Living in Philadelphia, a well-populated, urban area of extremes, I am struck by the difference in information access, needs, and behaviors between the most financially wealthy and the city’s economically disadvantaged (more commonly referred to as the “poor,” a term that is most appropriate and extremely inaccurate simultaneously). I began this research with the assumption that to be financially destitute inherently corresponded to information poverty.

These articles and books provided me with a greater understanding of how the low-income group seek information and why. I began to see similarities across the group, regardless of race, gender, or education. Notably, the poorer of us watch more television and prefer newspapers to books. The Internet is not only economically distant for them, but unused as a seeking behavior as well; they would rather confer, with family and friends than Google. They turn to people that are most like them – socially, culturally, and economically – because there is honesty in a true reflection.

Most of the included research is from the late 1990s until 2005 (with exceptions before and after these dates). The “digital divide” of the past decade has largely drawn the conversation about information poverty and economic differentiation into a more politically and socially charged arena where people’s thoughts and behaviors are heavily outweighed by business agendas. If one is not careful in reading thoroughly and between the lines of this latest research, it can almost seem as if the economically disadvantaged have gotten completely locked out of the information world.

A brief article from a recent Philadelphia Weekly counters this. Daniel Denver writes that, while many newspapers in this country are financially suffering as they lose readers to the Internet, Spanish-language newspapers (and other Spanish-language media) are doing just fine. How? Because “Latinos – along-side poor folks and people of color as whole – are victims of the ‘digital divide’” and therefore rely on the newspaper which is written in a language they understand and provides information about their culture and their needs (7). They are also tuning in to Spanish television and radio broadcasts.

They seek information that is relevant and immediate to their needs. They look for avenues of access that encourage and support them economically, socially, and culturally. So, no; the economically disadvantaged are not poor, in at least one regard.


From abstract: “This article describes the information use environment (IUE) of African American gatekeepers in Harambee, an inner-city neighborhood in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The most prevalent information needs related to race relations, crime and family...Interpersonal sources were preferred over all other sources because of concerns about trustworthiness and credibility of information.”

Through lengthy one on one interviews with this poverty-stricken neighborhood’s gatekeepers, Agada revealed a high level of unawareness and perceived lack of access to information sources with many respondents noting a feeling of the “insider/outsider” experience. Because of this, their information seeking behaviors tend to happen within their own community and with personal contacts deemed trustworthy and credible. This group was also more concerned with resolving immediate problems “rather than information and activities that would transform their socioeconomic conditions (79).” Agada concludes that information service providers will have to evaluate their position as perceived “outsiders” in the low-income population in order to make changes and better assist this community.

Database: Wiley Interscience (Drexel)
Method of Searching: citation
Search Strategy: from bibliography in Amanda Spink’s “Information and poverty: Information-seeking channels used by African American low-income households” (2001)


From abstract: “This article presents findings from an empirical study of community information exchange and computer access and use among low-income, predominately African-American residents in one locale...Results indicate that, while computer use is minimal, many low-income community members are poised to participate in the local development of networked information services.”

The study was conducted in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois through a number of methods including household interviews, surveys, and focus groups. Residents who participated frequently cited “informal, word-of-mouth contacts with people in one’s intimate social circle” as their means of accessing information with very little to no use of a computer (373). However, participants were eager to learn computer skills, with a desire for a home computer, in order to more easily access information (and act as informers) about their local community. The research concludes with the authors suggestions for public library’s outreach to the low-income population according to the study’s learned information needs and behaviors.

Database: Library Literature and Information Science (Drexel)
Method of Searching: controlled vocabulary
Search Strategy: (services to low income users and the working poor) and (information needs)


From abstract: “The purpose of this study was to explore the roles mass media plays in the social and information world of the poor.” Women employed by the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) “were found to be high consumers of print, concerned about activities and events beyond their social world, and of relatively high educational background.” This finding is generally inconsistent with previous studies of the information seeking behaviors of low-income groups and Chatman explains this difference as “partially attributed to level of education.”
Through a review of the literature, Chatman notes that previous research has found the economically disadvantaged to prefer television as their primary source of information. This study was performed to determine the role of mass media within a group of 50 low-income, female heads of households employed by CETA. The majority reported print media (from newspapers and then books) as the most useful source of information followed by radio. Television as a source was almost divided evenly in the group between useful and not very useful. Chatman notes that these findings may be credited to the women being involved in a selective employment program so that the respondents are “working poor” and that “although they are poor, they are not uneducated (109).” With this in mind, it is possible to rethink the low-income group’s behaviors in terms of education rather than economics.

