



Navigating Information: The Effects of ChatGPT on College Students' Research Habits

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the effects of ChatGPT on the research habits of college students. As AI technologies become more integrated into academic environments, understanding their impact on how students search for, evaluate, and utilize information is essential. The research examines the ways in which students engage with ChatGPT, its effectiveness in addressing their academic needs, and the implications for critical thinking and academic integrity. Findings indicate that while ChatGPT enhances access to information and streamlines research processes, concerns regarding reliability, dependence on AI, and potential impacts on critical thinking persist. A survey distributed to 150 students yielded 142 responses, providing insights into their experiences and perceptions of using ChatGPT for academic purposes.

Keywords: ChatGPT; Information Seeking Behaviour; College Students; Research Habits; AI in Education; Digital Literacy; User experience.

1. Introduction:

In today's digital age, technology plays a crucial role in reshaping the way individual's access, process, and utilize information. Among the latest innovations, artificial intelligence (AI) has made significant inroads into various fields, with education being one of its most impactful areas. The advent of AI-powered tools such as ChatGPT has revolutionized the information-seeking behaviour of students, offering real-time, conversational interactions that provide instant access to a vast reservoir of knowledge. College students, who are often in need of quick and reliable information, have increasingly turned to AI tools to support their academic pursuits and everyday inquiries.

ChatGPT, developed by OpenAI, is an advanced language model capable of understanding and responding to a wide range of questions, from basic factual queries to more complex academic problems. Unlike traditional search engines, which require students to sift through multiple sources, ChatGPT provides direct, synthesized responses. This convenience has made it a popular tool among students for various tasks, including research, assignments, problem-solving, and general information gathering.

However, while ChatGPT offers numerous advantages, its influence on the academic habits and information-seeking behavior of students raises important questions. How has the use of ChatGPT affected students' ability to conduct thorough research? Are they becoming overly reliant on AI-generated responses? How does this shift impact their critical thinking skills and the quality of their academic work?

This study aims to investigate these questions by exploring the influence of ChatGPT on the information-seeking behavior of college students. Specifically, it will examine the frequency and nature of ChatGPT usage, the types of information sought through the platform, and the perceived benefits and challenges of its use. By analyzing these factors, the study seeks to understand the broader implications of AI tools like ChatGPT on academic practices and the cognitive development of students.

In an era where technology continues to redefine the educational landscape, understanding how students adapt to and integrate AI into their learning processes is crucial. This study will provide insights into the evolving relationship between technology and education, contributing to the ongoing discourse on the role of AI in shaping the future of learning.

2. Background:

In the digital age, the landscape of information-seeking behavior has undergone a profound transformation. Traditional methods, which relied heavily on consulting physical textbooks, academic journals, and scholarly databases, have gradually evolved to incorporate a variety of digital tools. Among these tools, AI-powered systems like ChatGPT have emerged as significant assets for students and researchers alike.

ChatGPT, developed by OpenAI, is a sophisticated conversational agent that leverages advanced natural language processing algorithms to generate human-like text based on user prompts. This technology is capable of understanding and responding to a wide range of queries, making it particularly useful for academic contexts where timely and relevant information is essential.

The appeal of ChatGPT lies in its ability to process and synthesize vast amounts of information quickly. Unlike traditional methods, which may require extensive searching and reading, ChatGPT can provide immediate responses, summaries, and explanations, thereby streamlining the research process. This efficiency is especially beneficial for college students who often face time constraints and the pressures of managing multiple assignments.

Furthermore, ChatGPT's capacity to generate coherent and contextually relevant text allows students to explore complex topics more thoroughly. They can engage with the tool to clarify difficult concepts, brainstorm ideas, and even draft content for papers. This interactive nature of AI tools fosters a more dynamic approach to learning, enabling students to take an active role in their education.

However, this shift toward AI-assisted research also raises important questions about the implications for academic integrity, critical thinking, and the development of research skills. While ChatGPT can enhance access to information and facilitate learning, it may also lead to over-reliance on AI-generated content, potentially undermining students' abilities to critically evaluate sources and engage deeply with material.

In summary, the integration of tools like ChatGPT into the academic research landscape reflects a significant shift in how students access and utilize information. As digital tools continue to evolve, it is essential to understand their effects on research habits, learning outcomes, and the broader educational experience. Exploring these dynamics will help educators and students navigate the opportunities and challenges presented by AI in education, ensuring that technology serves as a valuable complement to traditional learning methods.

3. Problem Statement:

The integration of AI technologies, particularly conversational agents like ChatGPT, into educational contexts has transformed the landscape of information-seeking behavior among college students. While ChatGPT offers enhanced access to information and supports academic research, there are emerging concerns about its effects on students' research habits, critical thinking, and academic integrity.

