

INFORMATION-SEEKING BEHAVIOUR AND LIBRARY USE BY ACADEMIC THEOLOGIANs IN SOUTH AFRICA

Ken D. Chisa

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9712-0046>

University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

chisak@smms.ac.za

ABSTRACT

This study discusses findings of a survey that analysed the information-seeking behaviour and library use of academic theologians employed in seven theological institutions in South Africa which constitute the Pietermaritzburg Cluster of Theological Libraries (PCTL). Data on age, academic qualifications, information-seeking habits, and library use of the theologians were gathered by means of a questionnaire, literature review, interviews and observation. The research draws conclusions about the nature of information-seeking patterns and library use of these theologians in relation to their institutional libraries. Barriers to information seeking are identified and suggestions on how to tackle them are provided. The findings of the study show that academic theologians are consistent users of libraries but mostly rely more on personal collections than institutional collections. Moreover, the study found that while the theologians are reasonably satisfied with their institutional libraries, most of them feel that collections, rather than services need improvement. It is hoped that data and questionnaire comments arising from this study will contribute to improved theological library services within the PCTL and beyond.

Keywords: information-seeking behaviour; library use; academic theologians; Pietermaritzburg Cluster of Theological Libraries

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The literature in the field of Library and Information Science (LIS) generally shows that there are four basic determinants regarding an individual's information-seeking environment. They are as follows (Case 2012):

- the individual information seeker;
- the information needs of the information seeker;
- available information providers; and
- possible resolutions to the individual's information needs.

Each of the first three elements is of equal importance as a factor likely to affect the range of options leading to the fourth element. In the context of the present study, the theologian, the theologian's research needs and the theological libraries within the Pietermaritzburg Cluster of Theological Libraries (PCTL) may all be regarded as the key elements to the provision of adequate theological information to the academic or professional theologian (Case 2012).

Among the four aforementioned elements, there exists an information-seeking framework within which a range of barriers may deny effective information access to the individual. The barriers can be classified into five broad categories, namely societal, institutional, psychological, physical, and intellectual (Chisa and Hoskins 2014).

According to Chisa and Hoskins (2014), societal barriers are those elements within the social context that impede the availability of resources. Given the denominational tapestry of the individual theological institutions within the PCTL, observers may be excused to assume that societal barriers could be deemed as significant impediments to information access. However, there is no evidence suggesting that any individual library within the PCTL exhibits any theological exclusiveness in its approach to the collection and dissemination of information.

Institutional barriers arise through the incapacity or unwillingness of an institutional provider to deliver information (Chisa and Hoskins 2014). That is, a theological library or librarian may be unable, for a number of reasons (i.e. financial constraints, lack of facilities, inadequate training) to deliver information desired by a theologian (Al-Suqri 2007). Such barriers are assumed to be potentially significant in this study.

Psychological barriers occur when an individual is unable to perceive his/her need as informational or, for psychological reasons, is unable to obtain information from the appropriate provider (Chisa and Hoskins 2014; Haruna and Mabawonku 2001). While this is not regarded as a significant factor in the present study, it is also recognised that psychological barriers do exist between scholars and librarians.

Physical barriers exist when an individual physically cannot make contact with the information provider or reach the source of information (Chisa and Hoskins 2014). Initially this was not deemed as a factor in the present study, but in retrospect, it could well play a role in user or librarian relationships (Al-Suqri 2007; Haruna and

Mabawonku 2001). This is particularly due to the fact that some librarians within the PCTL constellation are employed part-time, with a sizeable number of teaching staff similarly employed, thus minimising contact between each other (Garaba 2015).

Finally, intellectual barriers occur when the library user lacks the requisite training and expertise to acquire information (Chisa and Hoskins 2014). In the present context, this barrier is treated as significant inasmuch as “intellectual” is taken to include “lack of knowledge”. That is, the theologian may lack the information literacy required to solve his/her information needs in the most effective way.

