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INFORMATION-SEEKING BEHAVIOUR AMONG YOUTHS IN POTISKUM, YOBE STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: This study examined the information-seeking behaviour of youths in Potiskum, Yobe State, Nigeria. Four objectives guided the study: to ascertain existing information-seeking behaviour; identify information needs; identify information sources used to manage health; and assess how information received affected respondents' way of life. A quantitative descriptive survey design was adopted. Data were collected through a structured Google Forms questionnaire distributed through email and social-media platforms, producing a self-selected online sample. After data cleaning, 102 valid responses were analysed using frequencies and percentages. Active searching was the most reported information-seeking behaviour (40.2%), followed by passive information-seeking (26.5%), passive attention (16.7%), and ongoing search (16.7%). The leading information needs were skills acquisition (36.3%) and employment (23.5%). The main health-information sources were the Internet (24.5%), social media (24.5%), and family members (22.5%). Information received most frequently assisted respondents in knowing how and where to obtain valid information (30.4%), navigating the Internet for information searches (23.5%), and recognising the importance of timely help-seeking (22.5%). The findings describe the connected respondents who participated and should not be generalised to all youths in Potiskum. The study recommends targeted information-literacy, employment and skills-information support through relevant state institutions and youth-serving channels.

Keywords: Information-Seeking Behaviour; Information Needs; Information Sources; Youths; Potiskum; Yobe State; Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Information-seeking behaviour concerns the ways people recognise information needs, encounter or search for information, select sources, and use the information obtained. Wilson (1981) located information seeking within a broader process in which information needs arise from a person's physiological, affective and cognitive circumstances. Later work distinguished modes ranging from passive exposure to deliberate and continuing search (Wilson, 1997). These distinctions are particularly relevant to young people, whose information needs may span education, employment, health, livelihoods and everyday decision-making.

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Young people increasingly operate within information environments that combine interpersonal sources, traditional media and Internet-enabled platforms. Studies show that young people use people, places and digital sources in combination and may rely on convenient or trusted sources when addressing everyday needs (Agosto & Hughes-Hassell, 2005; Combes, 2012). Information and communication technologies can widen access to knowledge and livelihood opportunities, including information related to employment, education and health (Zaremohzzabieh et al., 2021).

Context is central to understanding information-seeking behaviour. Potiskum is a major commercial town in Yobe State, north-eastern Nigeria, with a diverse youth population. The wider north-east has experienced prolonged conflict and disruption to livelihoods and basic services, including in Yobe State (UNICEF, 2024). Studying Potiskum therefore provides context-specific evidence on information behaviour in a setting where employment, skills, health and access to dependable information are practically important.

Despite the importance of information to education, employment, health and everyday problem-solving, there is limited context-specific empirical evidence describing how youths in Potiskum seek information, the needs they prioritise, the sources they use for health information, and the effects they report from information obtained. This study addresses that gap by providing descriptive evidence from youths who participated in an online survey in Potiskum.

The study addressed four research questions: (1) What information-seeking behaviours are reported by participating youths? (2) What information needs do they report? (3) What information sources do they report using to manage their health? and (4) How do they report that information received affects their way of life? Correspondingly, the objectives were to ascertain reported information-seeking behaviours; identify information needs; identify health-information sources used; and assess the reported effects of information received.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Information-Seeking Behaviour and Wilson's Modes

Information behaviour encompasses active and passive engagement with information sources and channels. Wilson (1997) identified four modes of information acquisition: passive attention, passive search, active search and ongoing search. Passive attention occurs when information is acquired without deliberate seeking; passive search occurs when another activity produces information relevant to the individual; active search involves deliberate efforts to find information; and ongoing search refers to continuing or periodic searching to update or extend an existing knowledge base. In this study, the questionnaire labels were active searching information seeking, passive attention information seeking, passive information-seeking and ongoing search information-seeking. The questionnaire's 'passive information-seeking' option is treated as corresponding to Wilson's passive-search mode. The instruction required respondents to tick the option considered appropriate.