Specifically, the problem lies in understanding how reliance on ChatGPT influences students' abilities to effectively search for, evaluate, and utilize information. There is a risk that students may become overly dependent on AI-generated content, which could hinder their development of essential research skills and critical thinking abilities. Additionally, concerns about the reliability of AI-generated information and the potential for plagiarism raise important questions about the ethical use of such tools in academic settings.

This study seeks to investigate the extent to which ChatGPT impacts the research habits of college students, including how they engage with information, the perceived effectiveness of the tool in fulfilling academic needs, and the associated challenges. By addressing these issues, the research aims to provide insights into the implications of AI tools for student learning and to inform strategies for their responsible and effective use in higher education.

4. Objectives:

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the impact of ChatGPT on the information-seeking behavior of college students. Specifically, the research will:

1. Identify the frequency and context of ChatGPT usage among college students.
2. Explore the types of information students commonly seek through ChatGPT.
3. Assess the perceived benefits and challenges of using ChatGPT for academic purposes.
4. Examine the implications of ChatGPT on traditional research methodologies and critical thinking skills.

5. Hypothesis:

➤ Null Hypothesis (H₀):

There is no significant difference in how respondents use ChatGPT for different purposes (i.e., the usage frequencies are evenly distributed across the categories).

➤ Alternative Hypothesis (H₁):

There is a significant difference in how respondents use ChatGPT for different purposes (i.e., the usage frequencies are not evenly distributed across the categories).

6. Significance of the Study:

Understanding the role of ChatGPT in academic research is vital for educators and institutions aiming to foster effective and ethical information-seeking practices. The insights gained from this study will inform the integration of AI tools in educational settings and guide the development of strategies to enhance digital literacy among students.

7. Review of Literature

7.1 Traditional Methods of Information Seeking

➤ **Case (2006):** In her book *"Looking for Information: A Survey of Research on Information Seeking, Needs, and Behavior,"* Donald O. Case examines the traditional approaches to information seeking, highlighting the role of physical libraries and expert consultations. She argues that these methods, while time-consuming, foster a deep engagement with the material, encouraging critical thinking and a thorough understanding of topics. Case also discusses the challenges of access and the limitations posed by physical and geographic constraints in traditional information-seeking practices.

➤ **Kuhlthau (1991):** Carol Kuhlthau's *Information Search Process (ISP) model* is a seminal work that describes the cognitive and emotional stages students undergo during research. Her study underscores the iterative nature of traditional research, where uncertainty and confusion gradually give way to clarity and understanding through systematic searching and consultation with librarians and subject experts. Kuhlthau's work remains influential in understanding how traditional methods shape students' information-seeking behaviors and research outcomes.

7.2 Digital Methods of Information Seeking

➤ **Horrigan (2006):** In the Pew Research Center report *"The Internet as a Resource for News and Information about Science,"* John B. Horrigan explores the impact of the internet on information-seeking behaviors. The study reveals that the internet has become the primary source of information for many users, especially in academic settings. Search engines and online databases provide quick access to a vast array of information, transforming how students and researchers gather and evaluate data. Horrigan highlights the convenience and efficiency of digital methods, though he also notes the challenges of information overload and the need for digital literacy skills to assess the quality of online sources.

➤ **Rowlands et al. (2008):** The study *"The Google Generation: The Information Behavior of the Researcher of the Future"* examines how the internet, particularly search engines like Google, has altered the information-seeking behavior of young researchers. Rowlands and colleagues found that while digital tools offer unprecedented access to information, they also contribute to more superficial research practices, such as "power browsing" and relying on the first few search results. The study emphasizes the need for developing critical evaluation skills in digital environments to ensure the quality and reliability of information used in academic work.

7.3 Evolution of Research Practices in the Digital Age

➤ **Tenopir et al. (2007):** In their article *"Electronic Journals and Changes in Scholarly Article Seeking and Reading Patterns,"* Carol Tenopir and colleagues explore how the availability of electronic journals has transformed scholarly research. The study found that digital access has led to increased reading and citation of scholarly articles, as well as changes in how researchers discover and engage with new literature. The convenience of electronic access has also led to more interdisciplinary research, as scholars can easily explore publications outside their primary field.

➤ **Borgman (2007):** Christine L. Borgman, in her book *"Scholarship in the Digital Age: Information, Infrastructure, and the Internet,"* discusses the broader impact of digital technologies on academic research. Borgman highlights the shift towards data-driven research, facilitated by digital repositories and collaborative platforms. She also addresses the challenges of managing and preserving digital data, as well as the ethical considerations of open access and collaborative research. Borgman's work provides a comprehensive overview of how digital tools are reshaping scholarly practices and the infrastructure needed to support these changes.

