Information seeking behaviour of different types of users in selected libraries of Delhi

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Abstract

Libraries and information systems are designed and built with the primary objective of meeting the information needs of a group of people who constitute their clientele. In the past, information systems and services were developed based more on 'literary warrant' rather than 'users warrant'. In fact, the key to the aims, directions and contents of any and all information activities is the users.

Keywords: Information seeking, different types of users, Delhi

1. INTRODUCTION

According to P.L. Leggate observation on information users are "Unlike retrieval systems and computer systems, users are human and therefore difficult to classify. Unfortunately, one says almost anything and it will be true of some users. Any generalization which can be made will be true of at least some users". Identifying definite user groups to which information is to be provided involves number of complex, costly and demanding processes. However the basic questions and problems are not how effective or efficient these processes are, but: What an information system or information unit or library can do to assist an information user in identifying, clarifying or solving a problem? What such a system or unit can do to raise the probability that a user will find relevant and useful information with a minimum effort?

The above said stated questions from the foundation on which to build or develop information systems or information units including library services. These questions provide a practical operational framework for viewing the objectives, products and services as well as for evaluating the success or failures of such products or services.

If this contention is accepted, it follows that the first requirement for designing an information system, service or products would be to study the users. The users should be studied not only before designing an information system or starting of an information service or product, but also, during the life cycle of the system or service. It might be emphasized here, that while study of users increases the probability of a longer life cycle of such a system, lack of a careful study may decrease it sharply.

There are various terms, which are employed to refer to those who use a library. These include terms like client, patron, Reader, user, customer, inquirer, member etc. Throughout the term user has been most preferred because it indicates use of the library and its resources. Those who do not use a library would be considered non-users. A person may be member of a given library but if he/she does not use the library, then we will consider him a non-user of the library. In the context of reference service, a person who does not use it would be considered a non-user of reference service.

Conducting of a user behaviour study is a difficult proposition because the related theories, models and methodologies have not been fully developed and perfected. However, there is a much higher probability that products and services based on user studies will be better designed than those based on intuition, anecdotal evidence or committee deliberations. It must be stressed that the basic purpose of a user study is to gather information that is useful in design and provision and/or evaluation of specific information products or services geared to meet the needs of specific users. To emphasis further, user studies are a necessity in all phases of information activities from design to evaluation, to marketing and to management. Therefore, the central question is: what useful information about users or uses should be collected? In other words, what user and use variables should be collected? The choice of such variables for study is wide. Depending on the objective, individual studies will concentrate on a limited number of specific variables. Some of the general variables possible to examine in user studies are:

➢ The factors or variables in the users of information that effect their perception of the problems;

- The specific ways they are most likely to use information and their capacity to use a given type of information;
- The stages in the information transfer process which relate to the knowledge an individual has about a specific idea or innovation;
- Environment or social characteristics; and
- Communication characteristics, etc.

2. USER AND USER STUDIES

A person who utilizes the information resources of a library, the services and products of an information system and derives benefit from them are called User. Users are also known as patrons or clientele. User is the focal point of all information activities at all levels. User is a broad concept which may include both producers as well as clients of information.

According to Whitaker defines- Users as a person who uses one or more of the services provided by a library.

According to Guinchat (1983) - User can be defines on the basis of the sets of criteria, namely Objective criteria, such as socio-professional category, specialist field, nature of the activity for which the information is sought, reason for using the information system, and Social and psychological criteria such as the user's attitudes and values with regard to information in general and in his relations with information unit in particular. The key factor is being reasons behind his particular information seeking and communication behavior and his professional and general social behaviour.

2.1 CATEGORIES

Categories of users may include a Specialist, a Student, a Housewife, an average Layman, a Businessman, a Teacher, etc. The categories of users will vary from library to library. Of course, the requirements of each category will also vary.

According to Guinchat (1983): categories users into three broad groups:-

Users not yet engaged in active life, such as Students. Users with a job and whose information needs are related to their work (management, research, development etc.) By branch of activity and/or specialist field (civil service, agriculture, industry etc.) and by level of education and responsibility (professional staff, technical works). Ordinary citizens need general information.

According to Professor J.D. Bernal (1948): His grouping is combining Engineers, Architects, Medical Practioners and Agriculturists into the category of Technologists. Also mangers (both business and industry) could be conceived as a distinct group of users of information.

According to Dr. S.R. Ranganathan has grouped users on the basis of types of services enunciated by him into: the freshman, ordinary inquirer, specialist Inquirer and general reader.