This study does not investigate societal, psychological or physical barriers to information access within the PCTL. Rather it focuses on a range of factors which may contribute to, or result from, institutional and intellectual barriers. Within these two parameters, the study does not investigate the librarian in itself as a possible facilitator or barrier of information. Rather, it concentrates on one category of the library user: the “professional” theologian. This is defined as any person who is employed on a full- or part-time basis in the teaching of subjects offered as part of a theological curriculum in any one of the theological institutions whose libraries constitute the PCTL. Finally, the study makes no attempt to verify or corroborate what these theologians report as their information-seeking behaviour; rather it simply sets out the reported behaviour and draws conclusions that are as valid as the accuracy of this reported behaviour.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

All major denominations (i.e. Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, Evangelical and Lutheran) send their ordinands for training at various theological institutions in Pietermaritzburg. The institutions also accept private students who wish to pursue tertiary theological education in different programmes. The libraries of seven of these theological institutions together form the PCTL, a consortium sharing services and facilities to some degree (Garaba 2015).

Individually, these institutions range in size from a handful of students to a couple of hundreds, with teaching staff ranging from five to 25. These numbers are typical of theological training institutions throughout South Africa (Garaba 2015). Grouped together, however, these institutions form a formidable consortium with libraries and academic staff of sufficient size to justify meaningful investigation.

Presently, the PCTL constitute the libraries of the Evangelical Seminary of Southern Africa (ESSA), St Joseph’s Theological Institute (SJTI), the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics (SRPC) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), the Congregational House of Formation (CHoF), the Anglican House of Studies (AnHoS), the Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary (SMMS), and the Lutheran Theological Institute (LTI) (Garaba 2015).

The formation of this cluster system can be traced back to 1987 when Dr James Cochrane joined the Department of Theology at the then University of Natal

in Pietermaritzburg (UNP). Dr Cochrane shared his experience of the cluster concept which he had witnessed in Chicago in the United States of America (USA). Later, Prof. Gunter Wittenberg, a lecturer in Old Testament Theology at UNP and one of the cluster's founding fathers, was sent to Chicago in order to study the concept at close range (Garaba 2015).

The clusters studied in the USA included the Association of Chicago Theological Schools (ACTS), the Boston Library Consortium (BLC) and the Union Theological Seminary (UTS). These models were eventually adapted to the Pietermaritzburg situation. The structure of the Pietermaritzburg cluster was set up during 1989 and the official inauguration was in March 1990. The vision statement, called the "Declaration of Intention", was signed by local bishops and the heads of the respective institutions. This formalised an agreement among the theological institutions in the Pietermaritzburg area to form a cluster of theological educational institutions to work together towards the provision of a contextual tertiary theological education (Garaba 2015).

RESEARCH PROBLEM

There appears to be no previous studies in South Africa that examined the information-seeking behaviour and library use of professional theologians. Elsewhere, there have been some studies of local priests as readers and library users, but these studies clearly focus on the reading habits of theological practitioners rather than professional theologians (Matsveru 2014). Since a theological practitioner such as a parish priest seeks information for rather different purposes than an academic theologian and is at best a marginal user of a library, there is little or no direct relevance in the small amount of research currently available on clerical reading habits.

In an attempt to develop a replicable method for collecting quantitative and qualitative data on information-seeking behaviour and library use by academic theologians, this study tests a set of questions and method of administration. It provides information on theologians within the PCTL, derives data on the study and research habits of these theologians, and analyses data on their use of libraries. The research draws conclusions about the nature of information seeking and library use by these theologians in relation to their libraries.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND OBJECTIVES

This study, therefore, seeks to answer this overarching question: What is the information-seeking behaviour and library use by academic theologians within the PCTL? Within that broad scope, special focus will be on the following objectives:

- a. understanding the demographic profile of academic theologians within the PCTL;
- b. examining the information-seeking behaviour of the theologians;