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Youth information seeking is influenced by the nature of the need and the accessibility and perceived usefulness of sources. Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2005) showed that young adults' everyday information seeking covers multiple life domains, while Combes (2012) found that young people frequently rely on familiar people and readily available online information. Thindwa et al. (2019) similarly demonstrated that information seeking can involve uncertainty and changing feelings during the search process.

Information Needs, Sources and Use

Young people seek information for education, employment, health, social participation and other everyday needs. Zaremohzzabieh et al. (2021) emphasised the role of information and communication technologies in expanding livelihood-related opportunities for youth. The value of information is also reflected in what users are able to do with it: Sinha and Kumar (2015), for example, reported problem-solving as an important use of information among public-library users. These strands informed the study's focus on information needs, health-information sources and reported effects.

The literature establishes that information seeking is shaped by needs, context, available sources and the user's mode of engagement. However, evidence specifically describing these dimensions among youths in Potiskum is limited. The present study documents the patterns reported by its respondents while recognising that online recruitment limits population-level generalisation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design and Setting

This section outlines the methodology employed to examine the information-seeking behaviour among youths in Potiskum, Yobe State, Nigeria, focusing on information needs, information sources utilised, and the impact of information received on the way of life of youths. A quantitative methodology and descriptive survey design were adopted for the study. According to Story and Tait (2019), surveys provide evidence of the attitudes, practices, and knowledge of respondents. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researchers to describe the information-seeking behaviours, needs, sources, and reported effects of information among the respondents. A survey is a systematic method for gathering information from a sample of entities for the purpose of constructing quantitative descriptions of attributes of the larger population from which the entities are drawn. Surveys are used to gather information on attitudes, behaviours, opinions, and beliefs that cannot be observed directly.

Potiskum is a town in Potiskum Local Government Area of Yobe State, Nigeria. The study setting was selected because it is a major urban centre in north-eastern Nigeria with a substantial youth population. According to Zhujiworld (2022), Potiskum has a population of 95,862, of which 48,595 are male, 47,266 are female, and 26,129 are between the ages of 15–29 years. The town serves as a commercial hub and hosts a diverse population from various ethnic groups including Bade,

Bolewa, Bura, Fulani, Hausa, Kanuri, Karai-karai, Manga, Marghi, Ngamo, Ngizim, Shuwa, and others.

Table 1: Population Distribution by Age in Potiskum LGA, Yobe State

Age distribution	Male	Female
15–29 years	13,280	12,849

Source: Zhujiworld (2022).

Study Population and Sampling

The study population comprised youths in Potiskum Local Government Area, Yobe State. The population estimate used was 26,129 youths aged 15–29 years, based on the demographic source available to the researchers at the time. Because that source is a commercial data aggregator rather than an official Nigerian statistical authority, the figure is retained as contextual background and is not used to claim sampling precision.

Although the research planned for 100 respondents, the questionnaire was administered through an electronic link shared by email and social-media platforms, including WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram, and could be shared onward. The achieved sample was therefore a self-selected online sample rather than a probability sample. No margin of sampling error or population-level precision is claimed. After duplicate removal, 102 valid responses were analysed.

Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

The researchers used a self-developed electronic questionnaire administered through Google Forms. The questionnaire was divided into five sections:

SECTION A: Biodata of respondents (gender, age, tribe, education qualification)

SECTION B: Information-seeking behaviour among youths in Potiskum, Yobe State, Nigeria

SECTION C: Information needs of youths in Potiskum, Yobe State

SECTION D: Information sources utilised by youths in Potiskum to manage their health

SECTION E: Impact of information on the way of life of youths in Potiskum, Yobe State

The questionnaire was entered into Google Forms and distributed electronically through email and social-media platforms frequented by youths in Potiskum LGA, including WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram. The instruction asked respondents to tick the option considered appropriate. Each substantive item was a single-choice response, so each respondent contributed one response to each

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study variable. Submitted responses were stored in the Google Forms database and retrieved after 14 days.