Database: Library Literature and Information Science (Dialog)
Method of Searching: keyword
Search Strategy: s (poor or poverty) and information()need?


From abstract: “The purpose of this study was to test diffusion theory in a study of the awareness, use, and diffusion of an innovation in a job environment of the working poor.” Job information seeking behaviors of women employed by the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) program revealed that “some aspects of models of diffusion were more prominent than others” and “linkages could be made between models to give a clearer picture of the diffusion of job information.”

The theory explains how information is spread through a community by a person becoming aware of an innovation (in this case, job information) and communicating that awareness with others. Four attributes (relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trial-ability, and observe-ability) determine the importance of an innovation and therefore if it will be diffused within a community. Chatman found all but the latter were applicable to the information seeking behaviors of this economically disadvantaged group.

“The data support evidence of diffusion of information within a low-income population [and] job information was found to be most valuable at the beginning of the diffusion process. The respondent’s awareness of job information occurred primarily through interpersonal communication channels which originated outside the world of work (384).”

Database: Drexel University’s Hagerty library (physical)
Method of Searching: citation
Search Strategy: from bibliography in Donald Case’s Looking for information (2007) as print source


Chatman examines the existence of opinion leaders in low-income communities and their role “as disseminators of information (341).” Opinion leaders are defined by certain characteristics that set them apart from others in their socioeconomic group, including their use of the public library for information gathering. Using the previous research of others, Chatman devised surveyed opinion leaders within a group of 50 low-income, female heads of households employed by the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA).

Her findings indicate that there are opinion leaders in low-income environments who provide information obtained from mass media, print media, as well as by seeking information from people with specialized training and experience who reside outside the opinion leader’s socioeconomic community. She discusses the information needs of the low-income, particularly in regard to “better self-awareness” and “how to get and hold a job (348).” However, Chatman’s study also shows a reluctance on the part of opinion leaders in this specific environment to share job-related information because the “chances for permanent employment (are) too valuable to be shared randomly (350).” The research concludes that opinion leaders are valuable for
information distribution in low-income communities and that public libraries can do more to support this socioeconomic group’s information needs.


From abstract: “This research reports a study in which gratification theory was applied to an information-seeking behavior of a lower-class population. (and) although members expressed a number of areas in which they needed information, they were not active seekers of information outside of their most familiar social milieu.”

The conceptual framework for this study and the analysis of its results lies within “six theoretical propositions about poor people, their view of social reality, and ways in which they satisfy their intellectual, social, and physical needs (438).” Chatman investigates, through observation and interviews, predominately black, female janitors at a major university as a means of exploring these propositions. Her findings substantiate other studies of low-income populations in their information-seeking behaviors. Namely, that this group focuses on current issues with “an orientation toward immediate gratification (447).”


From abstract: “The purpose of this chapter is to address the issues of information seeking behavior within a context of an information poor life style...This is a world in which there is a parsimony of helpful interpersonal channels [however] both formal and personal sources are devoid of everyday practical information of the kind needed by poor people...In addressing reasons to explain this phenomenon, knowledge gap theory is examined.”

An information poor life style can derive from a series of factors including lack of timeliness in the source(s), inefficiency as a response to needs, and a lack of trustworthiness and credibility that leads to skepticism. Mass media, primarily television, “is mainly viewed as a source of escape and diversion (137).” In terms of interpersonal sources, “the poor live in an environment in which they are alienated from each other and have few, if any, social supports (139).” Because of skepticism and general mistrust of sources outside their own small community, the economically disadvantaged are unable to obtain second-level knowledge resources (“knowledge that originates outside our lived experiences”) (143).