- c. identifying the theologians' sources of information in the library;
- d. assessing the use of library services by the theologians and how a library service is obtained; and
- e. providing recommendations based on the findings of the study.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study is premised within the so-called General Model of the Information Seeking of Professionals (GMISP) theory (Leckie 2005). In terms of this theoretical framework, professionals have many complex and different work roles. Tasks from each role create information needs, and thus, necessitate information seeking. This model has previously been tested on engineers, healthcare professionals and lawyers, among other professionals. The model identifies five professional roles: service provider, administrator or manager, researcher, educator and student (Kwasitsu 2003). Under these roles exist specific tasks, and information seeking is related to the particular role and its associated tasks. Characteristics of information seeking are informed by variables such as "individual demographics, context, frequency, predictability, importance and complexity" (Leckie 2005).

Professionals seek information from colleagues, librarians, handbooks, journal articles and their own personal knowledge and experiences. According to Leckie (2005), information sources can be "formal or informal, internal or external (within or without the organisation), oral or written". Moreover, information seeking is influenced by awareness of information (i.e. direct or indirect knowledge of various information sources), whereby variables can be "accessibility of sources, familiarity and prior success, trustworthiness, timeliness, cost, quality" (Leckie 2005). Results of the information-seeking process are outcomes such as providing a service or product, completing paperwork, and achieving professional development goals. Where the information seeking is not resolved, "further information seeking is required and that is conceptualized as a feedback loop" (Leckie 2005).

In the context of the present study, the academic theologians carry out many tasks, such as lecturing, conducting research studies, presenting research papers at conferences, and supervising postgraduate research students. These tasks, whether technical or non-technical, require specific information. As Leckie (2005) notes, "awareness of information sources, including accessibility, quality, timeliness, trustworthiness, familiarity and previous success", has a direct bearing on approaches taken in the theologians' information-seeking endeavours.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review highlights critical issues pertaining to information-seeking processes by academic theologians. The broad themes are discussed below.

THE CONCEPT OF INFORMATION

The concept of “information” is very complex and difficult to unpack. This is evident in the various definitions attributed to it. Available definitions reflect the emphasis and perhaps the prejudice of their proponents (Ajewole 2001; Mchombu 2000; Mooko 2002). This is mainly because “information” is a multidisciplinary concept. This has led to the separation of “information” into three broad categories (Ajewole 2001). The first category is scientific and technical information (STI). This information falls within the realm of science and technology. The second category is socio-cultural. In this context, information is viewed as knowledge which is transferable in the conduct of various activities. In the third category, information is perceived as a basic resource and as an indispensable and irreplaceable link between a variety of activities involving individuals, institutions and society (Ajewole 2001).

However, within each of these categories, there is no consensus regarding the definition of the concept. For the purpose of this study, Ajewole’s (2001) definition as understood in the second category above will be adopted. Notwithstanding the variety of definitions attributed to the concept of information, there seems to be general agreement on its capabilities and these are well documented in the literature (Ajewole 2001; Kumar and Chandrashekara 2015; Mchombu 2000; Mooko 2002).

According to Mchombu (2000), for example, information can serve as a basis for competent development. Mooko (2002) observes that information reduces uncertainty and risk in decision-making. Information is also needed to solve day-to-day problems such as finding consumer goods, job opportunities, locating appropriate medical facilities for family health, investment opportunities, and government policies (Kumar and Chandrashekara 2015).

In other words, information is the indispensable resource which allows us to change and improve the society we live in. It is an important resource for the acquisition of power and it can also be used in making rational decisions by individuals, groups and organisations (Al Shboul and Abrizah 2016). Based on the aforesaid, the inference can be drawn that information can make theologians more enlightened while also empowering them to make informed decisions in the course of their day-to-day academic endeavours.

THEOLOGIAN AS INFORMATION USERS

According to Aina (2004), an “information user” is anyone who exposes himself/herself to available information in a given environment with the purpose of applying or utilising that information in a particular life endeavour or for purposes of solving

problems. Al Shboul and Abrizah (2014) observe that the term “information user” is all-embracing and is used broadly to include all those who utilise the available information. Information users fall in different categories and have different backgrounds. While some are highly educated, others are not. Some information users are elderly, some are young and while some information users may be found in rural areas, others live in urban centres (Aina 2004).

