

Theoretical Perspectives on Information Needs and Seeking Behaviour

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ABSTRACT

Information has become an important property of man's life cycle to an extent that there will be no life in the modern society without information. Information is the input in terms of knowledge and is received by the senses. "Information is the product of the human brain in action. It may be abstract or concrete. When an individual begins to think a variety of images and sensations flash across his mind. This makes some information to accumulate in his mind and his memory retains some pieces of knowledge.

1. Introduction

It is to introduce and explain about the information, evolution and development of information and its importance, user studies and their determinants and information seeking behaviour and its means to seek through construction of theories, approaches and models. It is the importance of all these explained and discussed in to.

2. Theoretical Perspectives

These are the ways of outlook, beliefs and assumptions called as theories. In the popular usage, theory is understood as speculative or unsubstantiated or unrealistic or ivory tower of ideas. This is a wrong notion. A theory in science is not the result of mere speculation. It is the gradual outgrowth of constructive study of the accumulated sorted facts.

Theory is more properly defined as a set of systematically interrelated concepts, definitions and propositions that are advanced to explain and predict phenomena (facts)¹. Jack Gibbs defines theory as a set of logically interrelated statements in the form of empirical assertions about properties of infinite classes or events of things². A theory may not only explain or predict phenomena, but also specify causal relationships among variables. Thus in the latter sense, that further, a theory may be understood as a set of systematically related propositions specifying causal relationships among variables.

Strictly defined, a theory, as used in science is a coherent "set of hypotheses" says R.B. Braithwaite, "which form a deductive systems, that is, which is arranged in such a way that from, some of the hypotheses as premises all the other hypotheses follow"³. Thus, all in all theory can be comprehended as an integrated body of definitions, assumptions and general propositions covering a given subject matter from which a comprehensive and consistent set of specific and testable (principles) can be deduced logically. With regard to the study of Information needs and seeking behaviour, theories have been constructed on the basis of Informational importance perspectives that information is the basic material for the decision making process. People need information right from the organizational level to the personal

level, from the highly educated and experienced persons to school children, from a very famous person to an ordinary person; for taking the right decision in every step of life.

All the issues pertaining to the information studies have been researched, and analysed and explained on the basis of Informational theories. The information theories are the sets of systematically and logically interrelated concepts, definitions and propositions of information dimensions that are advanced to explain and predict phenomena or facts of information such as Information, Information types, Information Needs, Information Users and Information Seeking Behavioural acts.

3. Vitality of Information

Information is vital resources for all round development of society say individual, community, society and a nation. Thereby these developments lead to social, economic and political development of a country.

Thus, in this regard, the information can be seen as a resource which liberates the man from all the problems of life, viz. social, spiritual, economic and political. It is said that "An informed mind is an enriched mind". For this reason, every rational being requires some information for his day-to-day existence and well-being. It is understood that no society will grow beyond its level of information awareness, acquisition and appropriation. Due to this importance, all human beings need information, no matter where they live or find themselves. It is a vital factor that influences all persons be they rural or urban dwellers, old or young, literate or illiterate.

Information can also be seen as a strategies resource for virtually every person or group of persons is organizations or establishments, whether public or private and information is valued as much as human resources, financial resources and material and plant resources, becoming the fourth factor of production. Apata and Ogunrewo (2010)⁷ view information as power and an important working tool for the advancement of human society. The societies which do not have access to information will be lagging behind in cultural and technological development. It work as an important tool in the realizations of any objective or goal set by individuals and organizations, thus

it is considered as the lifeblood of any individual or organizations.

Further, the importance of information can be elaborated that "Information" is one of the fundamental and national resources, which is essential for development of each sector in the society. Information is vital resources for the national development and national welfare. The information which is systematically organized, collected and arranged in such a way that it can be retrieved easily helps to develop resources of the country and such resources can be directed towards economic, social and cultural growth.

4. Meaning and Definitions

The word 'Information' is used to identify many different concepts but still it is difficult to define clearly. In the generic source, meaning of information is that which can be communicated or received through any media of communication. The word information is derived from the verb "to inform" which implies that from a message of some sort has been issued, received and understood.

