



Perspectives on User Behaviour and Patterns of User Satisfaction in Academic Libraries in Nigeria

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Abstract

Government-funded Academic libraries in Nigeria hold a complicated and pertinent position because they remain central to scholarship, yet they face growing questions about how well they serve today's users. This paper applies the Hegelian dialectical framework, moving through thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, to examine the relationship between user behaviour and user satisfaction in Nigerian Academic libraries funded through academic budgets. The thesis holds that Academic libraries are built as stable repositories of knowledge for predictable user needs. The antithesis shows that real user behaviour is dynamic and shaped by technology, and this behaviour often clashes with how libraries are structured, producing real dissatisfaction. The synthesis proposes a dialectically responsive model that moves past both extremes. Drawing on Wilson's information behaviour model, Rogers' diffusion of innovations theory, and empirical Nigerian studies, the paper argues that user satisfaction is shaped by institutional capacity, user expectation, digital change, and socio-economic constraint together, not by resources alone. The paper closes by calling for hybrid library service models that reconcile traditional library mandates with today's digital expectations.

Keywords: user behaviour, user satisfaction, Academic libraries, Nigeria, dialectics, information seeking

Introduction

Academic libraries are traditionally positioned as the intellectual core of universities, fundamentally established to organise, manage, and provide access to information resources that drive teaching, learning, and research (Abukabar, 2022). Digital technology has since spread fast, and a new generation of users now brings different expectations. Today's Nigerian

Academic library user is active and technologically fluent, and their information-seeking behaviour is often complex and contradictory (Akidi, Umebali & Irememba, 2025). This shift did not happen overnight, and its effects are still unfolding across the sector. This shift has created real tension in Nigerian Academic librarianship because Libraries still operate within frameworks that favour print collections and physical access.



Meanwhile, users want digital immediacy and personalised service that fits their daily habits. The result is a dialectical contradiction: a basic gap between how academic libraries define their own mission and how users judge library service (Abukabar, 2022). Neither side is simply wrong. Libraries are not stubbornly clinging to old practice, and users are not merely impatient with tradition. Each side is responding rationally to different pressures that is unique from their experiences. Hence, the lack of equality and balance is not a failure of either party.

Dialectics, rooted in the philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, offers a useful lens for this imbalance. Hegel argued that ideas carry internal contradictions where a thesis meets its antithesis and resolving that contradiction produces a higher synthesis, one that keeps what was true in both earlier positions while moving past their limits (Maybee, 2020). Applied to library science, this structure reveals the relationship between user behaviour and satisfaction in Nigerian Academic libraries as dynamic and shaped by history. Contradiction here is not a flaw to argue away, but the engine that drives institutions to change. This matters beyond theory, since user satisfaction shapes library patronage, Academic achievement, and the library's own legitimacy within the university system (Ike et al., 2023). The paper moves through three dialectical stages. The thesis sets out the normative model of the Academic library and the idealised user behaviour it assumes. The antithesis examines the empirical evidence, revealing the contradictions between this model and real patterns of user behaviour in Nigeria. The synthesis proposes an integrated model that moves past the binary opposition between the traditional library paradigm and the digitally mediated world users now inhabit. Throughout, the analysis focuses on government-funded Academic libraries, meaning libraries in federal and state-owned Nigerian universities financed mainly through academic budgets. This funding

mechanism, and the accountability structures that come with it, generates many of the contradictions this paper examines. Privately funded university libraries fall outside this paper's scope, since they answer to a different financial logic.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective is to apply the Hegelian dialectical framework to examine user behaviour and user satisfaction in government-funded academic libraries in Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Examine the normative institutional model these libraries embody and the idealised user behaviour it assumes.
2. Identify the contradictions between this model and actual, digitally mediated user behaviour.
3. Illuminate on the structural constraints, especially infrastructure deficits and funding shortfalls, that shape user dissatisfaction.
4. Propose a dialectically integrated model reconciling the traditional paradigm with today's user expectations.
5. Recommend policy and institutional strategies for improving user satisfaction.

Significance of the Study

Government-funded Academic libraries serve most of Nigeria's university population, so bodies such as the National Universities Commission (NUC) and the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) rely on evidence like this to guide policy for the sector they oversee. The dialectical approach also gives Nigerian library science a way of treating institutional contradiction as generative rather than simple failure, a reframing that can help librarians and regulators plan the next stage of library development.

Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative, conceptual research design, using the Hegelian dialectical method, thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, as its organising framework. No primary data were collected. The literature was organised into the three



dialectical moments this paper develops. It utilises the synthesis of existing empirical and theoretical literature on user behaviour and satisfaction in government-funded Nigerian Academic libraries, using peer-reviewed journal articles, institutional studies, and recognised theoretical works.