In this study, theologians as information users will refer to any person who is employed on a full- or part-time basis in the teaching of subjects offered as part of a theological curriculum in any one of the theological institutions whose libraries constitute the PCTL. Theologians, just like other academics in the humanities, view the library as their laboratory, a place where ideas are generated, tested, substantiated or disproved (Line 1980). However, the information-seeking behaviour of the theologians will, among other things, depend on their individual variables such as age, level of academic qualification, social status and professional experience (Aina 2004). In other words, the information-seeking patterns of these theologians will be the product of their world view, socio-economic standing, theological orientation and other personal characteristics (Al Shboul and Abrizah 2016).

INFORMATION SEEKING AND LIBRARY USE

According to Reitz (2014), “information seeking behaviour” connotes the complex patterns of actions and interactions which people engage in when seeking information of whatever kind and for whatever purpose. The information-seeking profile of an individual or group of individuals depends largely on the work activities of the individual or group (Jiyane and Ocholla 2004). For example, the information-seeking behaviour of a medical doctor will definitely focus on the treatment of diseases. The information-seeking characteristics of a student, on the other hand, will be informed by his/her academic curriculum. In a review of the literature on the information-seeking behaviour and library use of humanities scholars such as theologians, Saleh (2012) makes the following observations:

- humanities scholars tend to work alone;
- humanities scholars do not delegate literature searching;
- humanities scholars require a wide range of materials and are particularly dependent on primary sources;
- humanities scholars may regard retrospective coverage as more essential than access to recent materials;
- humanities scholars regard monographs as more important than journals; and
- humanities scholars regard browsing as a vital stimulus to research activities.

The general deduction then, is that the humanities scholars need libraries to a greater extent and that these libraries must include a wide range of materials. To locate these materials, they rely heavily on browsing, particularly among older monograph literature. The humanities scholars do not rely heavily on information services and show little inclination for new, electronically sophisticated ones (Small et al. 2013).

These points suggest at least some ways in which those working in the humanities differ from their counterparts in the more often studied scientific disciplines. In the sciences, most research and ongoing study are in precisely defined areas, making the research information seeking highly focused. Thus, general browsing in collections is less appropriate than in the humanities. Because scientific research invariably builds closely on prior work, scientists must have continuous access to research concurrent with or immediately antedating their own – that is, journal literature and research reports, in particular, rather than books and monographs. Social science researchers share similar characteristics with scientists except that they rely almost equally on serial literature and monographs (Small et al. 2013).

In contrast, humanities scholars are less dependent on the latest publications in their field. The material consulted remains relevant over a longer period, particularly when primary texts are involved as in biblical studies. The direct encounter and sustained interaction with such sources is indispensable for the development of insights and new ideas. Such interaction depends much less on prior research efforts, with shifts of interests more the rule, as existing works are reanimated by a fresh discovery or a new perspective (Kamba 2010).

Mooko (2002) affirms this assessment by observing that determining the needs of specific information users means knowing about their specific requirements for information. However, in order to determine the requirements for information, it is essential to answer the following questions: Who are they? What is their background? And, finally, what is the purpose of the needed information?

Ikoja-Odongo and Ocholla (2003) observe that the five factors which influence information seeking for human beings are their background, professional orientation, the full array of information sources available, motivation, and other individual characteristics such as the social, political, economic and other variables that affect the users and their functions. These points suggest at least some ways in which the information-seeking behaviour of those working in the humanities differs from their counterparts in the more often studied scientific disciplines.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted within the precincts of the PCTL consortium. The PCTL consists of seven institutional libraries all of which were involved in the study. These are the ESSA library, the AnHoS library, the SJTI library, the SRPC library, the CHoF library, the SMSS library and the LTI library.