According to a Dictionary of English Language the meaning of information is 'in-ference' (imaging idea) + ashan, sharing that is law it is information i.e. it is the knowledge acquired, shared, derived and inculcated by observation, reading, studying and conserving. Thus, it may be intelligence a fact, a data, a message, a signal and a stimulus.

According to J.H. Shera, "Information may be a single isolated fact or it may be a whole cluster of facts; but still it is a unit; it is a unit of thought. It can have any dimensions. It is that intellectual entity which we receive, the building block of knowledge". According to Schramm "Information is the staff of communication and that communication is the ability to process information and share it with others".

5. Objectives of Information:

Information is a big and inevitable asset to every user which he uses whenever need arises. It is very useful to different users for different purposes. The following are the objectives of information.

- a. It is helpful for inspiration: It helps the user to develop his creativity and cultivate interest and also provides inspiration.
- b. Enrichment of Knowledge: It helps the users to enrich their knowledge.
- c. Creation of Awareness: The user comes to know about the existing competitions in various fields and it exposes new horizons opening up is the field of research through information.
- d. To increase Productivity: The users can utilize information to increase efficiency of producing and its effectiveness in the said field.
- e. Helping to predict Future: By understanding the issues through information, the user can predict the future events and thereby helping himself to imagine the new ideas in his related field.
- f. Helping to solve any kind of problems: the user gets information about now others have solved their

problems that are similar to his own problems. Thus, it helps him in solving his own problems.

- g. To help in the field of Education: It is useful to the users in the field of education, teaching and examination work and also guides them with regard to the latest developments in their own field.
- h. Research: Information is a vital force which is basic head for the foundation of the research and it enables the researcher to go in the right direction of research work.
- i. Helpful in decision making: It helps the user to become aware of various option and results through information and it helps him with process of decision making.
- j. Adjustment: it helps the user to adjust him to the ever changing environment, trends and demands.

All the above objectives prove the inevitability of information use at every level and at all the standards.

6. Sources of Information

Information can broadly be defined as the oral, written, numerical or geographical representation of any event, activity or condition of present, past and future. The sources of information can be categorized as documentary institutional, personal and non-documentary sources.

Dr. Ranganathan has divided the documents into four categories, such as :

- Conventional : which include Book, periodical publication, map, atlas etc.
- Non Conventional : which include standard; specifications, patent data.
- Neo – conventional : such as Microcopy, audio, visual, audiovisuals.

Denis Grogan has advocated three divisions in the documents such as i) Primary, in ii) secondary, and iii) Tertiary documents, reports, conference proceedings, patents, standards, trade literature and thesis; secondary documents cover indexing and abstracting services, review of progress, reference book such as (Encyclopedias, Dictionaries Hand Books, Tables, formularies etc), treatises monographs, textbooks etc. and tertiary documents include Year Book and Directories, Bibliographies (list of Books, location list of periodicals, list indexing and abstracting services), guide to the literature, list of research is progress, guides to libraries and sources of information, guides to organization etc (Parida Barman, 1993, pp. 10).

7. Meanings and Definition of Information Needs:

Information is manifold. It is a unique resource which has its special characteristics. It is essential to our existence and has a life of its own. The importance of information is manifested in research and development, in business and industry, is planning and policy making and in management and decision making. Information is communicated from an "Origin" to recipient". Access to information is an important factor, and especially so, in the light of Right to Information Act. (1987-p.72)⁸.

The "Information need" is another term that has been discussed and approached from many different perspectives. Much of the discussion has been oriented towards the clarification of other related concepts such as "wants" "requests", "demands" and so on. The concept of information needs has been coined by American Information Scientist Robert Jaylor in 1962 and is beautifully discussed in his work entitled, "The process of asking questions" published in the Journal of American society of information science (JASIS) ⁹.

"Information Need" is a term closely related to the concept of information seeking behaviour. A user recognizing an information need articulates it into a question or request which is conveyed through formal and informal channels of communication and information systems in order to receive a response may be verbal and visual which will satisfy that need.

It can be ponder over that the information requirements used to be more or less adequate reflection of the information need and the need to satisfy it. These are the information needs and information requirements are mutually interdependent and the requirement is the reflection of the objectively existing information need. Further the relation between information need and information requirement is to be seen in the light of the fact for satisfying the information needs. It is necessary to meet the information requirements corresponding to that information need" (1983p:3-7)¹⁰.