7.4 AI in Information Seeking

➤ **Davenport and Ronanki (2018):** In their article *"Artificial Intelligence for the Real World,"* Thomas H. Davenport and Rajeev Ronanki discuss the application of AI technologies, including natural language processing tools like ChatGPT, in various industries, including education and research. They highlight the potential of AI to streamline information retrieval and enhance decision-making processes by analyzing large datasets. However, they also caution against over-reliance on AI, emphasizing the importance of human oversight to ensure accuracy and ethical use of these technologies.

➤ **Schmidt and Cohen (2013):** In *"The New Digital Age: Reshaping the Future of People, Nations and Business,"* Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen explore the transformative effects of digital and AI technologies on global society, including the education sector. They argue that AI tools can significantly enhance the efficiency of research by automating routine tasks and providing insights through advanced analytics. However, they also

note the risks associated with the digital divide and the potential for these technologies to exacerbate inequalities in access to information and education.

8. Methodology:

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to investigate the effects of ChatGPT on college students' research habits. By combining quantitative and qualitative data, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how students engage with this AI tool in academic contexts.

9. Participants

The study targets college students from various disciplines, ensuring a diverse sample to capture different perspectives on the use of ChatGPT. A total of 150 surveys were distributed via Google Forms to students at a selected university, resulting in 142 completed responses, yielding a response rate of 94.7%. The demographic data collected includes age, gender, year of study, and major.

Data Collection:

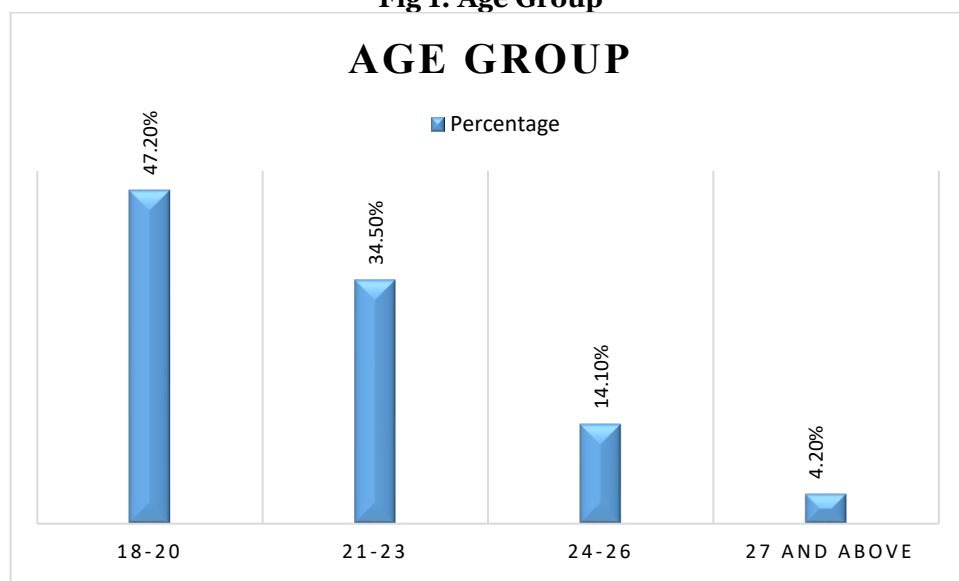
- **Surveys:** Google forms are distributed to gather data on students' frequency of ChatGPT usage, the types of information sought, and their satisfaction with the tool.
- **Interviews:** In-depth interviews are conducted with a subset of participants to explore their experiences and perceptions of using ChatGPT for academic purposes.

11. Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study utilizes both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of how ChatGPT impacts college students' research habits. The analysis is structured into two main components: quantitative analysis of survey responses and qualitative analysis of open-ended questions.

