounter while seeking information?

Methodology

Earlier studies on the information seeking behaviour of journalists have mostly utilized survey method using questionnaires, interviews and observation as data collection techniques. A review of earlier studies reveals that the questionnaire has not only been the most popular tool but has also been used very effectively. It was, therefore, decided to use a questionnaire for data collection.

The previous literature was examined to prepare a questionnaire that was reviewed by a team of six experts, pilot tested on a small group, and then finalized. Kuwait News Agency and seven local newspapers were approached for permission to conduct the study on their journalists. Two newspapers declined to participate. The remaining six organizations identified by name a total of 145 full-time working journalists. The questionnaire was personally distributed through the administrative office of each organization. Ninety-eight (67.6%) of the 145 respondents completed the questionnaires, out of which six were considered unusable. As a result, 92 (63.4%) questionnaires were used in the study. A majority of these respondents is male (80.2%), not unusual in a conservative Arab country, Arabic speaking

Table 2. Types of Informal Information Sources and Their Importance

Informal Information Source	n	Rank	Mean	SD
Other informal sources	20	1	4.10	1.165
Conversations	86	2	4.00	1.006
Phone-ins/people call you	85	3	3.64	1.089
Outside officials and experts	87	4	3.63	1.101
Colleagues in your agency	83	5	3.22	1.137
Letters/faxes from general public	84	6	3.15	1.177
Colleagues in other agencies	81	7	2.73	1.265

Scale: 1, Not important to 5, Critically important

(94.5%), less than 36 years old (54%), and expatriate (53.8%). About two-thirds (63.1%) are graduates in various disciplines with only 14.1% specializing in journalism. More than half (52.9%) of the respondents have been in the profession for more than 10 years.

Findings

The results of data analysis are reported in the following sections.

Type of information and its importance in journalists' work

The respondents were asked to indicate the level of importance of four types of information in their daily work. Their opinions, with no response from a few, are presented in terms of mean and standard deviation in Table 1.

These respondents consider all four types of information as important at various levels. 'Fact checking and verification' is very close to being 'critically important' (mean = 4.61) and gets the top rank whereas 'general' and 'background information' are considered as more than 'very important'.

Types of information sources used and their importance

The respondents were asked to specify the types of sources they used and indicate the importance of each. Opinions were to be expressed on each item given in the two sets of 'informal' and 'formal' sources. Informal sources are those where information is received from a 'person' direct rather than from a structured source that is pub-

Table 3. Types of Formal Information Sources and Their Importance

Formal Information Source	n	Rank	Mean	SD
Internet	23	1	4.17	1.029
Press releases	89	2	4.03	.982
Library of your agency	87	3	3.82	1.116
News agency reports	88	4	3.81	1.092
Your personal collection at home	85	5	3.75	1.104
Daily news diary	83	6	3.69	1.092
Electronic library of reports produced by your colleagues	83	7	3.54	1.243
Television	83	8	3.20	1.177
Other libraries in the city	83	9	3.07	1.276
Radio broadcasts	83	10	2.89	1.220

Scale: 1, Not important to 5, Critically important

licly available for use. The respondents' opinions for each source are presented in the form of mean and standard deviation in Table 2.

A small group of respondents gave the 'other informal sources' the top rank in terms of their importance (mean = 4.10). However, 'conversations' (mean = 4.00), as a single source, is considered as the most important one. 'Phone calls from citizens' (mean = 3.64) and 'outside officials and experts' (mean = 3.63) are also regarded closer to 'very important'. 'Colleagues in other agencies', seen as competitors, naturally receive the lowest rank (mean = 2.73).

Journalists use a variety of formal sources to gather information for their daily use. Table 3 presents the data on formal sources.

The Internet receives the top rank (mean = 4.17). 'Press releases' are considered very important (mean = 4.03). 'Library of the organization' (mean = 3.82) and 'news agency reports' (mean = 3.81) also receive high ranking. 'Television', 'other libraries', and 'radio' are given less importance.

Levels of satisfaction with the sources of information used

Journalists use many sources of information. The information obtained and the satisfaction gained varies from source to source. The respondents were asked to express their opinions on their level of satisfaction with the information received from various sources. Their responses for 'informal sources' are given in Table 4.

