

Tracing Social Inequality Through Information Poverty: An Analytical Literature Survey and Way Forward

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Abstract:

Information poverty is actually “manifested disparity between individuals, communities or nations in mobilizing society’s information resources for the benefit of their lives and development, which may take the form of information divide, knowledge gap etc.” Information poverty is a problem of social inequality. We are moving towards post-truth society, but it is not possible if we eliminate the social stratification among us. The purpose of this article is to explore the existing research in and around the topic & identifying gaps in the literature. This paper presents a literature review on four facets—i) Community Information Service, ii) Community Information Service through public libraries, iii) Information inequality and information poverty and iv) Digital divide and the libraries. From the literature survey information poverty is an important research topic today as society’s progress will depend on the power of information to increase the productivity of the citizen.

Keywords: *community information service, digital divide, information poverty, public library, social inequality.*

1. Introduction

In literature, there are various terms that describe the social strata between those who have information resources and those who have not, e.g., information inequality, information divide, information poverty, knowledge poverty etc.

The term information poverty, express either the disparity between people in their access to ICT or more specifically the disparity in their access to the internet. For a people, to be information rich, s/he must need intellectual capital for information or knowledge retrieval, assessment, and processing. Information poverty is actually “multifaceted disparity between individuals, communities or nations in mobilising society’s information resources for the benefit of their lives and development.”

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On the other hand, social inequality is a situation of unequal access to the benefits of the society. Poverty as well as social discrimination are the two main causes of inequality. Information poverty is a barrier in access to and use of resources and services in various domains of life. So, information poverty leads to social inequality among the society.

2. Objectives

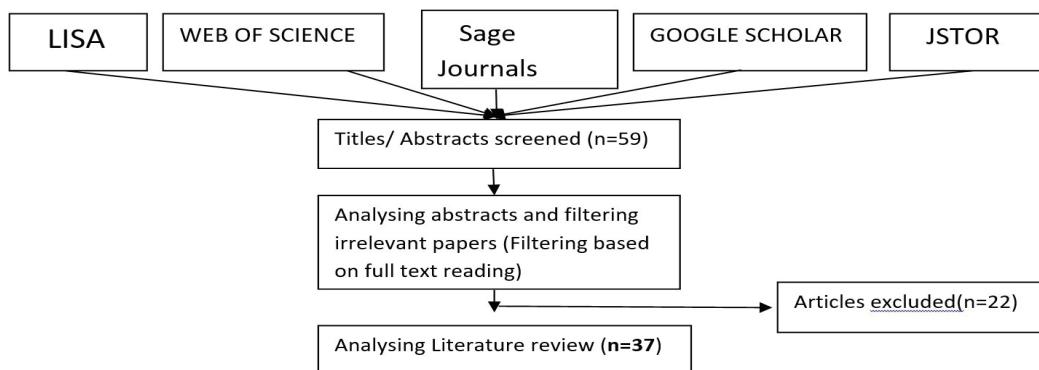
- 1.1 Know the existing literature on the topic concerned.
- 1.2 Locate the gaps in research reflected in published literature.
- 1.3 Summarize the trends of existing literature.
- 1.4 Check the relevancy of the topic for research.

3. Methodology & Scope

The literature search was based on four facets based on Ranganathan's APUPA formula i.e., community information service (Penumbral Document), community information service through public libraries (Penumbral document), information inequality & information poverty (Umbral document), and digital divide & the libraries (Penumbral Document). The full text of each article was reviewed. The search yielded thirty-seven articles which were published between 2020 and 2024. Each of the thirty-seven articles were reviewed and classified in accordance with the objectives of this study. Although this search was not exhaustive, it is restricted to some parameters only.

The databases like LISA, JSTOR, Web of Science, Scopus, Taylor and Francis, Sage Journals as well as Google scholar are used, because they cover the cross-disciplinary scope of this paper.

Flow diagram of literature review is as follows:



So, it is clear from the flow chart that, it is impossible to know the actual content of the paper from the title as well as from the abstract also. I have collected 59 articles for the present study from the databases using the search string TITLE ("Community Information Science") or

TITLE (“Community information service through public libraries”) or TITLE (“Information inequality and information poverty”) or TITLE (“Digital divide and the libraries”) taking a date range of 01/01/2020 to 31/12/2024 and limit to language English only. Last 5 years is taken into consideration here due to word limit and after full text reading, I have taken only thirty-seven articles for this study. So, it is mandatory to read full text for literature review. And all the papers qualified CRAAP test which check the objective reliability of the papers.

C=Currency: Publication date of the papers is between 2020 to 2024 which is acceptable.

R=Relevancy: The information given in the papers are relevant to the topic of the researcher.

A=Authority: The authors are expert in the field, and all the sources are known and reputable.

A=Accuracy: The information is professionally researched and supplied by the evidence.

P=Purpose: The point of view of the papers are impartial and not a hindrance of the work of the researcher.

4. Observations On Existing Literature

4.1. Community Information Service:

Information is the vital source for overall development of the society. Community information service is primarily concerned with dispersion of required information among communities.