Validity and Trustworthiness

Validity refers to the degree to which an instrument accurately measures what it intends to measure. Content validity was used for the validation of the research instrument for this study. Content validity indicates the extent to which items adequately measure or represent the content of the property or trait that the instrument is intended to measure. The instrument was submitted to the supervisor repeatedly for observations and verifications, ensuring that the researchers remained aligned with the objectives of the research. Corrections were made on the instrument in line with the supervisor's observations. In addition, the instrument was assessed by an expert in the field of research. According to Daud et al. (2018), face validity or content validity refers to an expert's recommendation based on his or her expertise and prior experience, after briefly assessing an instrument. Hence, the instrument can be said to be valid for field deployment.

Data Analysis

After data collection, responses were retrieved from the Google Forms database in Excel spreadsheet format. The data were prepared for analysis through editing, classification, filtering, and checks for duplicate or erroneous records before the findings were summarised.

A descriptive approach to data analysis was adopted. The data were cleaned by checking for incomplete, missing, duplicate, and redundant records and were then analysed in Microsoft Excel. Frequencies and percentages were used to summarise respondents' characteristics and responses in relation to the four research objectives. Findings were presented in tables and interpreted descriptively.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. The questionnaire included a clear statement of the research purpose and assurance of confidentiality. Respondents were informed that information provided would be treated confidentially and used solely for research purposes. Data used for the substantive analysis were reported only in aggregate form, and any administrative identifiers associated with electronic submissions were not included in the reported analysis.

Methodological Limitations

The study was descriptive and based on a self-selected online sample. Because the link could be shared onward, the total number exposed is unknown and a conventional response rate cannot be calculated. Online participation may have favoured respondents with Internet access, digital familiarity and higher educational attainment. Males constituted 66.7% of respondents, compared with 50.8% of the 15–29 population distribution reported in Table 1, while 52.0% held a first degree and 14.7% held a diploma. The sample therefore disproportionately represents educated, connected

young people and may under-represent youths with limited Internet access or lower educational attainment. Findings are descriptive of respondents and should not be generalised to all youths in Potiskum. The questionnaire recorded age only in the categories 18–23 and 24–27 years; consequently, although the contextual population estimate cited for Potiskum covered ages 15–29, the instrument did not represent those aged 15–17 or 28–29. This further limits generalisation across the full 15–29 age range.

RESULTS

The findings are presented according to the study objectives, focusing on information-seeking behaviour among youths, information needs of youths, information sources utilised to manage health, and the impact of information received on the way of life of youths. Quantitative findings from the questionnaire are presented using frequencies and percentages.

Characteristics of Study Participants

The questionnaire was electronically administered for 14 days. The response sheet contained 104 submitted records. Two unequivocally duplicated submissions were identified and one copy of each was removed, leaving 102 valid responses. The link was directly shared 148 times, but because it could be forwarded, the total number exposed is unknown. Accordingly, 148 is reported only as direct shares and is not used as a response-rate denominator.

Table 2: Questionnaire Distribution and Valid Records

Direct links shared	Submitted records	Duplicates removed	Valid analysed
148	104	2	102

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

Among the 102 valid respondents, 33.3% (34) were female, while 66.7% (68) were male.

Table 3: Gender Distribution

Respondents disaggregated by gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	68	66.7%
Female	34	33.3%

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

Regarding educational qualification, 52.0% of the respondents had First Degrees, 20.6% had Secondary School Certificates, 14.7% had Diplomas, 4.9% had National Certificate in Education (NCE), while the remaining 7.8% fell under 'Others'.