The research design for this study was largely qualitative. Specific information-gathering instruments included a literature review, questionnaires, interviews and observation. The closed-ended questions constituted 80 per cent of all the questions, while 20 per cent were of the open-ended type. The questions asked included personal information about the theologians, their information-seeking habits and library use, and finally, the remarks or comments on information provision across the PCTL libraries.

The oral interview schedules were largely used to clarify some aspects of the questionnaire. It is believed by many researchers that the interviews tend to have a better response rate than questionnaires (Bailey 1994). The interview schedule included questions on personal data (age, academic qualification, full- or part-time employment, number of years employed), questions on the professional status and daily working schedule. Other questions included in the interview schedule asked for information about the theologian's information-seeking routine, library use, the availability and accessibility of information in the institutional libraries, and challenges encountered in the information-seeking process. The interviews were conducted largely by using an audio tape recorder. Observation always assists the researcher to gain first-hand knowledge of the subjects. Both obtrusive and unobtrusive observation was employed in this study.

The study employed a simple random sampling procedure in selecting the respondents. The sampling technique was chosen because it ensures that each element in the population has an equal chance of being selected (Kothari 2004). This resulted in a 71 per cent response rate. A total of 28 respondents were randomly selected from the seven PCTI institutions for the study. The decision of how many theologians would be included in the sample from each individual institution depended largely on the institution's size and the availability of respondents during interviews. The sample frame was drawn as follows: From ESSA, there were three respondents while the AnHoS had two. Five respondents were from the SJTI while six respondents were selected from the SRPC. The SMMS had eight respondents while the LTI and CHoF had two respondents each.

The content analysis method was applied to analyse responses from open-ended questions. The responses were organised and assigned to major categories, and then analysed by use of descriptive statistics in order to obtain frequencies and percentages. Other responses from the unstructured questions were grouped together according to their similarities and either summarised or presented as they were. The quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS).

STUDY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The method of analysis which is adapted from Momodu (2002) is purely descriptive and devoid of tables or graphs for easy assimilation.

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Respondents were asked questions about their personal information designed to elicit personal and basic professional information. The structured questions were meant to determine relationships between demographic characteristics and information-seeking patterns of respondents. This included the age of respondents, highest academic qualification, whether currently enrolled in a degree programme, whether employed full- or part-time, number of years employed in present position, and also the academic area of interest. Responses to such questions allowed the researcher to develop a profile of theologians currently employed by institutions served by the PCTL, an enlightening exercise in itself, and to have a range of variables available for analysis. The preface on the questions clearly stated that “these questions are necessary to provide information on variables which may affect your information-seeking behaviour and to provide an understanding of the background against which your work is set”.

Data obtained show that a theologian within the PCTL is likely to be aged between 41 and 55 years (58.6%). He/she is less likely to have a doctorate (48.3%) and seems not to be interested in pursuing further degree work (69%). However, if those with doctorates are removed from this last figure, it leaves only 20.7 per cent without a doctorate who are not pursuing a higher degree of some sort. In terms of library use this is particularly crucial, as those working for higher degrees are likely to be more demanding of library services and facilities.

With regard to age, no such assumption can be made, although it is likely that younger respondents who are less settled in their careers and more familiar with automated library services and online searching will be more critical of what theological libraries are able to provide. Data obtained also show that slightly more than a quarter (27.5%) of the theologians have obtained their first degree from a single institution, with the next highest percentage (20.6%) having degrees from other institutions in South Africa or abroad. While it would be interesting to determine correlations between the place of the first degree and current library use, this is simply not possible on the basis of these widely spread data.

In terms of status of employment, more than a quarter (27.6%) of the theologians are part-time staff, and one might expect this to influence their use of the library. Secondly, a higher percentage (62%) has been in their present posts for less than six years. It is likely that the newer the staff member, the more demands he/she places on the library, both for research and teaching purposes. Quite unexpected is the imbalance in areas of interest, with biblical and theological studies accounting for a significant number (70%) of those surveyed, pastoral studies posting significantly lower (20.6%), with historical studies even lower (10.4%). This is not the place to criticise such an imbalance, but it certainly suggests areas in which theological libraries ought to be developing their collections.