2.2 DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF USER STUDIES:

i. Studies which are conducted to find out the overall pattern of interaction of the users community with the communication system, without reference to any specific information receiving event, are categorized as *communication behavior studies.*

ii. In the second category are placed studies which are conducted to find out the use of any communication medium like primary periodical, etc. and are called *user studies*.

iii. The Third category includes studies which are conducted to find out the pattern of flow of information in the science communication system as a whole. They constitute *studies in the flow* of information.

iv. The fourth category includes studies/surveys which are conducted within the limited context of a library or an information centre, mainly to find out the extent of use of the

services and facilities offered by an agency with the ultimate objective of improving the system or services.

In certain situations the users may not be fully aware of the many advantages of a particular system or service. In such situations the system designer must guide him to the pertinent aspects providing a tailor-made service.

The present era is called the "Information era." Information has become the most important element for progress in society. To thrive in this modern era, one needs a variety of information, no matter how well versed one is in a field or profession. We can reorganize the educational system and redefine scientific research only with the help of information. Information plays a significant role in our professional and personal lives. People need information to work properly in their fields. Questions that provoked this study include:

- What constitutes a need for information?
- What people think at that particular time?
- What actions people take? and
- What problems are faced while seeking information?

Knowledge of the information needs and information-seeking behavior of users is vital for developing library collections, upgrading facilities, and improving services to effectively meet the information needs of users. A review of the related literature reveals that no comprehensive study on the information needs and information-seeking behavior of arts and humanities faculty members at the different Universities has been conducted time to time.

2.3 NEED FOR USER STUDY

Information need surveys or user studies are potentially useful in bridging the gap between the kinds of information services needed and the kind of services in existence. Any information system would definitely require identification of user requirements. However there had been certain doubts regarding the point whether information needs could really be established through user studies or survey. The need for conducting user studies is necessary requirement for the design and operation of effective and efficient information systems, services and products.

2.4 TYPES OF USER'S STUDY

User's studies and surveys that have been carried out so far are of various types:

- ✓ Behavior studies
- ✓ Use studies
- ✓ Information flow studies
- ✓ Nature of information need
  a) Current approach
  b) Every day approach
  c) Exhaustive approach
  d) Catching up or brushing up approach

2.5 TYPE OF REQUEST MADE

- ✓ Demand of specific documents.
- ✓ Demand for specific data.
- ✓ Retrospective search
- ✓ Current awareness demands
- ✓ Demand of exhaustive search
- ✓ Research oriented search

3. METHODOLOGY FOR THE STUDY

For find the effective conclusion in this study, different kinds of methods were adopted, which are follows:

- Observation Method: - In this study, observation method was used to observe the negative as well as positive activity of user and related to library collection. The basis of these aspects of library collection, study has found the required information.

- Interview Method: - Mainly, interview is process of personal interaction between two and other people. One is called researcher and second is called respondent. In this interaction, the relevant questions are asked for colleting the data. Further In this study, interview method was conducted to collect the data from the librarian, staff members to services provided by library and users.

- Literature Survey: - Literature survey was helpful for the study. Various books, Journals, internet and other relevant sources were helpful for searching.

- Sample Techniques: - Different types of charts, diagrams, and other samples were used in the study to find out the relevant result.

- Questionnaire Method: - Using observation method and going through the records of library few basic data pertaining to library under study were collected. A questionnaire method was used to get response about the both libraries services and development work. Questionnaire was prepared for the users and staff members to collect information related to library service. A sample of questionnaire pertaining to the study was distributed to the respondents to acquire information need for the study. They were requested to respond to their respective questionnaire within a stipulated time period. After collecting data, the analysis was done and final result shown in dissertation work.

4. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

As per the guidance of Supervisor data collection plan was based on the different variables of visited libraries. Libraries are classified into 10 selected libraries of Delhi:

- SHAHEED SUKHDEV COLLEGE OF BUSINESS STUDIES (SSCBS)

- CENTRAL SECRETARIAT LIBRARY (CSL)

- SHAHEED RAJGURU COLLEGE OF APPLIED SCIENCES FOR WOMEN (SRCASW)

- LAW FACULTY LIBRARY (LFL)

- INDIAN COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL RELATION (ICCR)

- INDIAN INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC ADMINSTRATION (IIPA)
- RATAN TATA LIBRARY (RTL)
- INDIAN NATIONAL SCIENCE ACEDEMY (INSA)
- CENTRAL SCIENCE LIBRARY (CSL)

5. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

As per our data collection plan the all libraries of Delhi were classified are mentioned above:

Based on the categories of the libraries were handpicked and standard questionnaires (attached in Appendix) were circulated to all of them. Feedback received in a month's time and collected feedback analyzed. In total 30 questions were asked under these Six headings for the librarians and 40 questions were asked to users (students, teachers, research scholars etc.). After conducting detail analysis of the answers received from all the 10 libraries and also randomly selected (100) Research students, scholars and teachers in field of History, Political Science, Law, Science and Technology etc. following are the highlights which is necessary to be shared.