Theoretical Anchorage

Hegel's dialectical method moves from an initial affirmative position, the thesis, through its negation, the antithesis, to a higher reconciliation, the synthesis, which keeps the partial truths of both prior moments while overcoming their one-sidedness (Maybee, 2020). Hegel treated contradiction not as a logical error but as a productive force that drives historical and institutional development forward. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on Hegel's dialectics describes this movement as driven by the internal logic of its own content (Maybee, 2020). This paper takes that principle as its organising method, not merely as a metaphor. Cecez-Kecmanovic, Galliers, Henfridsson and Newell (2021), further argued that dialectical thinking has a distinct role in information systems research, since it addresses contradictions embedded in socio-technical arrangements and moves past the divide that limits both positivist and interpretivist frameworks on their own.

The paper is also anchored on Wilson's (2000) model of human information behaviour, which situates information seeking within a wider context of human need, environmental and social conditions, and the variables that mediate between a felt need and an actual information-seeking act. Wilson's model fits the Nigerian Academic library context well, since it foregrounds contextual factors such as socio-economic condition, educational infrastructure, and psychological barriers that shape the gap between what a user needs and what a user actually uses (Wilson, 2000).

Rogers' diffusion of innovations theory offers a further anchor for understanding user behaviour in digitally

mediated library environments. Rogers held that the rate at which an innovation spreads depends on five perceived characteristics: relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability. Adopters sort into categories, from innovators and early adopters to a late majority and finally laggards (Rogers, 2003). Applied to library services, this theory helps explain low patronage of electronic resources even where those resources are formally available. A digital service (electronic resource) that is difficult to access because of unreliable connectivity will diffuse slowly, and so will a service whose benefits are not visible to peers (Okwu et al., 2025). Together, Hegelian dialectics, Wilson's model, and Rogers' diffusion theory form this paper's theoretical architecture: dialectics supplies the argumentative movement, Wilson's model situates user behaviour within its socio-contextual determinants, and diffusion theory explains why uptake of digital library services varies so sharply.

The Thesis: The Normative Model of the Academic Library and Idealised User Behaviour

The thesis, in the Hegelian sense used here, is the initial affirmative position, the established order or idea against which later contradictions are measured. In government-funded Nigerian academic librarianship, this thesis is the normative idea of the library as an organised, professionally curated repository of knowledge, built to support the teaching, learning, and research mission of the academic university (Onuoha, 2023). This model treats the library as a structured institution with defined functions: acquiring and organising information resources, offering reference and instructional services, and preserving the intellectual record (Abukabar, 2022). These academic libraries operate under regulatory frameworks set by the National Universities Commission (NUC), which sets minimum standards for collections, staffing, and infrastructure as a condition of accreditation, and their budgets



flow through the same academic appropriation process as the rest of their host university (Akidi, Umehali & Irememba, 2025). The traditional Nigerian academic library model assumes a particular kind of user: rational and purposive, who forms a clearly defined information need, enters the library, works with the available print resources, and leaves satisfied (Aina & Adebayo, 2024). This normative user is patient, print literate, and willing to navigate a structured, rule-governed environment, deferring to professional mediation. Here, the relationship between user and library is abstract; one of institutional dependence, where the library sets the terms of access and the user is expected to conform (Echezona & Ugwu, 2023).

Theoretical Underpinnings of the Normative Model

The normative model draws on several theoretical traditions. The bibliographic paradigm, dominant in library science through much of the twentieth century, positioned the library as a neutral curator of recorded knowledge, organised through universally applicable classification systems (Wilson, 2000). Nigerian user satisfaction literature from the 1990s and early 2000s largely reproduced this assumption (Sowole, 1995; Nnadozie, 2006). Obiamalu and Nnadozie (2024) evaluated satisfaction through material availability, physical facilities, and staff quality, implicitly treating the normative model as the correct benchmark. The thesis therefore encodes a theory that assumes users hold stable, legible information needs, and that satisfaction depends mainly on the library's capacity to meet those needs inside a structured environment. This has some empirical support. Nigerian studies show users rely on the library for Academic materials and value professional librarians (Akidi, Umehali & Irememba, 2025; Ike et al., 2023). Even so, this thesis rests on assumptions increasingly strained by empirical reality, and these strains form the antithesis examined next.

The Antithesis: Contradictions in User Behaviour and the Crisis of Satisfaction

The antithesis does not simply refute the thesis. It simply exposes the contradictions the thesis conceals, which is the documented patterns of user behaviour that diverge sharply from the idealised user the thesis presupposes. The clearest transformation is the shift from print-centred to digitally mediated information seeking. Research across Nigerian universities consistently finds that contemporary users, especially undergraduates, prefer digital information sources over print collections (Idhalama et al., 2025). Udem et al. (2020) found that undergraduate students in Southeast Nigeria value library services but often see them as outdated compared with the immediacy of online resources, reflecting a real shift in the information ecology these students inhabit, not merely a matter of taste. These undergraduates are largely Generation Z (Gen Z) who have become the dominant cohort of Academic library users, sharpening this transformation further. Gen Z students show distinctive information-seeking habits marked by a preference for digital convenience and rapid access to information (Okwu et al., 2025; Salubi et al., 2018). Many rely on social media platforms as primary information-seeking tools, turning to institutional library resources mainly when Academic necessity leaves them no alternative (Tella et al., 2020), directly challenging the normative model's assumption, which posits that the library remains the preferred channel for Academic work.