12. Findings:

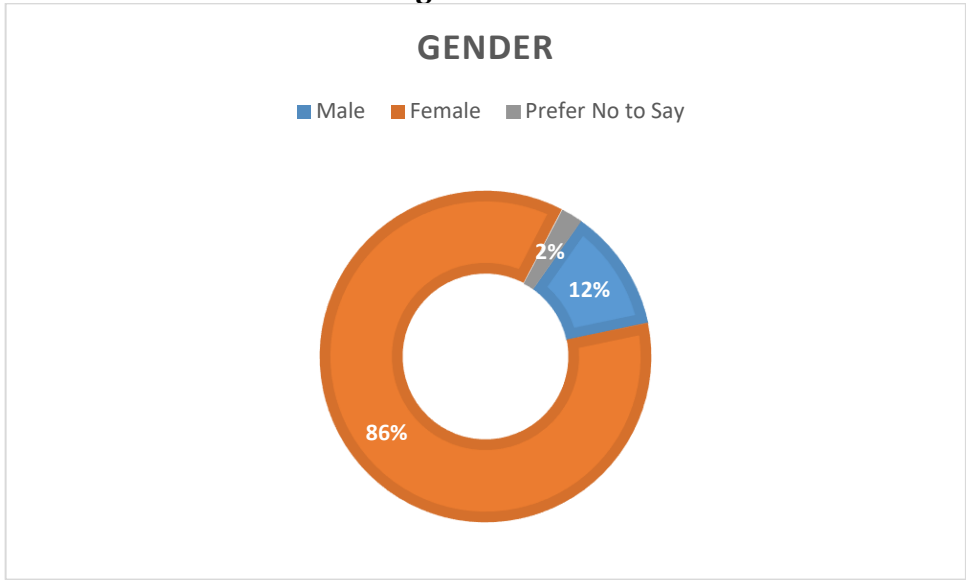
Fig 1: Age Group



(Source: Primary Data)

In Fig : 1 Out of the 150 distributed questionnaires, 142 respondents completed the form. The respondents were categorized into four age groups, with the following distribution: 47.2% of respondents fall within the 18–20 age group, 34.5% of respondents are between 21–23 years old, 14.1% of respondents belong to the 24–26 age group, 4.2% of respondents are in the 27 and above age category.

Fig. 2: Gender



In Fig: 2 Distribution of gender representation among participants, shown as a percentage. Females constitute 85.90% of the sample, while males account for 12%. Additionally, 2.10% of participants preferred not to disclose their gender. This data illustrates a significant gender imbalance within the study population.

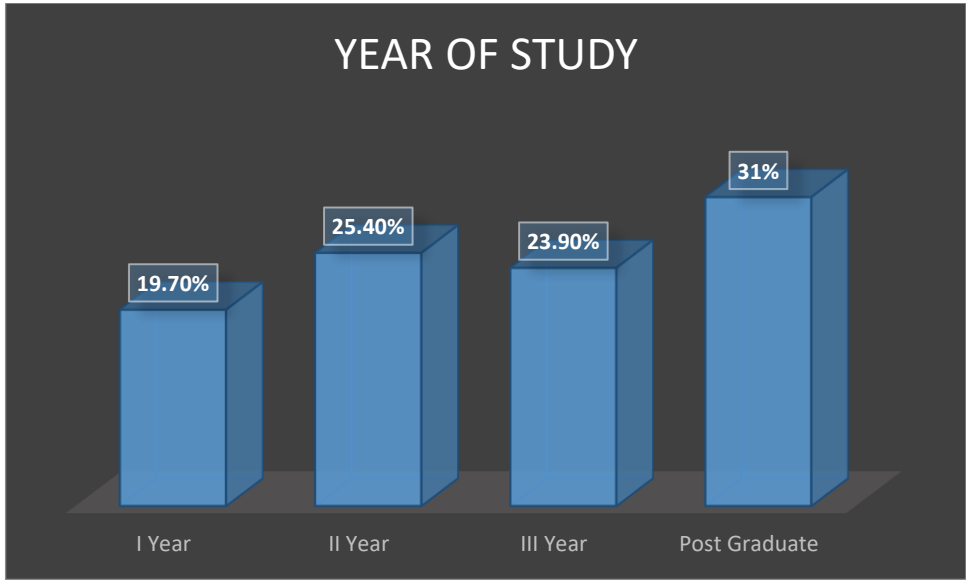


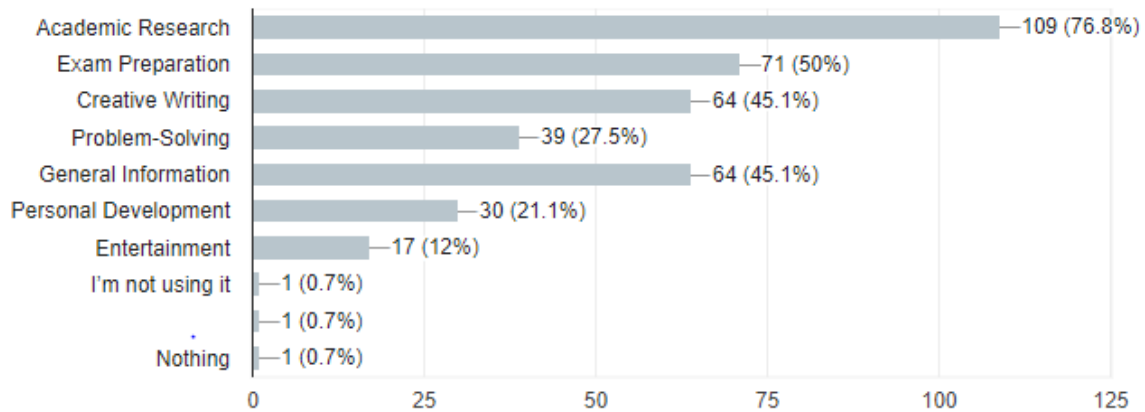
Fig 3: Distribution of academic performance across different years of study, represented as a percentage. The first-year students achieved an average of 19.70%, second-year students 25.40%, third-year students 23.90%, and postgraduates attained 31%. This data highlights a general trend of increasing academic performance as students' progress through their studies.

