

UNDERSTANDING HOW PEOPLE SEEK INFORMATION IN HARYANA IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the evolving patterns of information-seeking behavior among residents of Haryana, India, during the digital transformation era. The research examines how traditional methods of information acquisition have shifted towards digital platforms, with a focus on understanding the demographic, socio-economic, and technological factors influencing these changes. Using a mixed-methods approach involving questionnaire surveys (n=385) and interview data from urban and rural areas across five districts in Haryana, this study investigates the preferences, challenges, and outcomes of digital information-seeking behavior. The findings reveal that mobile internet dominates information access, with 751.5 million internet users in India and a 52.4% internet penetration rate as of 2024. Results indicate that social media platforms (78.3%), search engines (89.7%), and educational websites (56.2%) are the primary digital information sources, while traditional libraries and print media usage has declined to 23.4%. The study identifies significant disparities between urban (82.1%) and rural (54.3%) digital literacy rates in Haryana, highlighting the need for targeted digital inclusion initiatives. Key barriers include network connectivity issues (67.2%), language preferences (45.8%), and lack of digital skills training (38.9%). The research contributes to understanding regional digital transformation patterns and provides recommendations for policymakers, educators, and technology providers to enhance digital information accessibility in North Indian states.

Keywords: *Digital information seeking¹, Haryana², mobile internet³, digital literacy⁴, social media⁵, digital divide⁶.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid proliferation of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed how individuals seek, process, and utilize information globally. India's digital population has surged to over 751 million active users as of January 2024, driven by the government's Digital India initiative and increasing internet penetration. This digital revolution has been particularly pronounced in North Indian states like Haryana, where traditional agricultural

and industrial communities are increasingly embracing digital platforms for information access. Haryana, with its strategic location surrounding Delhi on three sides and a population of approximately 28.9 million, represents a unique case study for understanding digital information-seeking behavior in a rapidly developing Indian state. The state has 6 administrative divisions, 22 districts, and is home to major technology hubs like Gurgaon, which is considered one of India's largest financial and technology centers. The state's proximity to the National Capital Region, combined with its growing IT infrastructure, makes it an ideal location for examining the intersection of traditional and digital information-seeking patterns. The Haryana government has implemented various IT initiatives aligned with Digital India, including the SARAL platform providing 557 state services digitally and the Haryana State Wide Area Network (HSWAN) connecting all district headquarters.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of information-seeking behavior has been extensively studied across various disciplines, with researchers examining how individuals identify, search for, and utilize information to satisfy their needs. Information-seeking behavior is defined as the process motivated by an individual's information needs, arising from a perceived gap in knowledge, leading to the search for information that enhances understanding and meaning.

2.1 DIGITAL INFORMATION-SEEKING PATTERNS IN INDIA

Recent research on India's digital landscape reveals significant transformations in information consumption patterns. There were 751.5 million internet users in India at the start of 2024, with internet penetration standing at 52.4 percent, making India home to 462.0 million social media users. Among larger Indian states, Kerala, Punjab, and Haryana have the highest percentages of internet users, with rural India having 442 million active internet users, surpassing urban India's 378 million users. The mobile-first approach to internet access has been a defining characteristic of India's digital transformation. Mobile internet users account for over 750 million, representing 83% of total internet users, with mobile phones dominating how Indians access the internet due to affordable smartphones and cheap data plans. This trend is particularly relevant for Haryana, where agricultural and small-town populations have leapfrogged traditional desktop-based internet access.

2.2 ACADEMIC AND EDUCATIONAL INFORMATION SEEKING

Educational institutions have witnessed a significant shift in student information-seeking behavior. Studies have found that information-seeking abilities, IT-operating capacity, and reading/writing experience significantly impact academic performance among students. Research on 360 students from a university in eastern India revealed that online social media used for collaborative learning had a significant impact on interactivity with peers and teachers. A study conducted on agricultural students in Haryana found that 71% of students used the internet daily for more than 2 hours, with 82.5% using internet primarily for entertainment purposes compared

to academic purposes. This finding highlights the need for better integration of digital tools in educational contexts.

2.3 RURAL DIGITAL ADOPTION AND CHALLENGES

The digital divide between urban and rural areas remains a critical challenge in India's digital transformation. A study investigating digital technology adoption in rural areas found that age distribution, education levels, and technology adoption rates significantly influence digital inclusion among rural populations. The ASER 2024 survey, covering 114,553 youth aged 14-16 years across 605 districts, highlighted regional disparities in digital literacy, with northern states like Haryana performing well in digital task completion.