From abstract: “Drawing upon a series of studies that examines the information world of poor people, the author discovers four critical concepts that serve as the basis for defining an impoverished life world. These concepts are risk-taking, secrecy, deception, and situational relevance...the author develops a conceptual framework that links the world of the information poor – the outsiders – with a world of insiders.”
Chatman defines the worlds of insiders and outsiders through her four concepts and applies this to the fundamental theory of information poverty through six propositions that determine why people do or do not fulfill their information needs. She calls for more research in order to understand the needs of the information poor from their perspective. For me, this article served as an introduction to the theory of information poverty and Chatman’s work in general. I continued to use its references and terminology throughout my research.

Database: ERIC (Dialog)
Method of Searching: controlled vocabulary
Search Strategy: e (information seeking)

s information()seeking or search()strategies or access()to()information or information()need? or user()need? and poor


From abstract: “This exploratory study examines health information-seeking practices among Latin American newcomers to a small city in the United States...Information seeking is often assisted by both social networks and key institutions, yet the quality of information transmitted through social networks is apt to be uneven...The local information environment has evolved significantly in response to growing demand for Spanish-language and low-income services.”

Though this study focuses on a particular immigrant racial group, their citizenship status, non-English, and weak social ties enforce a continuous cycle of low-income jobs for these people. Courtright often employs the term “vulnerable” to encompass all of these characteristics. While health information was chosen as a means of “useful situational focus,” the findings can likely be applied to other information seeking behaviors of this group and the economically disadvantaged in general (4). Findings show a preference for using informal face-to-face networking as a primary source, but with the participants recognition that these sources (family and friends) can not always provide enough quality information. This social network was used, however, as a means to locate more formal, but still face-to-face, ties such as a Spanish-speaking person at the local health clinic or city hall. Because of language barriers and trust issues, in-person practices were more preferred with some use of print and media information and little to no use of the Internet.

Database: Information Research (an international electronic journal) http://informationr.net/ir/
Method of Searching: citation
Search Strategy: from bibliography in Donald Case’s Looking for information (2007) as print source


From abstract: “This article reviews research that has been done on the information needs and information-seeking behavior of indigenous people in developing countries...Findings reveal that, while a weak economy has a profound effect on the availability and accessibility of resources, the information and communication divide is not defined as much by the economic status of a geographic location as it is by an individual user’s educational background.”

Dutta looked at peer-reviewed articles published within the last twenty years to review the literature and propose general information seeking behaviors and possible reasons behind these behaviors. This is an excellent summation of the research done on the economically disadvantaged of rural and urban residents as well as the level of an information-seeker’s education, age, and physical accessibility to technology. She notes that the information needs of the world’s poverty groups are very basic and immediate and informal social networking is the most preferred method of meeting these needs. She concludes that a person’s education highly
influences how he seeks information and what sources he will use (effectively beginning by looking outside his small, weak personal network); therefore she stresses that a nation’s resources should focus on education needs rather than technology accessibility.

Database: ScienceDirect (Drexel)
Method of Searching: keyword
Search Strategy: (information seeking behavior) and poverty and Internet


From abstract: “Immigrants are generally perceived to be information poor, meaning they face major challenges with finding and using greatly needed everyday information... We explored the everyday information behaviour and information grounds of migrant Hispanic farm workers... [and] findings suggest that personal networks having various levels of credibility were used more readily than any other type of information source.”

Yakima Valley in Washington is “an economically distressed area with low wages, and high unemployment and poverty levels.” By studying the information seeking habits and social network environments, Fisher, et al. found a high preference for interpersonal sources. The farm workers shied away from more formal sources such as local services and the library due to language difficulties and cultural differences. School, church, and the workplace were cited as the most frequent information grounds for developing trustworthy social networks.

Database: Information Research (an international electronic journal) http://informationr.net/ir/
Method of Searching: browsing
Search Strategy: browsing online journal by subject; located journal through other citations


From abstract: “This article examines the attitudes as well as the media use of three groups: a general population sample, a sample of white low-income adults, and a sample of Negro low-income adults, all drawn from Lansing, Michigan. As expected, both attitudes and behavior show strong differences by income, but little difference by race.”