8. Forms of information needs:

Most of the information needs of the stakeholders can be categorized into the following five types, they are:

1. Agricultural Information;
2. Educational Information;
3. Economic Information;
4. Health Information;
5. Political Information.

The following are the basically five sources through which all types of users satisfy their information needs, these are:

- Government and its agents.
- Elite groups
- Relations and friends
- Market and
- Non – Governmental organizations (NGOs)

These above five types of sources is categories into two types (1) The formal and (2) The informal sources. The Formal sources and channels include Radio and Television, local Government Information office, agricultural extension workers and primary health care workers. And the informal sources and channels include village, the school Head Master, religious leaders and other elite groups in the community such as friends and relatives, and Non-Governmental organizations (NGOs).

9. Importance of User Studies:

User studies are one of the most important and useful areas of research in library and information science. These studies form a large body of literature in the discipline. The evolution and importance of user studies has been explained on the basis of explored related key concepts and on the law of library users.

10. Meaning and Definition:

As the works depict, it is the study of focusing on the users to understand directly or indirectly their needs, difficulties, behaviour and use pattern of the library and its service as a whole. The term 'user study' is preferred to library surveys' because the studies of information need or information use behaviour focus upon a wider range of information sources and channels rather than on simply libraries. A user study comprises the study of peoples' need for and use of information. A user study may be defined "as a systematic study of information requirements of users in order to facilitate a meaningful exchange between information systems and users"¹³.

The term, "The use" is what an individual actually uses. A 'use' may be a satisfied demand or it may be the result of browsing or a chance. Individuals can only use what is available. 'Use' is therefore, heavily dependent on the provision and availability of library and information services. A user usually represents a need of some kind. But need is an independent use.

These are the user studies which look for similarities and differences among the users in terms of their backgrounds like status, age, experience, education, specialization, field of research etc when the analysis is at the organization level (against individual level), they look for differences in nature of organizations and at the sometime users were also grouped as theoreticians or fundamental research workers, practitioners etc.

11. The purpose of User Study:

The purpose of user studies is primarily to identify the user's perceptions of library resources occasionally the surveys would be connected to comprime themselves with the assessment of other institutions doing. The following are the few factors of assessment of performance.

- Patterns, frequently ease and success of use.
- User needs expectations perspectives, profit and preferences for library collections, services and systems.
- User satisfaction with library tools, library collections, services, staff and websites.
- Service quality,
- Shifts in Users attitudes and opinions.
- Relevance of collections or services to the curriculum.

12. Types of User Studies:

User studies have been broadly classified in two categories. Viz.

1. User centre studies.
2. System centered studies.

In both of kinds of studies, the target group for the collection of data is the user only. User centered studies are designed to assess the user by the types of users, needs, behaviours, problem faced by them etc., the main purpose is to understand the users whereas in system centered studies, the information is gathered from the users to know the loopholes, advantages of the services offered by the system. The main

purpose the system centered study is to improve and develop the systems as a whole. In other words, first one is to know the user later one is to know the system.

13. Influencing Factors on stake holders' use of Information:

Factors that influence stakeholders use of information include personal characteristics such as age, education and experience in the particular field, Business Characteristics such as market orientation of their product, extent of their firm, type of enterprise, debt level and ownership of firm and geographical characteristics such as distance to market centers and distance to nearest technological adopter.

14. Information seeking behaviour

Meaning and Definitions

Information seeking is a kind of communication behaviour shown by an individual through some set of actions towards the attainment of some kind of information. It is the behaviour which is influenced by many factors. It also involves personal reasons for seeking information, the kind of information which sought, and the ways and sources with which needed information is sought.

Kakai (2004); has defined information seeking behaviour as "An individuals way and manner of gathering the sourcing for information for personal use, knowledge updating and development". He contends that, information seeking behaviour is a broad term, which involves a set of actions that an individual takes to express information needs, seek information evaluate and select information and finally uses this information to satisfy his / her information needs.

Wilson¹⁴ States that "Information seeking behaviour is a consequence of a need perceived by an information user, who, in order to satisfy that need, makes demands upon formal or informal information sources or services, which result in success or failure to find relevant information.