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Table 4: Educational Qualification of Respondents

Educational qualification	Frequency	Percentage
First Degree	53	52.0%
Secondary Certificate	21	20.6%
Diploma	15	14.7%
NCE	5	4.9%
Others	8	7.8%

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

Table 5: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age group	Frequency	Percentage
18–23 years	33	32.4%
24–27 years	69	67.6%

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

Table 6: Ethnic Distribution of Respondents

Ethnic group	Frequency	Percentage
Karai-karai	33	32.4%
Ngamo	27	26.5%
Others	23	22.5%
Ngizim	12	11.8%
Fulani	2	2.0%
Bolewa	2	2.0%
Bura	1	1.0%
Kanuri	1	1.0%
Hausa	1	1.0%

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

Information-Seeking Behaviour among Youths

The first research objective examined the information-seeking behaviour reported by respondents. Each respondent selected one of four categories corresponding to the study's operationalisation of Wilson's information-seeking modes. Table 7 presents the distribution.

Table 7: Information-Seeking Behaviour of Youths in Potiskum, Yobe State, Nigeria

Information-seeking behaviour	Frequency	Percentage
Active information seeking	41	40.2%
Passive information-seeking	27	26.5%
Passive attention information seeking	17	16.7%
Ongoing search information-seeking	17	16.7%

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

Active searching was reported by 40.2% (41) of respondents, followed by passive information-seeking at 26.5% (27). Passive attention and ongoing search were each reported by 16.7% (17) of respondents.

Information Needs of Youths

The second research objective examined respondents' principal information need. Because the item was single-choice, the percentages represent the one option selected rather than all needs a respondent may have had. Table 8 presents the distribution.

Table 8: Information Needs of Youths in Potiskum, Yobe State, Nigeria

Information needs	Frequency	Percentage
Information on skills acquisition	37	36.3%
Information on employment	24	23.5%
Information on financial assistance	11	10.8%
Information on health	11	10.8%
Information on entertainment, sports, and fashion	7	6.9%
Information on further education	6	5.9%
Information on relocation to a greener pasture	4	3.9%
Information on national and international news	2	2.0%

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

Skills acquisition was the most frequently reported information need at 36.3% (37), followed by employment at 23.5% (24). Health and financial assistance each accounted for 10.8% (11), entertainment/sports/fashion for 6.9% (7), further education for 5.9% (6), relocation to greener pastures for 3.9% (4), and national/international news for 2.0% (2).

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Information Sources Utilised by Youths

The third research objective examined the principal information source selected for managing health. The item required one response; the findings therefore identify the selected source rather than the full range an individual may use. Table 9 presents the distribution.

Table 9: Information Sources Utilised by Youths in Potiskum to Manage Their Health

Information sources	Frequency	Percentage
Internet	25	24.5%
Social media	25	24.5%
Family members	23	22.5%
Colleagues	14	13.7%
Radio/Television	13	12.7%
Newspapers	2	2.0%

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

The Internet and social media were each reported as health-information sources by 24.5% (25) of respondents. Family members accounted for 22.5% (23), colleagues for 13.7% (14), radio/television for 12.7% (13), and newspapers for 2.0% (2).

Impact of Information on the Way of Life of Youths

The fourth research objective examined the principal reported effect of information received. Each respondent selected one option. Table 10 presents the distribution.

Table 10: How Information Received from Sources Affected the Way of Life of Youths in Potiskum, Yobe State

Impact of information	Frequency	Percentage
It assisted me in knowing how and where to get valid information	31	30.4%
I get to know how to navigate the internet for information search to satisfy my information needs	24	23.5%
It made me realise the importance of seeking help on time	23	22.5%
It helped me in solving problems relating to my health	15	14.7%
I get to know that problems cannot be solved if information is not sought	9	8.8%

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

Information received assisted 30.4% (31) of respondents in knowing how and where to obtain valid information. A further 23.5% (24) reported improved ability to navigate the Internet for information searches, while 22.5% (23) reported greater recognition of the importance of timely help-seeking. Information helped 14.7% (15) to solve health-related problems, while 8.8% (9) reported understanding that problems cannot be solved when needed information is not sought.