Most notable, television was more often reported as an information source among both low-income groups than in the general population. While all three groups showed use of the television in their media environment, the low-income groups had less other available media and reported many more hours of television watching than the general sample. Additionally, the low-income groups did not use newspaper or radio as often as the general population for information seeking. The authors conclude that “a thorough study of the interpersonal communication behavior of the poor” is necessary for better understanding of this user group (235).

While this article focuses on the types of media used to seek information rather than the seeking behavior itself, this early study is heavily cited in low-income information behavior research to follow. This initial study and speculation proves vital to the continued research of this often neglected group.

Database: Google Scholar
Method of Searching: keyword
Search Strategy: “urban poor” and “information behavior”

From abstract: “This paper examines the issues of how the lack of access to information technology does not affect how the homeless access basic level information. The study investigates the information needs of the homeless, information sources, and information-seeking behaviors within the analytical constructs of information outsiders and insiders and the theory of information poverty posed by Chatman.”

Hersberger has done extensive research and writing on the information seeking behaviors of the homeless and in this particular study she discovers that the digital divide (lack of access to the Internet) does not affect the basic information needs of homeless families. Her findings suggest the basic needs of homeless families to be: finding permanent housing, child care issues, finding a job, financial matters, and personal issues relating to substance abuse and domestic violence. “The mode of information seeking reported as the most valuable was face-to-face contact” and participants cited information overload rather than the expected information poverty (243).


From abstract: HomeNetToo, a project funded by the National Science Foundation, is “designed to understand the antecedents and consequences of home Internet use among low-income families....Findings indicate that Web activities are more popular than e-mail, and that race, age, and education influence the frequency of use.”

Computers and the Internet were provided to 90 low-income (less than $15,000 per year) families and their home Internet use of the adults in the families was recorded for six months. The findings, derived from these records, show that the Internet was not frequently used, but when accessed, information on hobbies and interests was the highest ranking activity followed by e-mail. The African Americans as well as older participants in the study overall used the Internet less than European Americans and younger participants, showing race and age variables. Additionally, the more education a participant had obtained, the more frequently that participant used the Internet.

While this study does not show low-income behaviors in comparison to other user groups, it does reflect differing behaviors among types of low-income groups: race, age, and education. Understanding this informs the complexity of this user group and suggests, like other studies focused on the digital divide, that merely providing technological access to the economically disadvantaged is not enough to bridge the technical gap. These other factors must be considered.


From abstract: “Electronic government (e-government) is the provision of government information and services through the Internet to citizens and businesses and among government agencies...However, if
e-government usage is limited in certain segments of society, it is not achieving its egalitarian potential...Two phenomena of information behavior, information poverty and normative behavior, may help explain why certain groups do not use e-government information.”

Jaeger and Thompson’s article provides a distinct separation from most analysis of the online information seeking behavior of low-income groups. They note that the “digital divide” argument often focuses only on access to information and does not address the social behaviors of information seekers. This review of the literature discusses who is not using e-government (“the poor, the elderly, people with limited language skills, and people with limited education” as well as racial and geographical groups) and why – through analysis and recommendations based on the two theories (98). Topics such as information burden, small world concepts, trustworthiness, and self-protection must be understood by e-government designers if this new way of accessing government service and policy is to be utilized by the economically disadvantaged.

Database: Library and Information Science Research (Drexel)
Method of Searching: keyword
Search Strategy: (low income) and (information seeking) and Internet


From abstract: “It is an almost universal finding in studies investigating human information behavior that people choose other people as their preferred source of information...An explanation [for this] is that they are easier to approach than more formal sources and therefore are a least effort option...This paper reports findings [on the] information seeking behaviour of a random sample of residents of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Using the theory of social capital as a conceptual framework...[this study found] that respondents chose people who had better resources than they had and were not well known by them.”