'Other informal sources' that received the highest ranking in terms of their importance, also

Table 4. Levels of Satisfaction with Information Obtained from Informal Sources

Informal Information Source	n	Rank	Mean	SD
Other informal sources	16	1	4.31	1.088
Conversations	88	2	3.94	1.054
Phone-ins/people call you	85	3	3.82	1.026
Outside officials and experts	83	4	3.81	.917
Colleagues in your agency	84	5	3.75	.903
Letters/faxes from general public	82	6	3.55	1.079
Colleagues in other agencies	85	7	3.35	1.043

Scale: 1, Very dissatisfied to 5, Very satisfied

Table 5. Levels of Satisfaction with Information Obtained from Formal Sources

Formal Information Source	n	Rank	Mean	SD
Internet	13	1	4.23	.927
News agency reports	81	2	4.06	.842
Press releases	82	3	4.06	.880
Your personal collection at home	84	4	3.99	.843
Daily news diary	83	5	3.94	.967
Library of your agency	83	6	3.73	1.094
Television	78	7	3.65	1.017
Radio broadcasts	78	8	3.45	1.124
Other libraries in the city	79	9	3.39	1.148
Electronic library of reports produced by your colleagues	81	10	3.06	1.201

Scale: 1, Very dissatisfied to 5, Very satisfied

receive the highest ranking in terms of satisfaction (mean = 4.31). The rankings for all sources in terms of satisfaction with information received are exactly the same as those given to their importance.

The data related to satisfaction with information obtained from the formal sources are presented in Table 5.

The 'Internet' (mean = 4.23), 'news agency reports' (mean = 4.06), and 'press releases' (mean = 4.06) are given top ranks in terms of satisfaction with the information received. Satisfaction with the 'personal collection' (mean = 3.99) is higher than with the 'library of the organization' (mean = 3.73). 'Electronic library of reports created in-house', surprisingly, receives the lowest rank.

Purpose for which gathered information is used

Responses for what purpose do these respondents acquire information are given in Table 6.

Table 6. Purpose for Which Gathered Information is Used (Multiple response)

Purpose	Frequency	Percentage
Writing a news item	56	60.9
Writing a feature	50	54.3
General knowledge	38	41.3
Editing a news item	37	40.2
Writing an article	26	28.3
Personality profile	10	10.9
Writing an editorial	9	9.8
Writing a column	7	7.6

More than half of the respondents use the information for 'writing a news item' (n=56, 60.9%) and 'writing a feature' (n=50, 54.3%).

Use of the Internet and libraries

The Internet has become an important source of information for journalists because it provides easy access to information and resources that are increasing day by day. Therefore, it seems logical that news organizations will provide access to, and journalists will use, the Internet regularly to find information. What is the situation in Kuwait? Fifty-three (57.6%) of the 92 respondents indicated that their organizations provide the Internet connection and search facilities. Thirty-nine (73.6%) of these 53 respondents also claim to have the Internet connection at their homes whereas 14 (26.4%) do not. All of these 53 journalists use the Internet as a source of information.

IT developments have made it possible for journalists to produce stories/reports in electronic format enabling their organizations to create an in-house electronic library of these materials for future use of their staff. Have news organizations in Kuwait caught up with this development? Only 32 (34.8%) of the 92 respondents replied that their organizations maintain such a resource. Of these 32 respondents, two (6.2%) individuals 'never'

Table 7. Purpose for Which the In-House Electronic Library was Used (n = 30, multiple response)

Purpose	Frequency	Percentage
<i>A. Conceptualising the Story</i>		
1. Get story angle/idea	16	53.3
2. Background research	12	40.0
3. Identify interviewees	4	13.3
4. Assign stories	3	10.0
<i>B. Analysing Previously Published Materials</i>		
1. Avoid duplication	17	56.7
2. Compare coverage	17	56.7
3. Check past treatment	11	36.7
4. Resolve discrepancies	8	26.7
5. Detail retrieval and resolution	7	23.3
6. Check past editorials	6	20.0
7. Check dates, spellings	4	13.3

used this resource. Twelve (37.5%) respondents used it 'always' whereas 18 (56.3%) used it 'frequently'. The 30 respondents, who actually used it, were asked to specify the purpose for which they used this electronic library. Their responses are presented in Table 7.

The main purposes for the use of the in-house electronic library are: 'avoiding duplication' (n=17, 56.7%), 'comparing coverage' (n=17, 56.7%), 'getting story angle/idea' (n=16, 53.3%), and 'background research' (n=12, 40.0%).

Does the use of this electronic library have any impact on the daily work of these 30 respondents? Some respondents did not provide answers to all of the items listed in this question. The responses given are presented in Table 8.