2.4 SOCIAL MEDIA AND INFORMATION SEEKING

Social media platforms have emerged as significant sources of information, particularly for younger demographics. Research indicates that approximately half of surveyed consumers in India research products on social media before making purchases. Studies on international students' information-seeking behavior have highlighted social media's role in addressing practical challenges and fulfilling learning needs in academic studies.

3. OBJECTIVES

This study aims to achieve the following three primary objectives:

1. To identify and analyze the primary digital and traditional information sources utilized by residents of Haryana, examining the shift from conventional libraries and print media to digital platforms including search engines, social media, and mobile applications.
2. To assess the disparities in digital information-seeking behavior between urban and rural populations in Haryana, investigating factors such as digital literacy levels, infrastructure accessibility, and socio-economic influences that contribute to information inequality.
3. To document the changing patterns of information consumption, including preferred devices, time spent seeking information, credibility assessment methods, and the impact of demographic variables (age, education, occupation) on digital information-seeking preferences among Haryana's diverse population.

4. METHODOLOGY

This research employed a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative survey data with qualitative interviews to comprehensively understand information-seeking behavior in Haryana's digital era. The study

design incorporated both descriptive and analytical components to capture the complexity of digital information consumption patterns across diverse demographic segments. The research was conducted across five districts of Haryana: Gurugram, Faridabad, Hisar, Karnal, and Rohtak, representing a mix of urban technology hubs, rural agricultural areas, and semi-urban centers. This geographic diversity ensured comprehensive coverage of Haryana's socio-economic spectrum and varying levels of digital infrastructure development. The sample size of 385 respondents was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's formula with a 95% confidence interval and 5% margin of error. A stratified random sampling technique was employed, with stratification based on urban-rural classification (60% urban, 40% rural) and age groups (18-25: 35%, 26-40: 40%, 41-60: 25%). The sample included students (28%), working professionals (35%), homemakers (18%), farmers (12%), and senior citizens (7%).

Data collection utilized a structured questionnaire containing 47 questions across five sections: demographic information, digital device usage, information source preferences, information-seeking patterns, and challenges faced. The questionnaire was developed in both English and Hindi to accommodate linguistic preferences. Additionally, 25 in-depth interviews were conducted with selected respondents to gather qualitative insights into information-seeking motivations and experiences. Technical validation of the instrument was conducted through expert review by three library science professors and pilot testing with 40 respondents. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) was 0.87, indicating high internal consistency. Data collection occurred between March and May 2024, with field researchers trained in data collection protocols and ethical considerations. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS 26.0, employing descriptive statistics, chi-square tests for association, and regression analysis to identify predictive factors. Qualitative data from interviews was transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and emerging themes in information-seeking behavior.

5. RESULTS

The comprehensive analysis of information-seeking behavior in Haryana reveals significant insights into digital transformation patterns across different demographic segments. The following section presents detailed findings organized by key research themes, supported by statistical analysis and visual representations.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N=385)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age Group	18-25 years	135	35.1%
	26-40 years	154	40.0%
	41-60 years	96	24.9%
Gender	Male	198	51.4%

	Female	187	48.6%
Location	Urban	231	60.0%
	Rural	154	40.0%
Education	Graduate & Above	289	75.1%
	Higher Secondary	67	17.4%
	Below Higher Secondary	29	7.5%
Occupation	Working Professional	135	35.1%
	Student	108	28.1%
	Homemaker	69	17.9%
	Farmer	46	11.9%
	Senior Citizen	27	7.0%

The demographic profile reveals a balanced representation across age groups and gender, with urban respondents constituting 60% of the sample. Educational attainment is notably high, with 75.1% having graduate-level education, reflecting Haryana's emphasis on higher education and proximity to Delhi's educational institutions.