The theory of social capital explores the relationships between individuals in terms of strong and weak ties. People tend to form strong ties with other individuals of similar backgrounds. Mongolia is a low-income economy but with a high literacy rate (compared to other low-income economies). Exploring the social networks of the Mongolian people, Johnson found that they will not always follow the principle of least effort, as suggested by other studies. Rather, “people will use their weak ties to access people with better resources than theirs” and therefore gain access to information outside their strong tie social network.

Database: Information Research (an international electronic journal) http://informationr.net/ir/
Method of Searching: browsing
Search Strategy: browsing online journal by subject; located journal through other citations


From abstract: “This study presents cases of four Latino middle school students from three families who gained home Internet access for the first time in connection with an educational technology project set in a public school in Detroit, Michigan. We asked how the students and their families perceived and used the Internet as a tool for education, recreation, and socializing.”

This article became important as I began to learn more about the digital divide and the age discrepancy in Internet users. I wanted a better understanding of how low-income students were affected by the technological gap and how the Internet and other digital sources would affect their information seeking behaviors. Kupperman and Fishman found that the children were really the only family members to show interest (as well as actually use) the home Internet access provided by NetTV. Additionally, the uses of the computer were “ordinary, low-tech activities” and social and academic uses were “virtually absent (208).” In concluding, they also question the use of the Internet by minority cultures as much of the information and
user interface is primarily developed by and for white, well-educated, middle to upper class European-Americans and suggest further investigation.

Database: ProQuest (Drexel)
Method of Searching: keyword
Search Strategy: students and classroom and Internet or (digital divide)


From abstract: “This study investigates the information needs and information-seeking behavior of rural women residing in three non-urban villages in Botswana...[Information seeking topics] included health, agriculture, employment, family violence, and basic needs for the family...The sources of information used included village nurses, community welfare officers, traditional doctors, other women in the villages, village chiefs, and agricultural demonstrators.”

The women were often caring for ill family members and community members with AIDS, a disease that has ravished the country. This is why health was a common information need. The women relied on their own prior experience and direct personal contact with trusted medical practitioners, preferring local and previously contacted doctors and nurses, over print or government sources. Mooko notes “that there is a commonality in the information needs of low-income groups regardless of their location” and that these needs a basic and immediate (125).

Database: ISI Web of Knowledge (Drexel)
Method of Searching: keyword
Search Strategy: poverty and (information seeking behavior)


From abstract: “This article results from a qualitative case study focusing on the information seeking practices of unemployed people...The study makes use of the categories of autonomous motivation, controlled motivation and amotivation suggested by self-determination theory...(These categories) provide a fruitful framework for the elaboration of the drivers of information seeking about jobs.”

Savolainen provides a brief review of the unemployed information seeking behavior literature and uses previous theories and findings in comparison to her own study. She expounds on Deci’s self-determination theory and how it can be used to classify the motivations for information seeking behaviors related to job searching. She concludes that the level of motivation reflects in the level of seeking and what types of information is sought and compares the three motivation categories’ typical behaviors.

Database: Social SciSearch (Dialog)
Method of Searching: citation
Search Strategy: e cr=Hersberger J, 2001


From abstract: “This study investigated the information environment, including the information seeking and information needs, of low-income largely African American households...Dallas, Texas...Residents’ information seeking behavior focused on their family and neighbors, with a lower use of external channels, except for health and employment information issues.”
Spink and Cole specify five focal points for information seeking behaviors, stressing the importance of the “channel” and its formal verses informal possibilities, particularly for low-income people. Their overall research corroborated many other low-income information seeking patterns in that informal, local, and personal channels were preferred over more formal, “outsider” channels. The less important deemed the information being sought, the more likely the residents would refer to a formal channel. They conclude that a thorough understanding of these patterns can assist in the development and outreach of government policy for the economically disadvantaged.

Database: Library Literature and Information Science (Dialog)
Method of Searching: keyword
Search Strategy: s (poor or poverty) and information()need?

