CHAPTER - 2

USER STUDY

2.1 User Study: The Concept

In simple term, 'user study' means a study of the users of information. It deals with the kind of information required by the user, the ways and means used for searching for the required information, the use of the information, the use of the information obtained, the satisfaction/dissatisfaction arising from the use of information obtained, the flow of the information and the relationship of studies. 'User study' is the means for systematic examination of the characteristics and behaviour of the users of the systems and services. The 'user study' is directly linked with the effectiveness (performance) of the library and information services provided as they aim at satisfaction of user needs.

The term is named variedly as 'user studies', 'information-need studies', 'user studies', 'information-transfer studies', communication-behaviour studies', 'information-behaviour studies', 'dissemination and utilization studies' which are closely related, and often not precisely defined. Menzel (1966; p. 43) tries to delineate these studies and says "when approached from the point of view of the scientists or technologists, these are studies of scientists' communication-behaviour. When approached from the point of view of any communication system, they are studies in the flow of information among scientists and technologists". Hence the terminology depends much on the approach and the angle from which one sees. As per this assumption, some motives and purposes of users give rise to information needs and requirements. To satisfy such needs and requirements, users adopt many ways and means of accessing and searching sources of information. Then they try to acquire necessary information both regularly and in an ad-hoc way as necessary from these sources of information and apply the information to the purposes as predetermined, thus leading to satisfaction or dissatisfaction in relation to purposes and needs. In reality, these sequentially represented steps are neither discernible nor strictly linear. Though information-seeking behavior in one sense deals with actual seeking of information represented at the stage of searching of various information, it would be
more appropriate to cover other earlier stages and later stages to get a clear picture of the entire sequence. However, more emphasis is placed on the first four phases.

**Line** (1967) defines one type of user study - the survey as, "a systematic collection of data concerning a library, its activities, operations, staff, use and users, at a given time." A survey gives an overview, a map rather than a detailed plan and it may be motivated by the need to improve, to provide information, to bring complex situations under control, or to satisfy curiosity. Put more simply, it is a type of research study which involves collection of information by the researcher from a sample of individuals using questionnaires or interviews. He considers the survey method to be motivated by the need to improve, to provide information, to bring complex situations under control or to satisfy curiosity.

**Menzel's** (1966) category of user study is as follows:

(a) User studies (b) Behaviour studies (c) Information flow studies.

a) **User studies:** Such studies try to find out relative use of different channels in response to questions like, "Where would you search for information?" or "How did you find the reference?" Such studies have found that the common channel used by people include personal recommendations, abstracting and indexing services, [finding information] by chance, regular perusal of journals, etc.

One example of such studies is, "Scientists' approach to information," by **Melvin J. Voight** (1961).

b) **Behaviour studies:** These are carried to find the pattern of the overall reaction of the user community to the communication system without reference to any specific information receiving event. They basically study the communication behaviour of the users. One survey conducted by Operations Research Group of the Case Institute of Technology in 1958 found that scientists (chemists) generally spend almost half the time of their working hours in some form of communication such as consulting literature, looking up for references, actual reading, talking or listening to a colleague and so on. Another study found that every scientist has six favorite journals. Out of this, one may be a primary journal and other may be secondary one.
c) **Information flow studies:** These study the pattern of flow of information in the communication system. For example, an article is usually published in a journal 30-60 months after it has been written. Between the time it was written and the time it is published, it flows through different stages of report preparation - (i) first the oral report at a conference, (ii) then the technical report, and finally (iii) it is written for journal. After it has been published, it will flow through abstracting and reviewing services in the next twenty-one months.

Large number of user surveys of different types and of varying quality have been carried out which fall into two broad groups (Prasad; 1992; p. 80):

(i) **Library Oriented Studies:** The investigation of how individual libraries or information centers are used.

(ii) **User Oriented Studies:** How a particular user group obtains the information needed for the conduct of their work.

The study may be either system oriented or user oriented. The user study encompasses the study of 'users' in its totality i.e. overall aspect of the user, which are likely to have some interface value between the system and the user. The user study may be either library-specific or discipline specific. There may be several dimension of the user study, like behaviour studies, use studies, information flow studies. The study of information seeking and retrieving behaviour may be another dimension of user study. However, the key concepts in this user studies are 'information needs' and 'information seeking behaviour' (Prasad; 1992; p. 76).

The user study may also explore the pattern of information flow in a communication system or concentrate on the user's cognitive processes. The study of the variable characteristics is of primary concern in user study. The user study may also adopt interdisciplinary approach to the study of the users. There may be psychological as well as sociological approach. The aim of user study is to develop dynamic interface between the system and the user. Hence the scope of user study is quite wide and ever increasing in its dimension i.e. new dimension are being added to it. Thus, important aspects of user study are i) Information needs, ii) Information seeking behaviour, and iii) Reading habits of the users.
2.2 Genesis and Development of User Studies

The capability of uses of select and use of information independently is a problem of vital concern to the libraries and information centers. The review of user studies shows a strong interest in analyzing the information needs and channels of information flow. Since the first quarter of this century, library workers have developed curiosity over their users. While a library is primarily meant for the users, all its activities and operations centered to a library are directed towards user satisfaction. In order to achieve the optimal satisfaction of the users, the librarian has to keep a very close contact with its users knowing their reading interests, behaviour, information privations and attitudes towards the library. These attempts can largely be considered as informal studies on users.