Table 2: Digital Device Usage and Internet Access Patterns (N=385)

Device/Access Type	Urban (n=231)	Rural (n=154)	Overall	Urban %	Rural %	Overall %
Smartphone Internet	224	138	362	97.0%	89.6%	94.0%
Laptop/Computer	189	87	276	81.8%	56.5%	71.7%
Tablet Device	98	34	132	42.4%	22.1%	34.3%
Desktop Computer	156	56	212	67.5%	36.4%	55.1%
Daily Internet Usage >4 hours	187	89	276	80.9%	57.8%	71.7%
Broadband Connection	201	78	279	87.0%	50.6%	72.5%
4G/5G Mobile Data	219	124	343	94.8%	80.5%	89.1%

Smartphone penetration is remarkably high across both urban (97.0%) and rural (89.6%) areas, confirming the mobile-first approach to internet access in Haryana. However, significant disparities exist in laptop/computer access (81.8% urban vs. 56.5% rural) and broadband connectivity (87.0% urban vs. 50.6% rural). This data aligns with national trends showing mobile internet users accounting for 83% of total internet users in India.

Table 3: Primary Information Sources by Category (N=385)

Information Source	Daily Users	Weekly Users	Occasional Users	Never Use	Primary Choice %
Google Search	298 (77.4%)	67 (17.4%)	18 (4.7%)	2 (0.5%)	89.7%
Social Media Platforms	267 (69.4%)	89 (23.1%)	24 (6.2%)	5 (1.3%)	78.3%
Educational Websites	162 (42.1%)	138 (35.8%)	71 (18.4%)	14 (3.6%)	56.2%
News Apps/Websites	189 (49.1%)	127 (33.0%)	58 (15.1%)	11 (2.9%)	64.4%
YouTube	234 (60.8%)	98 (25.5%)	43 (11.2%)	10 (2.6%)	72.5%
Government Portals	67 (17.4%)	156 (40.5%)	134 (34.8%)	28 (7.3%)	34.8%
Traditional Libraries	23 (6.0%)	67 (17.4%)	156 (40.5%)	139 (36.1%)	23.4%
Print Newspapers	89 (23.1%)	98 (25.5%)	134 (34.8%)	64 (16.6%)	31.7%

Google Search emerges as the dominant information source with 89.7% considering it their primary choice, followed by social media platforms (78.3%) and YouTube (72.5%). The decline in traditional information sources is evident, with only 23.4% considering libraries as primary sources and 31.7% relying on print newspapers. This shift reflects the trends in India's search behavior, where billions of daily searches on Google indicate the platform's dominance in information seeking.

Table 4: Information-Seeking Behavior by Age Groups (N=385)

Behavior Pattern	18-25 Years (n=135)	26-40 Years (n=154)	41-60 Years (n=96)
Prefer Mobile Over Desktop	126 (93.3%)	142 (92.2%)	67 (69.8%)
Use Social Media for Info	124 (91.9%)	131 (85.1%)	56 (58.3%)
Verify Information Sources	89 (65.9%)	127 (82.5%)	78 (81.3%)
Share Information Digitally	118 (87.4%)	121 (78.6%)	43 (44.8%)
Face Language Barriers	34 (25.2%)	67 (43.5%)	56 (58.3%)
Trust Online Information	78 (57.8%)	89 (57.8%)	34 (35.4%)
Seek Help for Digital Tasks	23 (17.0%)	45 (29.2%)	67 (69.8%)

Age significantly influences information-seeking behavior patterns. Younger users (18-25 years) show the highest adoption of social media for information (91.9%) and digital sharing (87.4%), while older users (41-60 years) face more language barriers (58.3%) and require assistance with digital tasks (69.8%). Interestingly, middle-aged users (26-40 years) demonstrate the highest rates of information verification (82.5%), suggesting greater digital literacy combined with critical thinking skills.

Table 5: Digital Literacy and Skills Assessment (N=385)

Skill Category	Proficient	Intermediate	Beginner	Cannot Perform
Basic Internet Navigation	312 (81.0%)	58 (15.1%)	13 (3.4%)	2 (0.5%)
Search Engine Optimization	234 (60.8%)	98 (25.5%)	45 (11.7%)	8 (2.1%)
Social Media Usage	289 (75.1%)	67 (17.4%)	23 (6.0%)	6 (1.6%)
Online Banking/Payments	267 (69.4%)	78 (20.3%)	34 (8.8%)	6 (1.6%)
Government E-Services	156 (40.5%)	134 (34.8%)	78 (20.3%)	17 (4.4%)
Information Credibility Check	123 (32.0%)	145 (37.7%)	89 (23.1%)	28 (7.3%)
Digital Content Creation	98 (25.5%)	134 (34.8%)	123 (32.0%)	30 (7.8%)
Data Privacy Management	89 (23.1%)	98 (25.5%)	156 (40.5%)	42 (10.9%)

While basic digital skills show high proficiency rates (81.0% for internet navigation, 75.1% for social media), advanced skills like information credibility checking (32.0% proficient) and data privacy management (23.1% proficient) remain limited. This finding is concerning given the importance of these skills in the digital information age and aligns with research showing the need for digital media literacy interventions to improve discernment between mainstream and false news.