**Background Materials**


From Abstract: “Information is a crucial tool in the fight against poverty for agricultural and rural communities to achieve food security...This paper presents the results of the pilot fishnet initiative (FNI) of the Ilaje local government area of Ondo State [Nigeria]...The results show high coverage and effectiveness.”

Fishermen often resort to this work after all other job sources have been exhausted; therefore, they are often ill equipped and unknowledgeable about the environment and fish market production. After a study of the information needs of these people, information packages were developed and handed out as a resource through monthly meetings at local cooperatives. Feedback on the package’s usefulness was determined by “assessing the proportion of fisherfolk adopting the new practices (231).” In this manner, access to information through a group (the cooperative) actually changed the information behaviors of the individual, who now view the cooperative as a valuable information channel.

The paper describing this initiative is useful and informative for the study of information seeking behaviors of the economically disadvantaged, however it is very short and provides more of a summation.

Database: Library Literature and Information Science (Dialog)
Method of Searching: keyword
Search Strategy: s (poor or poverty) and information()need?


From Abstract: “In 1999 the King County Library System studied the information needs of low-income residents – not necessarily library users – and the sources they turned to for information...Respondents identified barriers they faced when trying to use the library, services the library system offers that are especially helpful, and areas in which the library system needs to improve in order to better serve low-income residents.”

A research project was undertaken in an area near Seattle, Washington through a variety of data gathering techniques with low-income residents, service providers to those residents, and AmeriCorps volunteers who assisted these residents. The information seeking behavior findings were very similar to more in-depth, scholarly studies with the four main information needs as: career and job assistance and advancement, translated and culturally appropriate everyday life information materials, and Internet use training. Conclusions and recommendations from the narrow study focus on improvements in library services to the low-income patrons based on current library use, eliminating perceived barriers to library use by the poorer residents, and participant suggestions for necessary library programming and services.
This article is considered Background Material for research in the information seeking behaviors of the economically disadvantaged because, while very relevant and useful for libraries hoping to assist its low-income patrons, it focuses primarily on the services aspect of information needs.

Database: Library Literature and Information Science (Drexel)
Method of Searching: controlled vocabulary
Search Strategy: (services to low income users and the working poor) and (information needs)


“This article deals mostly with theoretical issues relating to information poverty and the formulation of an ethical framework that can be used in the findings of solutions to information and poverty (63).” Social justice is used as this framework. An overview of the premise information poverty, largely through Chatman’s work, is discussed and leads the authors to four categories of social justice (commutative, distributive, contributive, and retributive) that can help eliminate information poverty and the correlating digital divide. As a paper focused on theory and principles, a detailed investigation of the information poor user behaviors is not well reflected.

Database: Alta Vista
Method of Searching: keyword
Search Strategy: (low income) and (information seeking behavior)


This text was recommended early in the project assignment and excerpt readings for multiple classes were required. I used Case’s work to determine my user group and the general availability of scholarly work on that group’s information seeking behavior. His extensive bibliography led to articles that would not only be highly relevant to my own bibliography, but also to authors whose research focused on my user group and related groups (such as minority races, immigrants, the elderly, and developing countries). This is a must-read for any research inquiries into information science and user behavior.

Database: Mercer County Library (physical)
Method of Searching: author
Search Strategy: using provided bibliography for the text, I located it at my local library system through their online catalog


The text provides an overview of the literature, broken down by the Areas of Information Need (such as Health, Housing, or Employment). It includes an extensive bibliography of relative importance for any research into “information needs, communication patterns, and information seeking behavior of the disadvantaged American.” It serves as an excellent starting point in discovering the complex vocabulary and opinion surrounding “the disadvantaged.”

Database: Drexel University’s Hagerty library (physical)
Method of Searching: citation
Search Strategy: from bibliography in Donald Case’s Looking for information (2007) as well as continuously cited in other literature

“Equitable access to information is one of the most vital principles in the emerging global information economy, and there is perhaps no region of the world that epitomizes the conflict between the information have and have-nots than Sub-Sahara Africa (SSA) (267).” From this point of view, the authors discuss ways to evaluate user needs in this region as well as stressing the need for information professionals to work together in order to bridge the divide and eliminate information poverty in developing areas such as SSA.