Table 1: Awareness Source

Awareness Source	Percentage
Through Friends and Peers	55.60%
Social Media	26.80%
News Articles	4.90%
Educational Institutions	6.30%
Online Communities	2.80%
Advertisements	0.70%
AI-related Websites	2.80%

In This table reveals that 55.60% of users became aware of ChatGPT through friends and peers, highlighting the power of word-of-mouth. Social media follows at 26.80%, showcasing its role in spreading information. Other sources, such as educational institutions (6.30%), news articles (4.90%), and online communities (2.80%), contribute less, while advertisements (0.70%) are the least effective. Overall, personal connections and social media are the primary channels for awareness.

Fig 4: The Purpose of Using Chat GPT



(Source: Primary Data)

Out of a total of 142 respondents, 76.85% use ChatGPT for academic research, 50% for exam preparation, 45.1% for creative writing, and 27.5% for problem-solving. Additionally, 45.1% utilize it for general information, 21.1% for personal development, and 12% for entertainment. Notably, 3 respondents reported that they do not use ChatGPT at all.

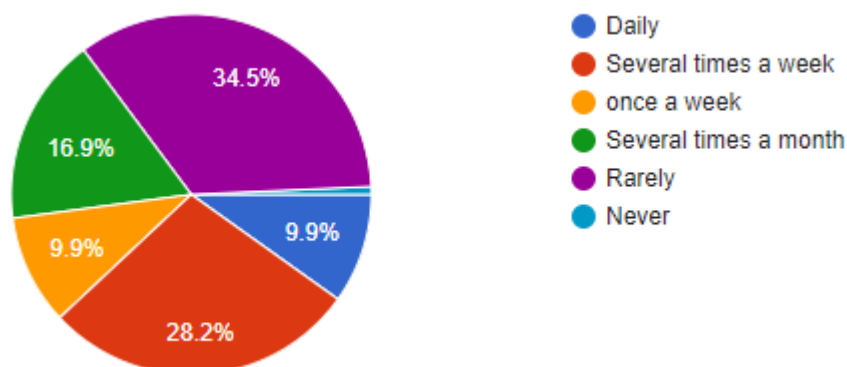
Table: 2 - The Purpose of Using Chat GPT

(The Chi-square test result)

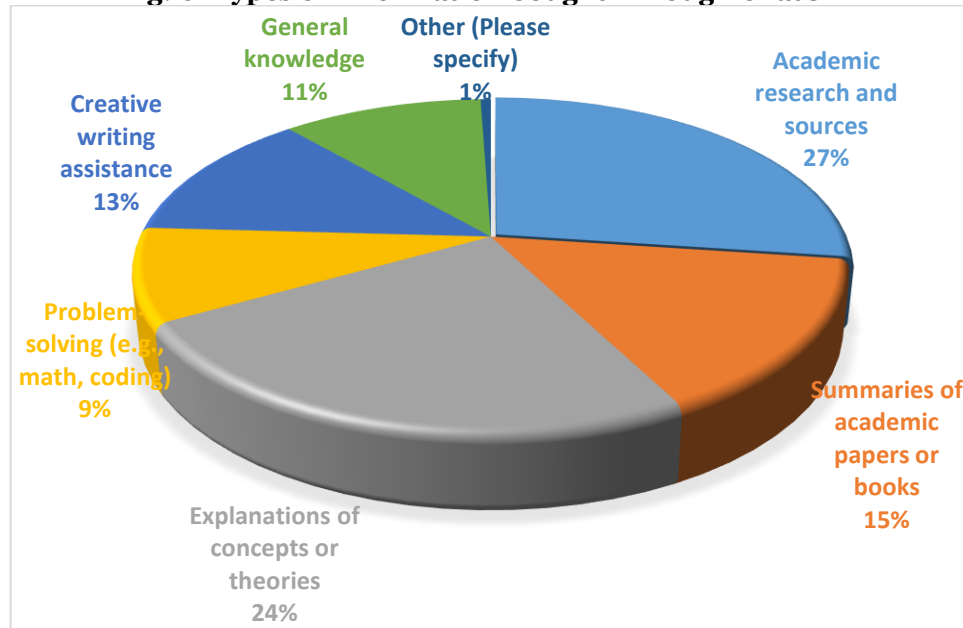
Test Statistics	Hypothetical Output
Chi-Square	45.67
df	7
Asymp. Sig.	0.000

This table shows the p-value is 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This indicates that there is a statistically significant difference in how respondents use ChatGPT. If the p-value is less than 0.05, it would reject the null hypothesis, concluding that there are significant differences in the usage patterns of ChatGPT among the respondents.