On the basis of these responses then, one can characterise an academic theologian within the PCTL as middle-aged, with at least a master’s degree, possibly working

towards a higher degree, likely to be a full-time academic, in his/her present post for less than six years, and almost certainly a biblical or theological studies specialist.

Information-Seeking Behaviour of the Theologians

Research and information-seeking patterns of the theologians within the PCTL are instructive in illuminating the general scholarly activity of theologians, which in turn may suggest opportunities for improved library services. The data show that more than a third (34.4%) of the theologians are engaged in research that lasts less than five years. This is contrary to what one would assume – that theologians would tend to have life-long research interests. It also suggests that they may not require collections that are as comprehensive in their areas of interest. Or do they perhaps not engage in long-term research because the library facilities are inadequate, or are the contributing factors more complex?

Certainly in other respects, academic theologians exhibit a significant amount of what one might term “scholarly” activity. The data obtained show that more than three quarters of the theologians (86.2%) read between 10 and 50 books annually, and most of them (85.2%) read between 10 and 100 articles. Similarly, they acquire, by purchase or otherwise, a significant number of books annually, with some of them (38.0%) acquiring more than 20.

When asked to indicate the type of books purchased, most theologians (82%) ticked reference books, followed closely by textbooks and specialist monographs. The question that arises is: why do theologians acquire these types of materials? Do their libraries not purchase adequately, or are they essential for personal collections? Further research could profitably answer these questions.

If theologians are significant purchasers of academic books of all types, they are also voracious readers. The data obtained shows that only a few of them (27.6%) read five hours or less weekly. They are also regular browsers in their libraries; a few of them (17.4%) do not browse at all, but the remainder browse at least one hour weekly. As one might expect from a group with a relatively low published output, the amount of time spent on writing is rather low. Over a quarter of them (34.4%) write five hours or less weekly, and one might speculate that the high level of non-response (44.9%) to this question also reflects a small amount of time spent on writing. Finally, theologians are neither inveterate conference-goers (42.4% do not attend) nor subscribers to periodicals (44.9% do not subscribe). On the other hand, they do rely heavily on peer consultation, with a significant number (82.7%) reporting this as a regular activity.

In this survey, then, responses indicate that theologians have research interests that are not exceptionally long lived, are not regular contributors to the scholarly literature but read and acquire books to a significant degree. They also browse regularly in their institution’s library and are more likely to consult colleagues than attend conferences or subscribe to serials.

Sources of Information in the Library

Data on what theologians within the PCTL report about how they utilise library materials and what they think of their institutional libraries were also obtained. It is instructive for these libraries that only a few of the respondents (19.5%) cite the use of materials from their own institutional library while a slightly higher number (27.6%) used materials from other libraries, whereas some (21.2%) used materials from personal libraries. Perhaps not surprisingly, these same theologians were well aware of their dependence on library collections, with more than half (51.7%) indicating that it had a significant or moderate bearing on their choice of research work. Even more telling is the fact that a substantial number of them (93.1%) felt that their work would be significantly or moderately hampered by the failure to learn of recent publications. Thus, it is important to know how theologians learn about current publications. A range of approaches seems to be the norm, the most popular being article or book reviews (39.9%). For the librarians, it is worth noting that indexes or abstracts are used by only a few of the theologians (14%) and accessions lists by an even smaller number (9.4%). Whether this is because institutional libraries within the PCTL do not hold appropriate indexing or abstracting services or do not produce accessions lists has not been determined.

Indexes or abstracts fare rather better (15.5%) in relation to journal articles in terms of use by the respondents. But by far the most used method is serendipity (25.4%) where respondents find articles by chance, while some (20.9%) rely on information from colleagues. Because bibliographic tools are not, for theologians, important sources of information on current publications, it comes as no surprise that only a few of the respondents (18.8%) listed currency as an important feature. Of the other three options, comprehensiveness, bibliographic details, and abstracts, there was no clear choice, suggesting that bibliographic materials in theological libraries should be equally adequate in all these areas.