Sixteen (61.5%) of the 26 respondents feel that the time used to gather information decreased whereas two (7.7%) felt that it increased. Seven (26.9%) individuals indicated that there was 'no effect' on time. Sixteen (69.6%) of the 23 respondents indicated that the number of errors in their papers decreased whereas two (8.7%) felt that the errors increased. The most positive impact was

Table 8. Effect of the Use of the in-House Electronic Library on Respondents' Work (n = 30, multiple response)

Nature of Effect	n	Decreased	No Effect	Increased	Don't Know
Amount of time to get information	26	16	7	2	1
Number of fact errors in the paper	23	16	4	2	1
Amount of total background information in paper	25	1	1	21	2
Amount of background information used by reporter	23	1	1	17	4
Instances of fact-checking	19	4	5	9	1
Use of library staff for reference help	21	2	7	7	5

Table 9. Purpose of Using Library / Information Centre
n = 81, multiple response

Purpose	Rank	Frequency	Percentage
To search a database	1	43	53.1
To read materials there	2	39	48.1
To ask library staff to search materials for you	3	35	43.2
To study back volumes of journals and newspaper files	4	30	37.0
To borrow materials	5	29	35.8
To use Internet	6	5	6.2

mentioned by 21(84.0%) of the 25 respondents who indicated that the 'amount of total background information in paper' increased. Almost similar response was given by 17(73.9%) of the 23 respondents by indicating that the 'amount of background information used by reporter' increased. Nine (47.4%) of the 19 respondents said that 'instances of fact-checking' increased. There was also a limited increase in the use of library staff for assistance.

How frequently do these journalists use their organizational library? Almost two-thirds (n=60, 65.2%) of the respondents made some use of the library, including the 33(35.9%) who used it daily. The remaining journalists either use it 'rarely' (n=21, 22.8%) or make no use (n=11, 12.0%) at all. How effective was their library? Thirty-four (42.0%) of the 81 respondents, who used it, considered it as 'very effective' and 23(28.4%) as 'effective'. On a scale of 5 to 1, the mean score for effectiveness comes to 4.0, meaning 'effective'. For what purpose do these respondents use the library? The responses of 81 users are given in Table 9.

The main purposes for using the library are 'to search a database', 'to read materials there' and 'to ask library staff to search materials'. The lowest use is for searching the Internet.

Do these respondents use any library outside their agency? Fifty-one (57.3%) of the 89 respondents who answered this question used other libraries and 38 (42.7%) did not. Six (11.8%) of these 51 individuals used these libraries 'always', 35 (68.6%) used them 'frequently', and 10 (19.6%) used only 'rarely'. Thirty-six respondents who named libraries used those that matched their topical interests except those who used either the

public libraries or the university libraries. Turning to the Kuwait University Libraries is understandable due to its very good collection on journalism. Kuwait University alumni among these journalists find it natural to use its information resources.

Use of external electronic information resources and information searching skills

Do these journalists make any use of commercial electronic information sources to locate the needed information? Only 32 (35.6%) of 90 individuals who replied said 'yes' whereas 58 (64.4%) said 'no'. These 32 respondents were asked to indicate the level of their information searching skills. Seven (21.9%) claimed to have 'excellent' information searching skills, 15 (46.9%) as 'very good', and eight (25.0%) as 'good'. Only two (6.2%) selected 'fair'.

Have these respondents ever attended a training programme on how to use libraries, databases or the Internet. Only 22 (23.9%) of the 92 respondents have had some sort of training whereas a large majority (n=70, 76.1%) never received such a chance. Would these 70 individuals like to be trained in information searching skills? Fifty-four (90.0%) of the 60 participants who responded said 'yes' while six (10.0%) said 'no'. What is the opinion of the participants with regard to the importance of giving training in information searching to working journalists? A large majority (n=72, 78.2%) of the respondents 'strongly agreed' while 18 (19.6%) 'agreed'. Only two (2.2%) persons expressed 'no opinion'. It is reassuring that none of these 92 participants either 'strongly disagreed' or 'disagreed' with this idea.

Major problems faced while searching information

The respondents were asked to express their opinions regarding six problems listed in the questionnaire with regard to their importance to them. Some of the respondents did not give their opinion for some problems. The data related to problems faced is presented in Table 10.

Journalists are always busy and short of time. It is not, therefore, surprising that these respondents consider the 'lack of available time' for searching information as their top ranked problem (mean = 4.14). Seventy-five (81.5%) respondents

Table 10. Problems Faced While Searching Information

Problems	n	Rank	Mean	SD
Lack of available time	83	1	4.14	1.037
Lack of electronic library consisting of reports produced by your organization	75	2	3.80	1.366
Lack of training in information use skills	79	3	3.77	1.270
Difficulty in accessing international information sources	71	4	3.41	1.536
Information explosion / too much information	71	5	3.24	1.535
Lack of support from staff working in the library or information centre	75	6	3.01	1.438

Scale: 1, Not important to 5, Critically important

consider 'Lack of electronic library of reports' (mean = 3.80) closer to 'very important' problem, although only 60 (65.2%) had mentioned the lack of such a facility in an earlier section. It appears that 15 of those who acknowledged the existence of such a facility in their organization now consider it as good as non-existent. The 'lack of training in information use skills' (mean = 3.77) is also considered as an important problem. Lack of support from library staff is considered as the least important problem.