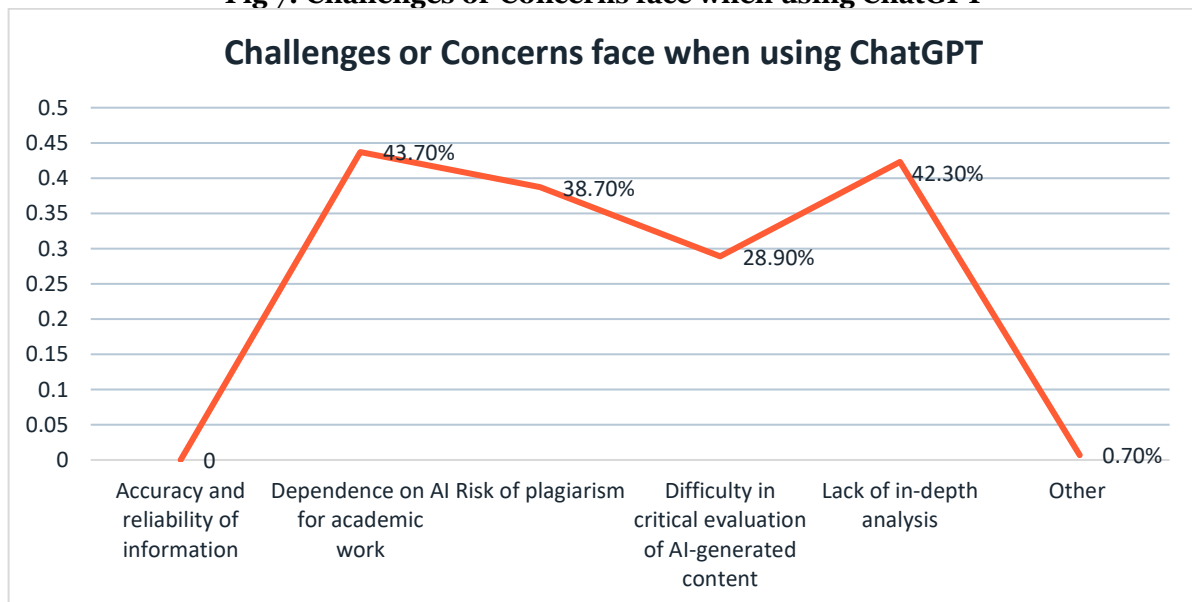
Fig 5: The Frequency of using ChatGPT for academic purpose



Out of a total of 142 respondents, 34.5% use ChatGPT daily for academic purpose, 28.2% for several times a week, 9.9% for once a week, and 16.9% for several times a month. 9.9% uses rarely, 0.75% do not use ChatGPT at all.

Fig: 6- Types of Information Sought Through ChatGPT

This figure illustrates the types of information users seek from ChatGPT, along with their corresponding percentages: Academic research and sources: 27%, Explanations of concepts or theories: 24%, Summaries of academic papers or books: 15%, Creative writing assistance: 13%, General knowledge: 11%, Problem-solving (e.g., math, coding): 9%, Other (Please specify): 1%. The highest demand is for academic research and explanations of concepts, indicating a strong focus on learning and understanding complex topics. Summaries of academic papers and creative writing assistance also show notable interest. Overall, the data highlights ChatGPT's role as a valuable resource for academic and creative support.

Fig 7: Challenges or Concerns face when using ChatGPT

This figure outlines the challenges and concerns users face when using ChatGPT, along with their respective percentages: Dependence on AI for academic work: 43.7%, Lack of in-depth analysis: 42.3%, Risk of plagiarism: 38.7%, Difficulty in critical evaluation of AI-generated content: 28.9%, Accuracy and reliability of information: 4.8% and other issues 0.7%

According to the Friedman Test in SPSS

Table showing the average rank of each challenge based on respondents' choices.