Information seeking behaviour is a ground term encompassing the ways of individuals articulate their information needs seek, evaluate and use the needed information. Menzel¹⁵ has defined information seeking behaviour from three angles;

1. When approached from the point of view of the scientist or technologies, these are studies of scientists communication behaviour.
2. When approached from the point of view of any communication medium, they are use studies; and
3. When approached from the science communication systems, they are studies in the flow of information among scientists and technologists.

From the third point of angle or perspective, even the information seeking behaviour can be technologically that, it is a social networking to build social relations among people who like to share activities, backgrounds, laterests of real life through mobile phones, internet etc. according to computing dictionary (2011); "Social networking site on any website is designed to allow multiple users to publish content of them.

The information may be on any subject and may be for consumption by friends, mates, employers, employees just to mention a few".

15. Features of Information seeking Behaviour:

The following are the be actives of information seeking behaviour that –

1. Information Seeking is a human process that requires adoptive and reflective nature: it is a human process and pattern that requires adaptive and reflective control over the afferent and efferent actions the information seeker. In formation seeking is a dynamic and changeable process despite its formal problem solving attributes. According McGarry¹⁶ "Information seeking as a process in which human engage to purposefully change their state of knowledge. The process is inherently interactive as information seekers direct attention adapt to stimuli, reflect on progress and evaluate the efficacy of knowledge base of the information seeker. "Information seeking is thus a cybernetic process is which knowledge state is changed through inputs, purposive outputs and feedback.
2. It is the behaviour of purposive in nature: Information seeking behaviour is purposive in nature and is an outcome of a need to satisfy some objectives. In the course of seeking, the individual may interact with people face to face or electrically (civilson: 2000)¹⁷ Thus, the individual recognize an inadequacy in his/her knowledge that needs to be resolved in order to deal with a problem, which then results in information seeking behaviour.

16. Characteristics of Information Seekers:

Among the pioneering information workers, Resenhloom and wolek¹⁸ pointed out the users characteristics factors such as experience seniority, educational level, professional activity and orientation are all potentially related to information seeking behaviour.

According to live maurice¹⁹ while arguing that users can be considered as individuals or as groups or communities, that the individual characteristics, which are oriented with information use and needs, include the these: Age, experience is research or job background, seniority etc. the psychological dimensions of individual characteristics include: persistence, thoroughness, orderliness, motivation, independence, breath approach and information threshold.

Fisher²⁰ mentions three clusters of factors which are: i) Psychological factors, ii) effectiveness of available services, and iii) characteristics of user and his environment. All these have major impact on information seeking behaviour.

The following are the eight major information seeking activities or characteristics that are: surveying, chaining, monitoring, browsing, distinguishing, filtering, extracting and reveling.

17. Knowledge and Information Sources Used by Information Seekers:

Research on the knowledge and information sources used by the information seekers are of two types that is informal and formal. For most of the ruralites and little bit educated seek to obtain knowledge and information from informal in formal network which include conversations with friends, relatives and neighbours and Urbanites and educates seek to obtain knowledge and information from man media means which include radio, television, news papers etc.

18. Constraints on Information Seeking:

The following are the constraints inhibited stake holders from seeking information for their information needs:

1. Lack of awareness on the available sources of knowledge and information and their right to seek knowledge.
2. Poor response from government authorities in terms of requests for information.
3. Far off locations from district Head quarter or central place of authority or market place make the stakeholders not to travel to get reliable information as travelling requires lot of change and more time to spend.

4. Poor knowledge sharing culture due to selfishness. For instable some stakeholders would benefit if they shared their knowledge.
5. Personal barriers such as age, gender, resistance to change and selfishness and external or environmental factors such as illiteracy, costly information materials, poverty and multiplicity of local languages.

All the above mentioned factors limit the respondents from seeking information.

19. Conclusion:

Thus, the information seeking behaviour is basically refers to the strategies and measures undertakes to locate the district knowledge essentials. The information use studies order the years here attempted to make clean the information use phenonoms, to understand information use behaviour and improve information use by manipulating necessary conditions the information seeking behaviour results from the cognition of some need experienced by the user over the year there has been a change in the understanding of the information use behaviour – many studies on the past have stressed on the psychological aspect of the information seeking behaviour. The users 'information behaviour is reflected in his affiliation to the information providing systems such as library and its various products and services.

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