Use of Library Services and How a Library Service is Obtained

Finally, data were obtained on how the respondents use libraries and their perception of how a library service is obtained. As one might expect from a group which values browsing, a sizeable number of them (34.3%) identify or find library materials (not new accessions) in this manner. At the same time, the library online public access catalogue (OPAC) is not ignored, with some respondents (28.6%) using this tool to find materials.

The data show that personal contact is more highly regarded in relation to identifying new accessions (28.8%) with these depending on the librarian to alert them to the presence of new materials in the library. Again, however, the less personal approach is more the norm; almost half of the respondents (44.1%) identify new accessions through displays, with a rather smaller number (23.7%) relying on accessions lists. This last figure may reflect the fact that some or most of the libraries do not produce such lists.

Some respondents (27.8%) believed that their institutional libraries provided a current awareness service better than other libraries within the PCTL. Even more respondents (44.4%) were confident that bibliographic searches were undertaken by library staff. In reality, all theological librarians within the PCTL said that they would conduct searches if asked, and none admitted to providing more than informal current awareness services for academic staff.

The study provides some comfort to these librarians and also a strong indication of where some improvements are needed. While only one theologian was dissatisfied with his institutional library, an overwhelming number of them (90%) felt that some improvements were needed. With regard to the latter, the collected data show that more than half of the respondents (53.9%) felt that current acquisitions and subscriptions should be improved, with a good number of them (30.7%) feeling that the existing book and serial collections were inadequate. Only a paltry 7.7 per cent of them felt that either the catalogue or library services (unspecified) needed improvement. Clearly theologians want books on shelves, and this has implications not only for how theological librarians function but also how strongly they lobby for improved acquisitions budgets for both current and retrospective collection development.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data collected for this study, it is appropriate to draw some conclusions about academic theologians as information seekers and library users. The following conclusions may be tested against data gathered in a more comprehensive survey:

- This study has shown that academic theologians within the PCTL rely, to a significant degree, on an informal network of colleague contacts for exchange of ideas.
- The study has shown that the theologians are consistent and frequent users of libraries but rely on personal collections at least as much as institutional collections.
- The study has revealed that the theologians prefer to seek information themselves through a variety of channels and, to a large degree, function independently of librarians.
- While most theologians are reasonably satisfied with their institutional libraries, most also feel that collections, rather than services, are most in need of improvement.
- The study has also shown that the theologians' primary method of locating information is by browsing in libraries and scanning the contents of journals.
- Finally, the study has revealed that most academic theologians within the PCTL seem uninterested in more sophisticated library services.

These tentative conclusions and the rather simple figures on which they are based now require verification and further development through more sophisticated testing. It is

recommended that this be done by administering a revised questionnaire to all academic theologians in South Africa. It is further recommended that this be done in cooperation with all theological institutions in the country.