Table 6: Barriers and Challenges in Digital Information Seeking (N=385)

Challenge Type	Urban (n=231)	Rural (n=154)	Significance	Overall Impact
Network Connectivity Issues	123 (53.2%)	136 (88.3%)	High***	67.2%
Language Preference Barriers	87 (37.7%)	89 (57.8%)	High***	45.8%
Lack of Digital Skills	67 (29.0%)	82 (53.2%)	High***	38.9%
Information Overload	134 (58.0%)	67 (43.5%)	Medium**	52.2%
Credibility Concerns	145 (62.8%)	78 (50.6%)	Medium**	57.9%
Cost of Data/Internet	45 (19.5%)	98 (63.6%)	High***	37.1%
Device Limitations	34 (14.7%)	89 (57.8%)	High***	32.0%
Time Constraints	156 (67.5%)	67 (43.5%)	High***	57.9%

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Network connectivity emerges as the most significant barrier (67.2% overall), with rural areas disproportionately affected (88.3% vs. 53.2% urban). Language barriers affect 45.8% of users, indicating the need for more vernacular content and interfaces. The digital divide is evident across all challenge categories, with rural users facing consistently higher barriers. These findings support Haryana government initiatives to improve digital infrastructure, including the 92% uptime achievement for departmental connectivity.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a complex landscape of digital information-seeking behavior in Haryana, characterized by rapid adoption of mobile technologies alongside persistent digital divides and evolving user preferences. The discussion examines these results within the broader context of India's digital transformation and their implications for policy and practice.

6.1 MOBILE-FIRST INFORMATION SEEKING PARADIGM

The overwhelming preference for smartphones (94.0% usage) over traditional computing devices confirms the mobile-first approach to information access in Haryana. This aligns with national trends showing mobile internet users accounting for 83% of total internet users across India, driven by affordable smartphones and cheap data plans. The higher mobile adoption rates in rural areas (89.6%) compared to laptop usage (56.5%) suggest that mobile devices have successfully bridged the digital access gap for basic information needs. However, this mobile-centricity also presents limitations. The complexity of certain information tasks, such as academic research or professional work, may be constrained by mobile interfaces. The relatively lower usage of government e-services (40.5% proficient) could partly be attributed to mobile-interface limitations and the need for more mobile-optimized government platforms.

6.2 SEARCH ENGINE DOMINANCE AND INFORMATION SOURCE DIVERSIFICATION

Google's dominance as the primary information source (89.7%) reflects broader Indian trends where Google maintains 98.51% market share in India's search engine market, with over 99% mobile search market share. This near-monopolistic position raises important questions about information diversity and the potential for algorithmic bias in information exposure. The high usage of social media platforms for information seeking (78.3%) warrants particular attention.

6.3 THE PERSISTENT DIGITAL DIVIDE

Despite overall high internet penetration, significant disparities persist between urban and rural areas across multiple dimensions. Rural users face substantially higher barriers in network connectivity (88.3% vs. 53.2%), digital skills (53.2% vs. 29.0%), and device limitations (57.8% vs. 14.7%). These findings align with national

data showing rural India's 442 million internet users, while highlighting the quality and capability gaps in rural internet access. The language barrier (45.8% overall impact) represents a particularly critical challenge, with rural users more affected (57.8% vs. 37.7% urban). This suggests that despite technological infrastructure improvements, linguistic diversity remains a significant impediment to equitable information access. Haryana's digital initiatives, including the SARAL platform providing services in local languages, represent important steps toward addressing this challenge.

6.4 AGE-RELATED INFORMATION BEHAVIOR PATTERNS

The study reveals distinct generational differences in information-seeking behavior. While younger users (18-25 years) demonstrate high social media usage (91.9%) and digital sharing (87.4%), they show lower rates of information verification (65.9%) compared to older users. This pattern raises concerns about information quality and the potential spread of misinformation among digitally native populations. Conversely, older users (41-60 years) face significant challenges with digital tasks (69.8% require help) and language barriers (58.3%), yet demonstrate higher information verification rates (81.3%).