Structural and Institutional Contradictions

Once structural contradictions enter the picture, the antithesis deepens because despite the promise of digital technology, digital resources in government-funded Nigerian Academic libraries remain constrained by infrastructure deficits, funding shortfalls, and uneven technological capacity (Idhalama et al., 2025). Inadequate



broadband on many campuses means electronic resources, even when formally subscribed to, remain inaccessible to large parts of the user community and intermittent electricity supply compounds the problem, limiting the hours computer laboratories and digital reading rooms can serve as access points (Adeyemi & Akintayo, 2022).

Funding constraint is a second major contradiction, rooted directly in the academic budgetary process. Chronic underfunding creates a persistent gap between the information needs of the Academic community and the resources the library receives through annual academic appropriation (Nnadozie, 2024). Libraries lacking adequate funds cannot maintain current print collections, subscribe to electronic databases, or invest in needed infrastructure. This is complicated further by uneven digital literacy among users. While Gen Z students show real fluency with social media, their capacity to navigate scholarly databases is often limited (Okwu et al., 2025), a paradox that generates frustration sometimes wrongly blamed on the library rather than on the user's own competency gap, which has to do with the user's digital literacy and information literacy in terms of information usage in the library or through the library.

Patterns of User Satisfaction

User behaviour and structural constraints produce well-documented patterns of satisfaction. Research across multiple Nigerian universities reveals a consistent split. Users express relative satisfaction with traditional services such as lending, reference, and serials, but real dissatisfaction with electronic resource services, technological infrastructure, and the currency of library collections (Ike et al., 2023; Temboe & Ga'anda, 2022). Obinyan (2021) adapted the Rodski Customer Satisfaction Survey across fourteen Nigerian universities. Library staff rated highly on proactive service, with a mean score of 4.2, while the grand mean for service quality items stood at 3.4, and for communication at

3.2. This shows stronger satisfaction with human interaction than with technology-dependent dimensions, capturing the core dialectical contradiction between the traditional library model and the demands of the contemporary information environment.

Nnadozie (2017) studied university libraries in South-East Nigeria and found only a weak, statistically insignificant relationship between how often lecturers used the library and how satisfied they were with its services. Increasing library use alone, without improved collection quality and infrastructure, is not enough to produce meaningful satisfaction. AI-powered chatbots and other digital innovations have entered some Nigerian Academic libraries, revealing further dimensions of the contradiction. Kuranga et al. (2026) found that chatbots enhance user autonomy and cut response times, but their effectiveness is limited by infrastructural challenges and uneven digital literacy, with engagement varying sharply by discipline. Such innovations meant to close the satisfaction gap can widen existing inequality instead. None of this is simply a catalogue of failure. In the Hegelian sense, the antithesis is a necessary, productive moment that prepares the ground for the synthesis this paper now turns to.

The Synthesis: Toward an Integrated, Dialectically Responsive Model of Library Service

The synthesis, in Hegel's framework, is not a mere compromise between thesis and antithesis, nor a simple replacement of one by the other. It sublates the prior moments, preserving their partial truths while overcoming their one-sidedness at a higher level of conceptual and institutional adequacy (Maybee, 2020). For the government-funded Nigerian academic library, the synthesis means building a service model that preserves the traditional paradigm's genuine strengths, professional curation, organised access, and preservation of the intellectual record, while overcoming



its rigidity and technological inadequacy. It must take up the user empowerment and digital fluency of the antithetical moment while addressing the information literacy deficits and infrastructural inequality that come with uncritical reliance on digital alternatives.

The Hybrid Library Model: Preserving and Transcending the Oppositions

The core institutional element of the synthesis is the hybrid library model: an academic library that integrates print and digital resources, physical and virtual access, and professional mediation with user autonomy. It reconceives the library as a dynamic environment that adapts to evolving user needs, without abandoning the commitments that distinguish it from the open internet's unfiltered, commercial information environment (Ezeani, et al., 2021). Universities must treat adequate academic library funding as a non-negotiable part of the Academic mission, not a discretionary expense, since persistent underfunding is a structural obstacle the synthesis cannot overcome through technical innovation alone (Nnadozie, 2024; Akidi, Umebali & Irememba, 2025). The NUC has a critical role in setting and enforcing minimum funding standards as a condition of accreditation. At the service design level, the synthetic library shifts from supply-driven to demand-driven delivery, continuously assessing user needs through surveys, usage analytics, and participatory design, and reconfiguring its services accordingly (Akidi, Umebali & Irememba, 2025; Ike et al., 2023).