5.1 FINDINGS

We present our findings in the context of the research questions which guided the collection and analysis of the data. The research questions were:

   1 Has the user group or the nature of use of information changed in the different user survey?

   2 How are library resources being used in teaching and research?

   3 How satisfied are users with features of different departmental libraries, and how can these features be improved?

5.2 USER GROUP AND NATURE OF USE OF DIFFERENT RESOURCES

5.2.1 User group

One hundred people responded to the user survey of the 100 respondents. Table 1 shows the profile of respondents in terms of gender, age, and area of interest.

5.2.2 Nature of use of Library resources

We explored the nature of use in terms of how people use Library documents and how they used the material in general.

One section of the questionnaire focused on how the respondent used an item in the library. The questionnaire asked how users found the item, their reason for using the item, how they used it, the parts of the item they used, whether they printed any portion of the item.

Figure 2.2 shows how respondents found the item. Almost three-quarters of the respondents found the item by using the search function; 10% percent followed a link from another site; and 9% had used the item before and bookmarked it.
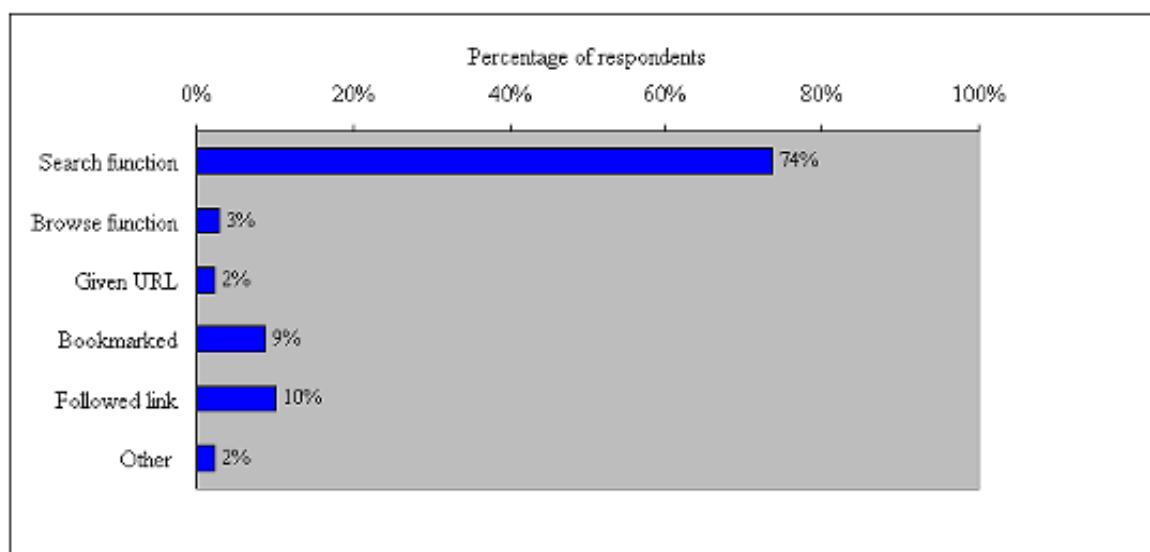

Figure 2.2: Percentage of Respondents

Approximately half (51) were using the item for personal interest/hobby or genealogy. Twenty-one percent were using the item for scholarly research, 12 for professional purposes, and 6 for teaching. Only 5 read the entire item online; 29 read parts of the item online, while 30 read some of the item online and printed some, or all, of the item.

Over half (59) of the respondents reported using the table of contents; almost one-third (31) used the introduction; and about one-quarter (24) used the index. Illustrations, graphs, tables/data, and citations were each used by slightly less than 20 of users. Less than ten percent (9) of the respondents used the conclusion of the document. It is important to note that the collection contains many pamphlets and works of fiction and therefore many of the items used may not have contained some of these features. Almost half (49) of the respondents printed some part of

the item. For many (35), this amounted to only a few pages. Well over three-quarters (82) of respondents reported that they would not need to consult either the original paper or the microfiche format of the item just used. For teachers and researchers at institutions with small libraries provides the means to do research or offer courses which require materials. For example, one respondent stated, "I am at a university with a limited budget for microfilm acquisition, never mind the original documents. I might not be able to do specialist research from this university, were it not for the version of early resources online from the WWW database." A teacher commented that " it will provide me with an additional place to search for subject content for my courses—I teach at small community college so the importance of resources such as yours which supplement our relatively small library are invaluable to ourselves and to our students--and we are grateful for them.

6. SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

After completing this study of *Information seeking behaviour of different types of users in selected libraries of Delhi* few points should be given as a suggestion point for all those libraries who are going for user studies and they have strong desire to make the study drive successful in perspective of people, budget, service and schedule adherence.

1. While doing library annual budget planning it should include the following

   a. To conduct a user study requires a significant amount of time and effort. The understanding of user behaviors can be gained through a particular user study must be valuable enough, in terms of improving the practice of librarianship, to make the effort worthwhile.
   b. Library Maintenance cost for doing annual maintenance of hardware as well as software.
   c. Training cost on software should be added as a separate head in the annual budget plan.
   d. There should be provision in the budget for electronic consumable as well as small hardware items.
   e. Separate budget for web hosting web space booking for organization website.

2. A rationale for evidence-based librarianship, based on studies of user behaviors and the information needs that motivate those behaviors, will be presented. This rationale will be illustrated with several example studies, each of which provided empirical evidence that can be directly applied to the improvement of library practices (such as the development and marketing of reference services, the design of training programs for library and database users, and the design of online library systems.

3. Skill matrix should be prepared in parallel for identifying the people who should be trained on the library software.

4. Committee or the task force should also monitor the training program in order to ensure that they start and finish in a given time line.

5. Management should also plan for alternate services of libraries which are going to be affected by the study drive so that the user should get uninterrupted services of library.

6. Management should also start some reward scheme to motivate library staff in order to use the computerized infrastructure.

7. Management should create awareness about the importance of library user studies and services amongst all the staff and fulfill all the requirements of the users.

8. The importance of considering the context in which people seek information from libraries will be discussed, as well as the importance of considering the specific characteristics of the library's patrons.

9. Library management should also understand that visibility of organization on internet is part of library services.

10. Separate training plan should be there for newly joined employee by identifying some of the people from the library staff only as trainer and providing him the incentive for training newly joined staff so that there should be symbiotic relationship where everybody is benefited.

11. Last it is the responsibility of the management to make the library user studies drive as a successful activity and they should take the complete ownership if they want to enjoy the benefit

of library resources, half hearted effort will never bring in the desired result.

7. CONCLUSION:

There are several kinds of conclusion to be drawn from this:- first, it is clear that in the early part of the period, the studies were essentially system studies, rather than person-centred studies. Not only that; they lacked any common theoretical underpinning and were predominantly descriptive. They used different methods, different scales for describing behaviour and relatively crude forms of statistical analysis. Consequently, very little of lasting interest can be found in them. This is not to say that descriptive, system studies are necessarily useless - several ideas for possible studies come to mind, which would compare the situations then and now:

1. Given the extent to which the university library studies found that the public library was a source of supply when materials were not available in the university library, what has been the effect on undergraduates of the past fifteen years of reduced public spending on both university and public library systems?

2. In the same context, how has undergraduate book-buying changed over the same period, and what strategies are teachers using to help students overcome the problems of supply?

3. So far as university researchers in all fields are considered, what means have they found to gain access to the literature, when so many journals have been cancelled, and what role is electronic communication with fellow researchers playing?

4. What would a study of the major public reference libraries now reveal, compared with the other studies?

For decades, academic researchers in library science have used the experiences of librarians to identify research questions of interest. Once such questions were identified, the researchers took it upon themselves to define and carry out studies that addressed those questions. However, progress in the field is limited because the number of researchers is very small. The practice of librarianship can advance much more rapidly if librarians also view themselves as partners in the

enterprise of librarianship. Some studies that conduct will be small in scope and will pertain only to one service within library. Others may be larger in scope, or they may have a broader impact on librarianship generally. In this way, library services can be improved for all our library patrons

Although a number of studies have been conducted in the past to assess the information needs of Scientists, Engineers and technologists, the information needs proved to be extremely complex and varied. As result, most of these studies proved to be inadequate to the task of completely revealing the precise nature and needs of information users. These investigations have, at best, provided only an a priori approach to the problem and much is needed to be done in this direction.

The importance of including individual variables in studies of information gathering and Information seeking behaviors has been stressed by some experts. Some of the individual variables cited include: (i) age, (ii) experience in research in a particular job; (iii) background qualification; (iv)whether solitary or team worker; (v) persistence and thoroughness and (vi) motivation, etc.

An information science firmly founded upon an understanding of information users in the context of their work is also likely to be of more use to the information practitioner by pointing the way to practical innovations in information services and to potentially beneficial associations with other communication/information-related systems. It does little injustice to the historic record to suggest that information service has developed more by copying previously-existing examples than by genuine analysis of the needs of potential users.

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