DISCUSSION

Information-Seeking Behaviour among Youths

The study identified four information-seeking modes among respondents: active searching information seeking (40.2%), passive information-seeking (26.5%), passive attention information seeking (16.7%), and ongoing search information-seeking (16.7%). This order is consistent with Table 7. The framework derives from Wilson's later model, which distinguishes passive attention, passive search, active search and ongoing search (Wilson, 1997). In the questionnaire, 'passive information-seeking' was used as the label corresponding to passive search. Active searching was therefore the most commonly selected mode among these respondents.

The variety of information-seeking behaviours observed indicates that information seeking is contextual and hinges on prevailing circumstances, as individuals react in multifarious ways when faced with critical life challenges. This finding aligns with Thindwa et al. (2019), who reported that feelings proposed by Kuhlthau's information search process model, which include anxiety, optimism, uncertainty and excitement, were experienced by most students as they started an information search. This implies that individuals can exhibit different types of information-seeking behaviour depending on the situation they find themselves in, and what they need the information for.

Combes's (2012) study on the information-seeking behaviour of youths (Millennials or Generation Y) found that participants in using the internet prefer to connect with people they already know, and often resort to trusted or significant others when engaged in serious information-seeking. The study also uncovered that young people demonstrated high satisficing behaviours that involved the use of retrieved information that may be incomplete, inaccurate, not detailed, or information that is just easily available. Similarly, the present study found that while many youths actively seek information, others engage in passive information seeking, which may reflect satisficing behaviour.

Information Needs of Youths

The study identified eight typologies of information needs among youths in Potiskum: skills acquisition (36.3%), employment (23.5%), health information (10.8%), financial assistance (10.8%), entertainment/sports/fashion (6.9%), further education (5.9%), relocation to greener pasture (3.9%), and national/international news (2.0%). The predominance of skills acquisition and employment as information needs is notable given the educational qualification profile of respondents, with 52.0% holding First Degrees. This pattern should be interpreted in light of the achieved sample: 52.0% held first degrees and 14.7% held diplomas. A comparatively educated

online sample may be especially likely to prioritise skills acquisition and employment, so the distribution should not be assumed to represent youths who were less connected or not reached online.

This finding is consistent with Zaremohzzabieh et al. (2021), who stated that ICT empowers youth to have access to information and knowledge on different topics on healthcare, employment, and education. The findings also align with Sinha and Kumar (2015), who found that 88.4% of respondents searched for information related to employment, while 60.43% searched for information related to education.

The diverse information needs identified reflect the various aspects of youth life and aspirations. Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2005) identified 28 topics encompassing the everyday life information needs of urban teenagers, including daily life routine, social activities, academics, personal finances, current events, health, career, and self-actualisation. The present study similarly found a range of information needs spanning personal development, career, health, and social engagement.

Information Sources Utilised by Youths

The study found that the primary information sources utilised by youths in Potiskum to manage their health were the Internet (24.5%), social media (24.5%), family members (22.5%), colleagues (13.7%), radio/television (12.7%), and newspapers (2.0%). The predominance of the Internet and social media as information sources reflects the increased access and availability of smartphones among youths.

This finding is supported by Kang (2023), who stated that access to the internet has eased access to information. Mohammadpour et al. (2017) reaffirmed that the availability of smartphones has significantly increased in developed and developing countries, most especially among people in remote and rural areas. The findings also align with Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2005), who found that teens prefer people as information sources (friends and family) and have unfavourable views about libraries and librarians. However, the present study found that while family members remain important, digital sources are now more frequently utilised.

Within this respondent group, the low reported use of newspapers (2.0%) contrasts sharply with the combined prominence of the Internet and social media. Radio/television (12.7%) nevertheless remained a reported source of health information, indicating that traditional broadcast media continued to contribute alongside digital and interpersonal sources.