6.5 INFORMATION CREDIBILITY AND DIGITAL LITERACY CHALLENGES

The relatively low proficiency in information credibility checking (32.0%) and data privacy management (23.1%) represents a critical gap in digital literacy. Research on digital media literacy interventions in India has shown the effectiveness of targeted training in improving discernment between mainstream and false news. The high credibility concerns (57.9% of users) indicate awareness of the problem, but limited skills to address it effectively. This gap is particularly concerning given the high trust levels in online information among younger users (57.8%) combined with their lower verification rates.

6.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL AND GOVERNMENT POLICY

The findings have significant implications for educational institutions and government policy in Haryana. Previous research on agricultural students in Haryana showed that 82.5% used internet primarily for entertainment rather than academic purposes, suggesting underutilization of digital resources for educational advancement. The Haryana government's digital literacy mission, registering 13,000 citizens for IT literacy programs, represents a positive step. However, the scale and focus of such initiatives need significant expansion to address the identified digital skill gaps, particularly in rural areas and among older populations.

6.7 ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

The study's findings suggest that digital information-seeking behavior is becoming a crucial determinant of social and economic participation in Haryana. The high usage of online banking/payments (69.4% proficient)

indicates growing digital financial inclusion, while the lower usage of government e-services suggests potential barriers to civic engagement and public service access. The observed patterns may contribute to widening social and economic disparities if not addressed through targeted interventions. Rural populations and older demographics risk being left behind in an increasingly digital society, potentially limiting their access to economic opportunities, government services, and social participation.

7. CONCLUSION

This comprehensive study of information-seeking behavior in Haryana during the digital era reveals a society in transition, characterized by rapid technological adoption alongside persistent challenges of digital equity and literacy. The research demonstrates that while Haryana has made significant strides in digital infrastructure and access, achieving truly inclusive digital transformation requires addressing complex socio-technical barriers. The dominance of mobile-first information seeking, with 94% smartphone usage and Google's 89.7% preference rate, confirms that digital information access has become mainstream across urban and rural populations. Social media platforms have evolved beyond communication tools to become primary information sources for 78.3% of users, fundamentally altering traditional information landscapes. However, this transformation is accompanied by concerning gaps in digital literacy, particularly in information credibility assessment (32% proficiency) and data privacy management (23.1% proficiency). The persistent digital divide between urban and rural populations represents a critical challenge for equitable development. Rural users face significantly higher barriers across all measured dimensions, from network connectivity (88.3% vs. 53.2% urban) to digital skills (53.2% vs. 29% urban). Language barriers affect nearly half of all users (45.8%), with rural populations disproportionately impacted, highlighting the need for vernacular digital content and interfaces.

Generational differences in information behavior present both opportunities and challenges. While younger users demonstrate high digital engagement and sharing behaviors, their lower information verification rates (65.9% vs. 81.3% for older users) raise concerns about misinformation vulnerability. Older users, despite facing significant digital access barriers, show greater information skepticism and verification practices, suggesting valuable knowledge that could inform digital literacy programs. The study's findings carry important implications for stakeholders across multiple sectors. Educational institutions must integrate comprehensive digital literacy curricula that emphasize critical information evaluation alongside technical skills. Government agencies should prioritize mobile-optimized service delivery while expanding rural digital infrastructure and vernacular content development. Technology companies and platform providers bear responsibility for developing more intuitive interfaces and implementing better information verification mechanisms. For policymakers, the research underscores the need for holistic digital inclusion strategies that address not only infrastructure and access but also skills development, content localization, and digital safety. The success of initiatives like Haryana's SARAL platform, providing 557 digital government services, demonstrates the potential for comprehensive digital transformation when properly implemented and scaled.

Future research should examine the longitudinal impacts of these information-seeking behavior changes on educational outcomes, economic participation, and social cohesion. Additionally, investigating the effectiveness of different digital literacy interventions and their scalability across diverse demographic groups would provide valuable insights for policy development. Ultimately, this study reveals that Haryana stands at a critical juncture in its digital transformation journey. The widespread adoption of digital information-seeking behaviors creates unprecedented opportunities for social and economic development. However, realizing these opportunities requires concerted efforts to address digital divides, enhance digital literacy, and ensure that technological advancement translates into equitable access to information and opportunities for all residents. The path forward demands collaborative action among government, educational institutions, private sector, and civil society to build a truly inclusive digital society that serves the diverse needs of Haryana's population.

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