

Information Seeking Behaviour (ISB) : Tool for Collection Development and Management

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Abstract

User studies are essential and conducted to improve the need based collection in libraries. ICT applications changed the practices in libraries and the need of information seeking behaviour studies are necessary in libraries. In digital era and information era users are searching for their information from the libraries for various purposes. There is a need felt to analyse the problems faced by the users in getting their desired information from libraries and based on ISB the strategies for collection development could be formulated by librarians. This paper has made an effort to assess need and benefits of ISB in libraries.

Key words: user survey, user needs, information needs, information seeking, information seeking behaviour, library resources

1.1 Introduction

Information is essential component in academics, research, education, teaching etc as well as every sector of application of knowledge. The present era is information era and information is required for progress and development of the information society. Every human being need information for different purpose and try to find it from different sources in which information is available either published or informal ways. Libraries no doubt treasure of information and knowledge centres' and hold variety of information required by their users. The librarian is responsible for the collection development in the library and has to take in to account the users demands, expectations and needs.

The user needs are difficult to predict and hence to understand user needs librarians were conducting user surveys. Many user studies in different fields were conducted and analysed to find the needs of the users. ICT applications are more powerful and applied in libraries extensively. This changed the face of the libraries and user's reading habits and methods of information gathering. There is a demand for conducting a study based on various aspects related to information, its need, when users need information, what efforts they make to get the proper information, are users information literate to find the sources, what problems they faced while getting information, etc. ISB helps in analysing these factors and streamline the processes in libraries.

1.2 What is Information

Information plays a significant role in professional and personal lives of society. Case (2002) stated that information can be any difference one can perceive in environment or within every one. Information helps in generating knowledge and very essential element in human life.

1.3 Why information required?

An information need is a recognition that knowledge is inadequate to satisfy a goal selected. information seeking is conscious effort to acquire information in response to a need or to fill gap in knowledge (Case 2002).

1.4 What is information behaviour

It encompasses information seeking as well as the totality of other unintentional or passive behaviours, as well as purposive behaviours that do not involve seeking such as availing information (Case 2002). Charles Elliot (1902) mentioned about information behaviours and what was used and what was not in a library. Ayres and McKinnie (1916) studied information seeking at Cleveland Public Library. During 1960's many "Information needs and Use" studies were conducted by different scholars and they were focused on how scientists and engineers sought information. (Tibbo, http://www.delos.info/files/pdf/events/2004_Sett_6_10/Tibbo-Information-Seeking-Behaviors.pdf)

1.5 What is Information Seeking Behaviour (ISB)

The term Information seeking behaviour is now used for the terms user studies, information needs of users etc before this and studying information needs and information gathering behaviour thus dates back to 1948 when Bernal (2000) presented a paper on scientific information at Royal Society conference. Since then many studies were conducted dealing with information needs and ISB of both individuals and groups in different context (Anwar et al 2004). Line (1669), Hopkins (1989), Blazek and Aversa (1994), Challenger (1999) and Tahir (2008) are of the opinion that studies of ISB in different scientific disciplines are needed as the needs are changing regularly.

Tahir (2008) and Zhang (1998) in their communication stated that user information needs and ISB is fundamental to provide successful information services to users. Kadli and Kumbhar (2011) rightly stated that the kind of information required by users, methods used in searching information, time spent, problems faced while gathering information, satisfaction or dissatisfaction of user after getting information, etc all comes under purview of user studies. A user study is means for systematic examination of characteristics of information behaviour of users.

From these statements it can be summarised ISB as analysing user needs to meet their demands successfully by proper collection development and providing value added services. The applications of ICT in libraries has offered different opportunities to access

information resource in variety of formats including e-resources like e-docs, databases, OPACs, Web and Internet resources.

1.6 Need of ISB in libraries

The human behaviour and habits while searching information for research is to be evaluated for proper collection development and provide information services to users both qualitative and based on technologies. The task of assessing behavioural patterns is not easy because human beings or users are not homogenous and have different requirements and also select different routes or approaches to satisfy their information needs. The applications of ICT is also playing an important aspect to conduct the ISB studies. Different studies over the past few years conducted to find ISB of various user groups in both print and electronic environment. Libraries are associated with proper and qualitative collection, and providing information services to users. These two aspects are based on user needs and expectations and hence it is now felt necessary to know the users need from libraries in the changing environment in order to satisfy their educational and research needs.