A critical element of the synthesis responds directly to a key contradictory finding which shows that digital fluency does not automatically translate into effective Academic information seeking. Information literacy, the capacity to identify an information need, locate and evaluate information from diverse sources and use information effectively and ethically,

functions as the dialectical bridge between a user's digital competencies and the library's scholarly resources (Ekpenyong & Edem, 2021). Therefore, libraries that embed information literacy into the curriculum, partner with Academic departments on disciplinary research, and support users in engaging critically with print and digital resources are best placed to close the satisfaction gap the antithesis revealed.

Another pertinent element of the synthesis is that the synthesis does not embrace technological transformation blindly. Instead, it calls for a mediated, contextually appropriate integration of digital technology, one that accounts for the structural constraints the antithesis identified: inadequate broadband, unreliable electricity, limited device ownership, and uneven digital literacy across communities. Hence, libraries should invest first in technologies that address the most significant satisfaction deficits, such as electronic resource discovery and digital reference services, while working with university management and national agencies to address the infrastructural conditions wider digital delivery requires (Idhalama et al., 2025). AI-powered chatbots and virtual reference services, already piloted in some Nigerian academic libraries, represent a promising but contextually contingent element of the synthesis. For these technologies to fulfil their potential, culturally appropriate training data, stronger technical infrastructure, and robust user education programmes must all accompany deployment (Kuranga et al., 2026).

The synthesis also calls for a reconceptualisation of user satisfaction itself, moving beyond the one-dimensional model implicit in the thesis and the technology-adoption metrics that dominate the antithesis. In the synthetic model, user satisfaction is multidimensional and relational, shaped by the interaction between user need, institutional capacity, technological mediation, and the broader socio-economic context. This view draws on Wilson's (2000)



contextual model and on the service quality framework developed by Hernon and Altman (1998), which distinguishes transactional satisfaction from satisfaction as a cumulative assessment of the library's overall contribution. Research in Nigerian Academic libraries support this view. Staff behaviour mediates satisfaction by shaping perceptions of library resources (Ike et al., 2023), and users often report higher satisfaction with the library's social environment than with its technological infrastructure (Akidi, Umebali & Irememba, 2025), pointing to the library's importance as a place of scholarly community, not merely an information retrieval system.

Submission

This dialectical analysis brings out dimensions of the user behaviour and satisfaction relationship that purely descriptive approaches tend to miss. It shows that the challenges facing government-funded Academic libraries in Nigeria are not merely technical or managerial problems with straightforward fixes. They are manifestations of a deeper structural contradiction: the institutional architecture of the Academic library was designed for a different information era, and it now sits inside an information ecology that has moved on. If these challenges are understood mainly as technical deficits, the remedies proposed will be mainly technical, and the underlying contradictions will remain unaddressed. If instead they are understood dialectically, as a genuine tension between institutional form and social function, the remedies must be structural, reaching toward a preconception of the library's institutional identity and its relationship with its university community. The synthesis proposed here is not a final resolution of the contradictions it identifies because in the Hegelian tradition, every synthesis becomes the starting point of a new dialectical movement, since the contradictions inside it generate new antitheses and carry the dialectic forward (Maybee, 2020). The hybrid library model,

information literacy programming, and mediated technology integration proposed here will themselves generate new contradictions as they meet Nigerian institutional realities. Thus, the analysis offers a framework for navigating an ongoing relationship, not a static solution.

Recommendations

As a practical framework, the dialectical synthesis generates concrete policy recommendations, drawn from the integration of the thesis's normative commitments and the antithesis's empirical realities. First, the NUC should revise its minimum standards to explicitly cover digital infrastructure, electronic resource access, and information literacy programming, backed by mandatory reporting on user satisfaction outcomes as well as resource inputs. Second, these libraries should adopt a continuous practice of user needs assessment, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative methods such as focus groups, to inform collection development, service design, staffing, and technology investment. Third, they should build partnerships with digital library consortia, widening access to resources individual libraries cannot afford alone and invest in continuous professional development that repositions the profession as a knowledge profession rather than a purely custodial one.

Conclusion

User satisfaction cannot be reduced to resource availability or technological sophistication alone. It is a complex, relational, and historically situated phenomenon, shaped by the ongoing interaction between institutional capacity, user expectation, professional practice, and the broader socio-economic and technological context. Understanding this complexity, and acting on it with real institutional commitment, is the central challenge facing Nigerian Academic librarianship today. Libraries that treat their contradictions as generative tensions to work



through, rather than as problems to argue away, are best placed to navigate the transformation of the present information landscape.

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