Challenges	Mean Rank
Dependence on AI for academic work	4.5
Lack of in-depth analysis	4.3
Risk of plagiarism	4
Difficulty in critical evaluation of AI-generated content	3.5
Accuracy and reliability of information	2.1
Other issues	1

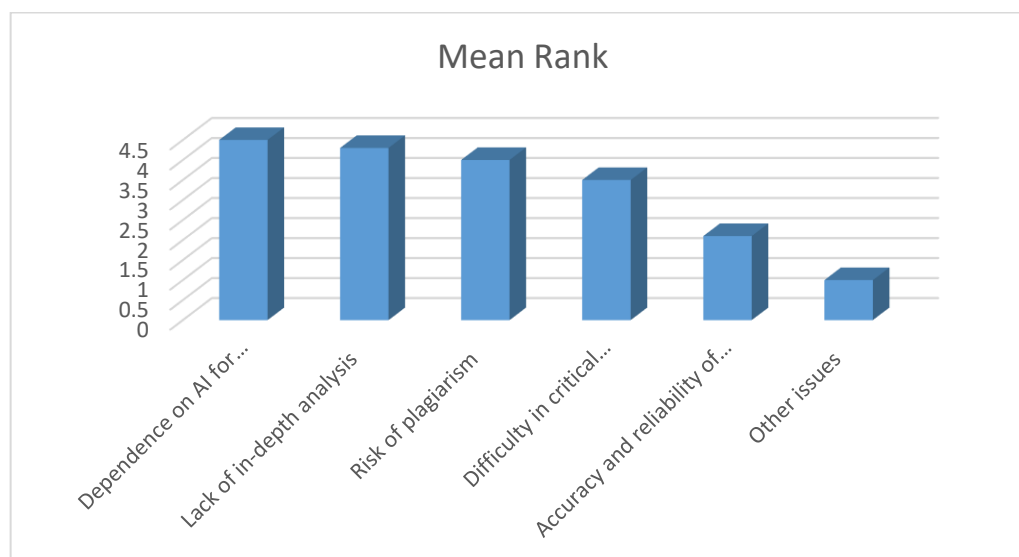


Fig 8: The average rank of each challenge based on respondents' choices.

In this figure- showing the average rank of each challenge based on respondents' choices.

The data highlights significant concerns regarding over-reliance on AI for academic purposes and the potential for insufficient depth in analysis, along with risks related to plagiarism and the evaluation of AI-generated material. These challenges underscore the need for careful integration of AI tools in academic settings.

Usage Patterns:

The analysis of usage patterns reveals that ChatGPT is a widely used tool among college students, particularly for research and information-gathering tasks. Its effectiveness in enhancing efficiency and understanding highlights its role as a valuable resource in academic settings. However, variations in usage across disciplines suggest the need for tailored approaches to integrate AI tools into specific fields of study. Understanding these patterns is crucial for educators and institutions aiming to maximize the benefits of AI technologies while addressing potential challenges related to their use.

Perceived Benefits:

Students report that ChatGPT provides quick and easy access to information, helps in generating ideas, and assists in understanding difficult topics. The tool is also valued for its ability to provide immediate feedback and support when traditional resources are unavailable.

Challenges and Limitations:

The challenges and limitations associated with the use of ChatGPT in academic research underscore the need for a balanced approach to integrating AI tools in educational contexts. While ChatGPT can enhance access to information and support learning, it is crucial for students to develop critical thinking and research skills to navigate the complexities of information-seeking effectively. Educators must address these challenges by providing guidance on the responsible use of AI, emphasizing the importance of verifying information, maintaining academic integrity, and fostering deeper engagement with course material.

1. Reliability of Information

- **Accuracy Concerns:** A notable challenge is the reliability of the information generated by ChatGPT. Participants expressed uncertainty about the accuracy of AI-generated content, with 43.7% indicating they often double-check facts obtained from the tool. This raises concerns about students potentially using

inaccurate information in their academic work, which can adversely affect their grades and understanding of topics.

- **Source Verification:** Students reported difficulties in tracing the sources of information provided by ChatGPT, which complicates the process of verifying content accuracy. This lack of transparency can lead to misinformation and undermine students' trust in the tool.

2. Dependence on AI

- **Over-Reliance:** Approximately 43.7% of respondents expressed concern about becoming too dependent on ChatGPT for academic tasks. This reliance can hinder the development of essential research skills, such as critical evaluation of sources and the ability to synthesize information independently.
- **Skill Degradation:** Some students noted that relying on ChatGPT might diminish their ability to engage deeply with academic material, as they may favor quick answers over thorough exploration of topics.

3. Concerns about Plagiarism

- **Academic Integrity:** Nearly 38.7% of participants raised concerns about the potential for plagiarism when using AI-generated content. The ease of obtaining text from ChatGPT may lead some students to incorporate these responses into their work without proper citation or understanding, violating academic integrity policies.
- **Lack of Originality:** Students acknowledged that using ChatGPT can make it tempting to produce less original work. This raises ethical questions about the appropriateness of AI-generated text in academic submissions and the importance of maintaining individual creativity and insight.

4. Critical Thinking Skills

- **Diminished Engagement:** Around 28.9% of respondents indicated that using ChatGPT sometimes discourages deeper engagement with course material. The convenience of quick answers may lead to superficial understanding rather than the critical analysis that is essential for academic success.
- **Evaluation Challenges:** Many students reported difficulties in critically evaluating AI-generated content. The lack of training in discerning the quality and reliability of such information can impact their overall research skills and academic performance.