In an article the authors searched 5 scientific databases about dissemination of health information during pandemic period(Oliver et al., 2024). In a research article the authors did 7 focus group study and 26 interviews with different community leaders as well as community health workers to evaluate the barriers in reaching women in remote communities in Mali(Jones et al., 2024).A study was conducted to see the effect of community core services among the psychological health of elderly people in Liaonij Province of China(Sen & Lei, 2023). A qualitative study was conducted to find out the services of community social workers, their ICT usage and works they had done during COVID-19(Fung et al., 2023). A group of researchers did a case study using qualitative method to investigate strategies accustomed by MCSJ in distributing health information among the people of low-income group of Cape Town, South Africa(van Pinxteren et al., 2022). A qualitative interview with 27 participants among healthcare Asian communities was done to assess their outreach programs apart from traditional health communication strategies(Pringle et al., 2022). There is a strong need of establishment of information resource centre in Nigeria. The authors searched about the relevancy of these centres in Akure North Local Government, Onto state in Nigeria(Akinola, Adewusi & Felix Akinola Adewusi Mr, 2020). The development of community foundations across the world and their movement towards community improvement in China was discussed in a paper. The Community Foundations takes a positive step towards community service delivery. The authors tried to build a theoretical framework about China’s Community Foundations(Weng & Zhang, 2020).

4.2. Community Information Service through Public Libraries:

Public library, as people's university, should take positive steps in evaluating community information need among the society. The community information service is one of the best ways to eliminate social inequality.

Role of public libraries to promote local information services were investigated in research. 116 public libraries of Chungcheong region were studied and showed that only 36% libraries providing local information services to sustain local communities(Kyung & Hye-Young, 2024). A paper discussed about community engagement through technologies and innovations by the public libraries. The authors discussed about Library Living Lab of Miquel Batllari Public Library of Barcelona, Spain(Hernández-Pérez et al., 2022). An online survey of rural library professionals was done to know agriculture-based community engagement in rural Southern and Central Appalachian region of U.S. The authors synthesized 8 different initiatives taken by the libraries(Singh et al., 2022). A case study was done on Roma community in Spain to assess the services of the public libraries to communities. IFLA advocates the inclusion of minority community in public libraries by providing guidelines(Agustín-Lacruz & Saurin-Parra, 2021). A survey was conducted among librarians in different public and community libraries of five districts of Limpopo province of South Africa. LIS policy should be implemented for proper functioning of public and community libraries(Bopape et al., 2021). A paper analyses the positive role of public libraries in promoting community literacy by arranging user education program. The author examined the value of public libraries by assessing their impact on community education(Chatterjee et al., 2021). A survey was conducted in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi district in India to know the status of public library's information services to rural communities(Lokaraja & Purushottama, 2021). The scenario of public library services in North-East India was assessed. Public library can take a positive role in bridging digital divide through their services (Hazarika, 2020).A survey was conducted in 34 public libraries to investigate the role of Egyptian public libraries towards Sustainable Development Goals (2030)(Mansour, 2020). A case study was conducted to analyse the present scenario of public libraries and CICs in J&K. There are 135 CICs are active in J&K, but they are providing the traditional services like book borrowing, reading room services. The public libraries need to be modernised with the demand of the present-day situation(Gupta, 2020).

4.3. Information poverty and information inequality:

Information poverty and information inequality is a very crucial issue of the day. Information inequality is the multifaceted disparity between communities in mobilizing society's information resources.

A systematic analysis was conducted to understand the level of women of color's current information seeking habit in the present age of digital world. The paper supports the role of media institutes to create and sustain information inequalities(Peterson-Salahuddin,

2024). A study was conducted to investigate the possibility of information poverty among the children. The authors did an interview with 156 children of UK primary schools and 34 parents and teachers of schools in searching inequality in accessing information(Breslin Davda & Buchanan, 2024). In a paper an author did a literature review on information poverty published in between 2000 to 2022. He pointed out that maximum literature was published from Global North(Al-Zaman, 2023). Information poverty theory of Chatman is used to analyse journalism newsgathering practices in Canada. The author conducted semi-structured interview with 12 indigenous and non-indigenous journalists to reveal information poverty as a hindrance of community information(Henrichsen, 2022). A survey was conducted among 25 African immigrants in Metro Vancouver to know the experiences of African immigrants. The author used Britz's information poverty framework to know the perception of availability of information(Mabi et al., 2022). A survey was done to know the present status of youth in South Africa who were not in education, employment, or training. Information poverty theory was explained by the authors(Matli & Ngoepe, 2022).Role of public libraries in lowering digital divide and reducing information poverty from the society was searched. To achieve sustainable development, a society must need to eliminate information poverty(Kalliani, 2021). The relation between economic poverty with that of information poverty was analysed(Sabu, 2021). A paper assessed the situation of information poverty in Turkey(Demir, 2020). A literature review on role of rural community libraries in alleviating information poverty from the society was done(Md., 2020). A survey was conducted to examine the factors of information poverty in Western China. The authors used SEM (Structural Equation Modelling) technique to test the hypothesis framed(Mou & Xu, 2020).