Thus growing availability of literature in e-form over the web and net has affected ISB and hence need to find it regularly to suit changing demands. The print to digital shift caused development in new information formats, new ways of collecting information, processing and storing and finally providing new information services using net and web, WAN etc.

Information seeking behavior (ISB) refers to the way people search for and utilize information. Wilson (2000) described information behavior as the totality of human behavior in relation to sources and channels of information, including both active and passive information-seeking, and information use. Wilson (2000) also described information seeking behavior as purposive seeking of information as a consequence of a need to satisfy some goal. Information Seeking behavior is the micro-level of behavior employed by the searcher in interacting with information systems of all kinds, be it between the seeker and the system, or the pure method of creating and following up on a search.

Earlier studies were called as user and use studies and generally conducted for improving collection development (Broadlis 1977, 1980) (Subrahmanyam 1983). Later studies explored the research habits of individuals or groups or design appropriate systems and services that support the habits (Belkin, Oddy, Brookes, 1982)(Ellis 1989, 1993). In 1980 more focus was on users than systems and major shift took place and user studies became ISB studies. Thus use and user studies evolved in to examination of ISB used with more holistic approaches. (Fidel 1993, Pettigrew et al 2001, Wang 1999).

1.7 Characteristics of Information Seeking Studies

- Study small groups using observation or unstructured interviews
- Moved away from studying large groups
- Attempt to generate information seeking models

- Information Seeking studies can be conducted in areas like occupational groups (Scientists, Engineers, Humanists, health care providers like doctors, managers, Journalist, Lawyers etc.), demographic groups (Voters, consumers, patients, gatekeepers)

1.8 Method of Conducting ISB studies

- Quantitative Research
- Qualitative research
- Mixed methods
- Asking people What they do? (Interviews, focus group)
- Surveys and questionnaires
- Critical incidence methodology (specific event at specific time)
- Delphi Technique (Experts come to a debate on topic)
- observation of individual or group

1.9 Methods of conducting ISB studies

Nicolaisen (2004, 2009) described four distinct types of information seeking behaviors: visceral, conscious, formalized and compromised. The visceral need is expressed as the actual information need before it has been expressed. The conscious need is the need once it has been recognized by the seeker. The formalized need is the statement of the need and the compromised need is the query when related to the information system.

According to Wilson (1999, 2000), information-seeking behaviour includes "those activities a person may engage in when identifying their own needs for information, searching for such information in any way, and using or transferring that information." Kakai, et al., (2004) have defined information-seeking behaviour as an individual's way and manner of gathering and sourcing for information for personal use, knowledge updating, and development. Information-seeking behaviour of students, researchers, and professionals has been the focus of enquiry for decades. Initially, however, user studies were conducted primarily to evaluate library collections. These were followed by studies of the research habits of individuals or groups that would lead to the design of appropriate information systems and services. In mid 1980s, the focus shifted to holistic approaches to information-seeking behaviour. According to Line (2000), new studies of information users and their needs are even more necessary in the age of the Internet. Researchers such as Callison (1997), Devadason and Pratap (1997), and Ellis (1993) have explored quantitative and qualitative methodologies for user studies. Information-seeking behavior differs among user groups. Academic libraries must understand the information needs of faculty and students in order to address those needs.

1.10 Benefits of ISB in Libraries

ISB helps in finding the information needs of the users and based on that collection development could be more effective. The qualitative information resources collection may yield to better provision of information services.

ISB identifies the form and formats used by the users and preferences given, based on this the information collection might be more effective in the form and format users prefer. This causes better use of information.

ISB helps in finding time spent by users in libraries, rate of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of users from the collection, usefulness of library staff to users in getting the information, usefulness of information services, use of internet resources, web resources etc. This helps in fixing the different library management practices like collection development policies, information services policies, stacking policies etc.

ISB helps library professionals in provide training programmes, information awareness, library orientation programs for users etc. Changing environment makes impact on all factors and hence ISB needs to be a continues process of evaluation of users and libraries.

Conclusion

The core of the library profession remains the same, but methods and tools for information delivery continue to grow and change dramatically. Libraries must understand information-seeking behaviour of users to re-engineer their services and provide information efficiently. The results of this study reveal users who are more or less satisfied with library collections and services, but who want training in the use of online information. Although document delivery service is being provided on demand, the researchers pointed out that it would be worthwhile if the library could provide them with indexing, abstracting, and interlibrary loan service as well.

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