This article focuses more on user needs than user behavior, however it is an excellent review of current literature on the subject and does consider user practices when formulating ways to provide technological access in spite of geographic and social barriers.

Database: Library Literature and Information Science (Dialog)
Method of Searching: keyword
Search Strategy: s (poor or poverty) and information()need?


As a guest columnist for this issue of the journal, Hersberger encourages librarians to set aside attitudes and judgments about the homeless and focus on creative outreach and meeting service needs. From her research with this diverse group, she expresses concern about the misconceptions and unequal treatment libraries tend to uphold. It serves as a quick introduction to this economically disadvantaged population and their information seeking needs and behaviors, but is merely an opinion paper from a well-respected research scholar in the field.

Database: Google Scholar
Method of Searching: author
Search Strategy: Hersberger, J


This compiled text “examines the injustice of ‘Information Poverty’ as manifested in the inner city, in cutbacks in government published information, in control of information for children and young adults, and in the lack of access to modern technologies in the third world.”

The articles do not directly discuss information seeking behaviors, but rather provide a concise background to the argument of information poverty, investigating the people and places that are considered information poor as well as government policy enacted to assist these groups. I elect to include this as a thorough review of opinion and analysis of the general topic; that is, the information needs of the economically disadvantaged.

Database: Drexel University’s Hagerty library (physical)
Method of Searching: browsing
Search Strategy: physical browsing of library’s shelves; area of searching determined by quick review of online catalog, search terms: poor and library science


From abstract: “An approach to understanding one phenomenon is to explore the antithesis of the phenomenon...and one approach that has been taken in studying information poverty centres on perceived cultural and behavioural issues within the social context. This social lens focuses on how the information poor have difficulty assessing their own information needs or knowing when those needs are fully met.”

This article serves as a highly detailed review of the literature on information poverty, exploring its
Development, definitions, user abilities and skills and information channels among other related topics. It is extremely valuable as a concise overview.

Database: ISI Web of Knowledge (Drexel)
Method of Searching: keyword
Search Strategy: poverty and (information seeking behavior)


“Information is power. When poverty limits access to information, the poor stand powerless. Libraries promise the equality of service to all, but the fact is that they often fall short of that goal. Why is that so – and how can it be changed?”

While this book focuses mainly on library services and programs that have successfully worked “to bring those barriers down,” this is an important beginning tool for the study of the economically disadvantaged as information seekers and library patrons. Particularly, the forward discusses the American Library Association’s “Policy on Library Services to Poor People” and its lengthy timeline of politics.

Database: Drexel University’s Hagerty library (physical)
Method of Searching: browsing
Search Strategy: physical browsing of library’s shelves; area of searching determined by quick review of online catalog, search terms: poor and library science


From abstract: “This paper reviews related research since the early 1990s on the information and digital divides...Ethical principles [and] political standpoints...[have] produced divergent, and sometimes contradictory, research findings and policy recommendations.”

“There exist, for example, different interpretations of the nature of the divide (economical, political, or cultural), different explanations of the causes of the divide and different prescriptions of policy solutions to the divide...These variations seem to be intrinsically connected to the theoretical perspectives that researchers adopt as their guiding lights for interpretation (231).” As a result of this, the “information-impoverished worlds tend to be inhabited by those who are disadvantaged in all these aspects and who, paradoxically, are in great need of information to improve their conditions (235).” Furthermore, the more recent dialog about the growing digital divide is often dominated by political dogma which directly shapes the policy and actions in eliminating the divide to the exclusion of other principle factors.

This paper serves as an excellent study of the intentions and opinions behind the various research related to information poverty and the digital divide. It does not discuss information-seeking behavior, but rather how the examiner of these behaviors can influence the explanations and therefore the research as a whole. In my own review of the research, particularly in studies on the digital divide, I often found this to be true and feel that Yu’s review of the literature is necessary for any investigation into the economically disadvantaged as an information user group.

Database: HighWire Press online (Stanford University)
Method of Searching: keyword
Search Strategy: (low income) and (information seeking)