4.4. Digital Divide and the libraries:

Digital divide is a multifaceted phenomenon due to its various dimensions of determinant factors. The digital divide in respect of libraries is considered here for review as it creates sociological stratification.

An article stated a brief story about the procedure of libraries in addressing digital divide through digital equity, policy of U.S Government in addressing digital divide and workings of New Jersey Broadband Access Commission in this regard(Grimes & Porter, 2024). The effect of COVID-19 pandemic on computer as well as internet access in public libraries of Canada were assessed in research. How the libraries confront digital divide issues in post pandemic era was also examined(Intahchomphoo & Vellino, 2024). A paper searched different strategies of public libraries to grasp modern technologies with the advancement of national policies. Libraries can make an association with different civil groups and educational institutes in arranging digital literacy program for the vulnerable groups(Bello & Adepegba, 2023). The role of public library specially Kerala State Central Library was assessed to see the role of public library in bridging digital divide. The users pointed out that the main factor behind digital divide is lack of ICT skills and literacy(P & Sudhier, 2023). The digital literacy

instructions and situation of digital access as well as literacy divide in the United States was assessed. Information redlining has been observed(Hall, 2021).A survey was conducted to understand the role of public libraries in digital inclusion in California. Author used Critical Race Theory to know the situation well(Pun, 2021).A survey report of 2020-2021 Connecticut State Library Digital Inclusion Survey was analysed to find the digital divide situation during covid-19 pandemic(Real, 2021).A survey was conducted to evaluate ICT connectivity with rural libraries in Ghana. Ghana Library Authority did their best in bridging digital divide by using this library connectivity project(Ayoung et al., 2020).

5. Gaps in Research:

This is the fact that several authors found the role of public libraries as well as community information centres in providing community information services. But it is not clear about the policies of government in case of knowledge transfer which affect existing indigenous mode of communicating information.

Various research has been done to investigate the liaison between community libraries and the information seekers, but no methodological paper was seen that will enhance the effective information delivery to the people. Just a few articles were found during the literature survey concerning the need to enact library legislation for establishing and promoting the functioning of public libraries.

There are various articles on concept of information poverty and relevance of it in the 21st century, but if information inequality is related with economic poverty or not, still this is a big question. There are numerical empirical studies which survey the present situation of information poverty in various places and between societal sections within a country, but only a few papers search the cause-analysis of information poverty.

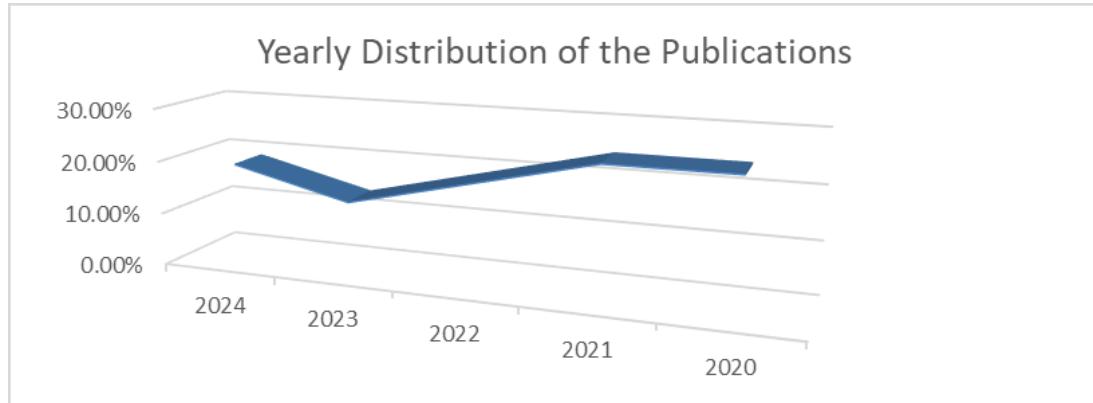
Most of the researchers who worked on information poverty would conclude by proposing policy recommendations for tackling the issues, but only a few papers will give some recommendations about the steps to be taken for digital support in contributing to digital and social inclusion of the rural communities.

6.Trends of existing literature:

6.1. Research methods used in the literature:

Research method	Count	Percentage
Survey Method	11	29.73
Conceptual	17	45.95
Case Study	9	24.32
Total	37	100.00

6.2 Yearly distribution of the publications:



7. Relevancy of the topic:

So far, only a few works done to measure the success rate and report from rural India in case of information poverty is concerned. India's progress will depend on the power of information technology to increase the productivity of its citizen. This is important that the issue of information inequality will continue to be discussed on a wide range of platforms as this is a big social issue of the day. There is a need to examine the determinants that govern the information poverty in future research.

8. Conclusion:

Information poverty is an important research topic due to its various impacts on society as well as on economic development too. One of the biggest challenges facing the world today is that of information poverty which can have a negative effect on the economic, cultural, and socio-political development of the community. So, to formulate a set of ethical principles and to help to create a fair information society, it is imperative to work on information poverty as well. This is an attempt to find out the gaps for conducting research and way forward.

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