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to identify the information seeking patterns of working journalists in Kuwait. What general patterns can be found from the data presented in this study?

These journalists place more emphasis on fact-checking, general and background information as compared to getting ideas for future articles (Table 1). It must be mentioned that most of the analysis-based articles and columns are written by outside academics and experts who are not included in this study. The number of in-house journalists who write original articles is small. The information needs of these participants broadly fall into the categories identified for British journalists by Nicholas & Martin (1997): fact checking, current awareness, researching to obtain a context, and stimulus.

Kuwaiti journalists use a wide variety of sources, both informal and formal, to obtain the needed information (Tables 2 and 3) as do their

colleagues in other countries. However, in addition to giving preference to 'human' sources, as was found by Campbell (1997), they place more emphasis on the Internet and 'press releases'. They seem to be more satisfied with the information that they receive from the sources that they prefer (Tables 4 and 5) than those that they do not. It is interesting to note that these respondents are least satisfied with the in-house 'electronic library of stories/reports produced by their colleagues' simply because this is something new to the Kuwaiti news establishments, must be small in size, and still evolving. Some of the respondents may not even have the appropriate skills to use this electronic library.

The information gathered by these respondents appears to be mainly used for preparing news stories, features, personal knowledge, editing a news item, and preparing an article and less so for preparing personality profiles, editorials, and columns (Table 6). This was expected because a limited amount of items mentioned in the later group are actually needed and are written by a limited number of individuals. Non-journalists from outside the news establishments, in fact, write some of the 'columns' and articles on a regular basis.

A majority of the respondents of this study have access to the Internet and claim to use it as a source of information. These figures are closer to those for the British journalists reported by Nicholas et al. (2000). However, the Kuwaiti journalists place the Internet at the top rank in terms of its importance as a source of information as well as in terms of satisfaction that they gain with the information obtained (Tables 3 and 5). This perception exists in spite of the fact that the Internet access to Arabic resources is still limited and that most of the respondents are Arabic speaking and are not well versed in information searching. A good number of these journalists use the in-house 'electronic library of stories/reports produced by their colleagues' for a variety of purposes (Table 7) and display a positive attitude in terms of its impact on their daily work (Table 8). However, all the respondents are not very happy about this facility, and, whether accessible or not, consider its 'lack' as a second major problem (Table 10).

Less than one-fourth of the respondents of this study have had some sort of training in in-

formation searching skills. A majority of these respondents would like to go through such training if it were provided. It is not surprising then that these respondents consider the 'lack of training in information use skills' as the third major problem (Table 10). Lack of time, naturally, is the top ranking problem of these journalists. Other major problems mentioned were: lack of electronic library of reports, accessing international information sources, information explosion, and lack of library staff support. Some of these problems are similar to those identified by Nicholas & Martin (1997). These are the areas where the information professionals can play a positive role and come in to help.

Conclusions and recommendations

Considering the latest global developments in news provision and the recent increased focus on this region, Kuwait has momentous responsibility and a latent opportunity to improve its news delivery services. In order to meet this challenge, major steps are needed to upgrade the skills of its journalists and improve services provided to them so that the problems that they face are resolved. The key partners in such an undertaking must include:

1. Kuwaiti government agencies related to news services;
2. Newspaper publishing organizations; and
3. Journalist training agencies

The findings of this study point to a number of deficient areas that need to be improved. The core recommendations for immediate attention to which these partners must address their efforts are the following:

1. Promote the use of Information Technology in the news delivery services, especially focusing on the Internet;
2. Initiate an intensive program to develop in each news organization an electronic library of reports produced in-house by its journalists;
3. Improve the current organizational library services focusing on information and human resources, creating awareness of these resources among users, and initiating cooperation with other libraries;
4. Initiate need-oriented programs of in-service training to improve information searching and use skills of journalists; and

5. Examine the Kuwait University journalism curriculum with the aim of making a provision for curriculum-integrated instruction of information literacy to make student journalists competent in this area.

This study also points to several areas where more research needs to be conducted. The nature of the use of electronic resources by Kuwaiti journalists using in-depth interviews needs to be investigated. Both the nature and impact of the in-house electronic library of stories/reports generated by the journalists themselves also need to be studied in-depth through personal examination of this resource and interviews of actual users. No attention has been given to the role of the information professional vis-à-vis the journalist client. This role needs to be articulated by conducting a study using interviews with journalists and information professionals.

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