Impact of Information on the Way of Life of Youths

The study found that information received from various sources affected the way of life of youths in Potiskum in multiple ways: assisting them in knowing how and where to get valid information (30.4%), knowing how to navigate through the internet for information search (23.5%), realising the importance of seeking for help on time (22.5%), solving problems related to their health (14.7%), and understanding that problems cannot be solved if information is not sought (8.8%).

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These findings indicate that information-seeking has practical benefits for youths, including improved problem-solving abilities, enhanced information literacy skills, and greater awareness of the importance of timely help-seeking. This aligns with the findings of Sinha and Kumar (2015), who found that 82.73% of respondents used information for problem-solving.

Only 14.7% of respondents selected solving health-related problems as the reported effect of information received. Because the study did not directly measure information quality or barriers to applying health information, this finding should be interpreted descriptively rather than as evidence of why health-related problem solving was less frequently reported.

CONCLUSION

Summary of the Study

This study examined the information-seeking behaviour of youths in Potiskum, Yobe State, Nigeria. The research was guided by four objectives: to ascertain the existing information seeking behaviour among youths in Potiskum; to identify the information needs of youths in Potiskum; to identify information sources utilised by youths in Potiskum to manage their health; and to assess how information received from these sources affected their way of life.

Summary of Findings

1. Information-seeking behaviour among youths in Potiskum manifests in four typologies: active searching information seeking (40.2%), passive information-seeking (26.5%), passive attention information seeking (16.7%), and ongoing search information-seeking (16.7%).

2. The information needs of youths in Potiskum include: skills acquisition (36.3%), employment (23.5%), health information (10.8%), financial assistance (10.8%), entertainment/sports/fashion (6.9%), further education (5.9%), relocation to greener pasture (3.9%), and national/international news (2.0%).

3. Information sources utilised by youths in Potiskum to manage their health include: the Internet (24.5%), social media (24.5%), family members (22.5%), colleagues (13.7%), radio/television (12.7%), and newspapers (2.0%).

4. Information received from various sources affected the way of life of youths in Potiskum by: assisting them in knowing how and where to get valid information (30.4%), knowing how to navigate through the internet for information search (23.5%), realising the importance of seeking for help on time (22.5%), solving problems related to their health (14.7%), and understanding that problems cannot be solved if information is not sought (8.8%).

Taken together, the study contributes context-specific empirical evidence on information-seeking modes, principal information needs, health-information sources and reported effects among an online sample of youths in Potiskum. Its contribution lies in documenting these patterns in a setting

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for which published youth information-behaviour evidence is limited, while delimiting the population to which the findings can reasonably speak.

Conclusion

The study concludes that information-seeking behaviour among the respondents varied across the modes, needs and sources measured. Active searching was the most frequently selected behaviour, while skills acquisition and employment were the leading principal information needs. The Internet, social media and family members were prominent health-information sources. Because the study directly measured reported behaviours, needs, sources and effects—but not all possible determinants such as literacy, socio-economic status or information quality—those wider factors should be treated as contextual explanations rather than measured causes.

Recommendations

1. The Yobe State Ministry of Education, State Library Board and relevant youth-development agencies should provide targeted information-literacy activities across digital and non-digital sources.
2. Youth-serving institutions should strengthen access to practical information on vocational skills, employability, entrepreneurship, further education and available training opportunities through libraries, youth centres and digital channels.
3. Health-information initiatives should combine credible online information with trusted interpersonal and institutional channels, including health workers, libraries and community youth platforms.
4. Mentoring and guidance mechanisms should help young people navigate information choices where source credibility or misinformation may affect decision-making.

Suggestions for Further Study

1. Replicate the study using offline or mixed-mode data collection to test whether the observed patterns hold among youths with limited or unreliable Internet access.
2. Examine age, gender, educational and socio-economic differences using a sampling design that supports subgroup and population-level inference.
3. Investigate how youths assess the credibility and quality of health, employment and skills information obtained through social media and other digital sources.
4. Explore relationships between information-seeking behaviour and outcomes such as employment decisions, skills uptake, health-service use or educational progression.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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