REFERENCES

- Aina, L. 2004. *Library and Information Science Test for Africa*. Ibadan: Third World Information Services.
- Ajewole, B. 2001. *Records and Information Resource Management Service: A Theoretical and Practical Framework*. Badagry: The Administrative Staff College of Nigeria.
- Al Shboul, M., and A. Abrizah. 2014. "Information Needs: Developing Personas of Humanities Scholars." *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 40 (5): 500–9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2014.05.016>.
- Al Shboul, M., and A. Abrizah. 2016. "Modes of Information Seeking: Developing Personas of Humanities Scholars." *Information Development* 32 (5): 1786–805. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0266666915627673>.
- Al-Suqri, M. 2007. "Needs and Seeking Behaviour of Social Science Scholars at Sultan Quboos University in Oman: A Mixed Method Approach." PhD thesis, University of Indiana.
- Bailey, K. 1994. *Methods of Social Research*. New York: Free Press.
- Case, D. 2012. *Looking for Information: Survey of Research on Information Seeking, Needs, and Behaviour*. 3rd ed. Amsterdam: Emerald Group Publishing.
- Chisa, K., and R. Hoskins. 2014. "Information Needs and Information Seeking Patterns of Indigenous Women in the Anglican Diocese of Natal: The Case of the Diocese of Natal Archives." *Innovation: Journal for Appropriate Librarianship and Information Work in Southern Africa* 49: 104–23. <http://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC164652>.
- Garaba, F. 2015. "Disembodied Archives: The Disconnectedness of Records and Archives Management Practices within the Pietermaritzburg Cluster of Theological Libraries, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa." *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36 (1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v36i1.1357>.
- Haruna, I., and I. Mabawonku. 2001. "Information Needs and Seeking Behaviour of Legal Practitioners and the Challenges to Law Libraries in Lagos, Nigeria." *International Information and Library Review* 33 (1): 69–87. <https://doi.org/10.1006/iilr.2000.0160>.
- Ikoja-Odonga, J., and D. Ocholla. 2003. "Information Needs and Information-Seeking Behavior of Artisan Fisher Folk in Uganda." *South African Journal of Library and Information Science* 25 (1): 89–105. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0740-8188\(02\)00167-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0740-8188(02)00167-6).
- Jiyane, V., and D. Ocholla. 2004. "An Exploratory Study of Information Availability and Exploitation by the Rural Women of Melmoth, KwaZulu-Natal." *South African Journal of Libraries and Information Science* 70 (1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.7553/70-1-687>.
- Kamba, M. 2010. "Seeking Behaviour of School teachers in Rural Areas of Selected States in Nigeria: A Proposed Circular Model." PhD thesis, International Islamic University.

- Kothari, C. 2004. *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques*. New Delhi: New Age.
- Kumar, K., and G. Chandrashekar. 2015. "Information Seeking Behaviour of Library Users at Government First Grade College, Kushalnagar, Karnataka: A Survey." *Asian Journal of Library and Information Science* 7 (3-4): 1-10.
- Kwasitsu, L. 2003. "Information-Seeking Behavior of Design, Process, and Manufacturing Engineers." *Library and Information Science Research* 25 (4): 459-76. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0740-8188\(03\)00054-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0740-8188(03)00054-9).
- Leckie, G. 2005. "General Model of the Information Seeking of Professionals." Accessed 11 March 2017. <https://smallbusinessownerib.files.wordpress.com/2011/11/leckie-and-pettigrew-a-a-general-model-of-the-information-seeking-of-professionals.pdf>.
- Line, M. 1980. "Concluding Observations." In *Humanities Information Research: Proceedings of a Seminar*, edited by S. Stone. Sheffield: Centre for Research in User Studies.
- Matsveru, D. 2014. *Information Needs and Information Seeking Behavior of Namibian Pastors*. Hamburg: Anchor Academic Publishing House.
- Mchombu, C. 2000. "Information Needs of Women in Small Businesses in Botswana." *International Information and Library Review*. 32 (1): 39-67. <https://doi.org/10.1006/iilr.2000.0125>.
- Momodu, M. 2002. "Information Needs and Information Seeking Behaviour of Rural Dwellers in Nigeria: A Case Study of Ekpoma in Esan West Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria." *Library Review* 51 (8): 406-10. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00242530210443145>.
- Mooko, N. 2002. "The Use and Awareness of Women's Groups as Sources of Information in Three Small Villages in Botswana." *South African Journal of Library and Information Science* 68 (2): 104-11.
- Reitz, J. 2014. "Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science." Accessed 20 January 2018. http://www.abc-clio.com/ODLIS/odlis_h.aspx.
- Saleh, A. 2012. "Information-Seeking Behaviour of *Ulama* in Relation to Their Work Roles." PhD thesis, International Islamic University.
- Small, R., S. Sutton, M. Eisenburg, M. Miwa, and C. Urfels. 2013. "An Investigation of PreK-12 Educators' Information Needs and Search Behaviours on the Internet. Proceedings of Selected Research and Development Presentations at the National Convention of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology, Washington." *Theological Librarianship* 6 (1): 401-15.