5. Technical Limitations

- **Contextual Understanding:** While ChatGPT is capable of generating coherent responses, it may struggle with nuanced or context-specific queries. Students noted that the AI sometimes misinterprets prompts or fails to capture the complexity of certain academic topics, leading to incomplete or inaccurate answers.
- **Limitations in Problem-Solving:** Responses to coding and math-related queries were less favorable, with an average effectiveness rating of 3.2. Students reported that while ChatGPT could provide some assistance, it often lacked the depth needed for complex problem-solving tasks.

Summary of Findings

1. High Usage Rates: The research indicates that a significant majority of college students utilize ChatGPT for academic purposes, with over 80% reporting regular use. Most commonly, students engage with the tool for research, summarization, and brainstorming, demonstrating its role as a valuable resource in their study routines.

2. Perceived Effectiveness: Students rated ChatGPT positively in terms of effectiveness, particularly for research-related tasks. Average effectiveness ratings ranged from 3.5 to 4.2, reflecting the tool's ability to enhance access to information and streamline the research process. However, its effectiveness in problem-solving tasks received a lower rating, indicating limitations in this area.

3. Time Savings: Many students reported significant time savings through the use of ChatGPT, estimating an average reduction of 3–5 hours per week in their research efforts. This efficiency is particularly beneficial in high-pressure academic environments.

4. Concerns about Reliability: Despite its advantages, concerns regarding the reliability of information generated by ChatGPT were prevalent. A notable portion of students expressed the need to double-check facts, highlighting uncertainty about the accuracy of AI-generated content.

5. Over-Reliance and Academic Integrity: The study found that approximately 43.7% of respondents were worried about becoming overly dependent on ChatGPT, which could hinder the development of critical research skills. Additionally, concerns about plagiarism were significant, with many students acknowledging the risk of incorporating AI-generated text into their work without proper citation.

6. Impact on Critical Thinking: The reliance on ChatGPT was linked to potential decreases in critical thinking and deep engagement with academic material. Students indicated challenges in evaluating AI-generated content critically, which could impact their overall research capabilities.

7. Variability across Disciplines: Differences in usage patterns were observed among various academic disciplines, with humanities and social sciences students utilizing ChatGPT more frequently than those in

STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields. This variation suggests that the integration of AI tools may need to be tailored to specific disciplines to maximize effectiveness.

Hypotheses can be tested as:

- **H₀:** The observed distribution of ChatGPT usage matches the expected distribution (no significant difference).
- **H₁:** The observed distribution of ChatGPT usage does not match the expected distribution (significant difference).

The p-value is less than 0.05, you will reject the null hypothesis (H₀) and accept the alternative hypothesis (H₁), concluding that there is a significant difference in how respondents use ChatGPT for various purposes. If the p-value is greater than 0.05, you will fail to reject the null hypothesis, meaning there is no significant difference in the usage patterns.

Conclusion:

This study has explored the effects of ChatGPT on college students' research habits, revealing both the advantages and challenges of integrating AI tools into academic settings. The findings indicate that a significant number of students actively use ChatGPT, primarily for research and information-gathering tasks, and perceive it as an effective resource that enhances their learning experience.

However, alongside these benefits, the study highlighted critical concerns regarding the reliability of AI-generated information, the potential for over-reliance on technology, and issues related to academic integrity. Many students expressed uncertainty about the accuracy of the content generated by ChatGPT and acknowledged the risk of plagiarism, which underscores the need for education on responsible AI usage.

Moreover, the reliance on ChatGPT may diminish students' critical thinking skills and their ability to engage deeply with academic material. This calls for a balanced approach to integrating AI tools in education—one that promotes both the efficient use of technology and the development of essential research skills.

In conclusion, as AI technologies like ChatGPT continue to evolve and permeate educational environments, it is crucial for institutions to provide guidance and resources that foster responsible use. Future research will play a key role in understanding the long-term impacts of AI on student learning and will help inform strategies to optimize the benefits of these powerful tools while addressing their challenges. By doing so, educators can better equip students to navigate the complexities of the digital age and enhance their academic success.

Recommendations:

To maximize the benefits of ChatGPT, educational institutions should provide training on its ethical use, encourage critical thinking, and promote the integration of AI tools with traditional research methods.

Future Research Directions:

As AI technologies continue to shape the educational landscape, these future research directions will be vital for understanding their implications for student learning and academic integrity. By addressing the challenges and opportunities presented by AI tools, educators and researchers can develop strategies that maximize the benefits of these technologies while minimizing potential drawbacks.

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