The libraries during the first quarter of this century are believed to have traditionally used to study their users through the records kept, especially the circulation record. Sometimes, the librarian used to find the use of catalogues, reference service related records and records concerning to library use by various age groups for conducting user studies.

The second quarter of this century witnessed a spectacular change in the structure, organization and management of libraries, besides their rapid and extensive expansion. The most popular type of study undertaken during the said period was mainly on this type of study, almost everything related in anyway to the use of the library was researched (Tobin, 1974, P.100) with new methodology of research called 'Operation Research' which was entered into the field of library and information science. User studies gradually became an object of research using the methods of this operation research.

On the onset of second half of this century, a vast number of studies were undertaken. The 'Bibliography of use surveys, 1950-1970' compiled by Atkins gives the evidence of nearly 687 studies for all types of libraries except for special libraries for which, 1200 studies have been undertaken (Kawatra, 1992, P.100). In Academic libraries, there were over 100 such studies conducted (Ford, 1978). Wood in his studies 'Factors influencing Student Library use : an Analysis of Studies' presents a
useful analysis and summary of some of the major studies on library use during the period 1930-1964.

Krikelas (1983, P.6) has also brought out a 'catalogue use studies and their implications that includes a chronology of catalogue use studies during 1930-1970'.

The Centre of Research in User Study of the Sheffield University has brought out certain guidelines for the UNESCO for study of information user. The Annual Review of Information Science and Technology (ARIST) makes a review of user studies and has been publishing the reports of research work on such user studies at regular intervals, The Library Literature and LISA used to index the current work taken up on user studies. In addition to this, there are a number of studies on library users which do not see the light of print. These unpublished studies give sufficient amount of information on growth and development of research on use, non-use and mis-use of library materials by the users.

If one tries to trace the development of user studies, it will be seen that the real growth of user studies was mostly activated by two international conferences, namely, (i) The Royal Society's conference held in London in 1948 and (ii) the Washington conference of 1958 (Devarajan; 1989; P. 5). Prior to these two conferences, an early user study in the field, however, was conducted in the late 1930's by the well known scholar, Louis R. Watson which was an attempt to investigate the distribution and status of libraries in the United States. A study entitled 'Pilot Study on the use of scientific literature by Scientists, conducted by Ralph R. Shaw is considered another milestone in the history of user studies.

During 1950s and 1960s, user studies were conducted in a very limited scale. The other user studies that drew attention of the contemporary scholars include: (i) a study carried out by Glock, Menzel, Glessnor and Sewers involving the interview of 77 sample scientists to discover their information needs and information gathering habits, (ii) Study made by Voight (1959-60) to determine the approach of scientists to information, (iii) a comprehensive bibliography on user studies compiled by Davis and Bailey in 1964 containing 438 studies deserve special mention. Crawford also reported that by 1977, more than 1000 important studies were conducted on user studies (Prasad, 1992, P.80-81).
The present trend of research in Library and Information Science, however, gives adequate attention to the use of library materials for the optimal satisfaction of its users for which they are intended. The trend of user studies further shows that, the present rate of studies on the subject is increasing year after year (Devarajan, 1989, P.6). Undoubtedly, the review of user studies shows a strange interest in analyzing the information flow among the users of various classes.

### 2.3 Trends in User Study

Researchers in Library and Information Science, as the time marches, have laid much emphasis on user studies, particularly in the field of LIS research. As a result, the research literature in the field of Library and Information Science, particularly during the last decade, witnessed a spectacular growth in all its ramifications. During the 1930s, when early researches on user studies were undertaken, the scope then was mostly limited to inside the library. But taking into consideration the variety of users in multidisciplinary field, such studies were undertaken concerning to the problems of the users beyond the library premises. The same phenomenon can be exemplified through an illustration in which, two such studies i.e. one concerning to inside the library or other outside the library of the University of Colorado were undertaken. The study concerning outside the library i.e. Student Union is a better represented study of library use compared to the study made within the library premises.

Library being the centre of information for both science and social science research, researchers have stressed the need for developing an effective communication setting so as to make a sound system for free-flow of information. To practice the same, communication, as a scientific method of dissemination, was adopted to provide a comprehensive description of all facts of the subjects concerned. APA project of scientific information exchange in Psychology, for instance, applied several methods and techniques to bring out a comprehensive picture of the free-flow of information in Psychology and of the characteristics of all major media used to acquire and disseminate information in the concerned field. This study was more concerned with the participants who were seeking specific information through their attendance, their success in obtaining it, and the nature of information they sought.
Another well known trend is the recognition of the social role of the scientific communication as reflected in the studies of invisible college. Since the information generators are also among the principal users, the system continuously fed back on itself. With the adoption of system approach to the study of scientific communications, inter-relations and interdependence of various methods of communication system too have received increased attention.

Satish (1994; P.26, 27) in his work 'Attitude towards Information.......", mentions one definite trend that is, however, discerned towards comprehensive description of all facts of scientific communication in particular disciplines. The major trend in the communication research which he maintains include-growing awareness of social characters and social organization of scientific communication as reflected in the studies made by Derek J. De S. Price and Donald De B. Beaver (1966, P.1011-18) on invisible college, and defining the role of scientific meeting and enhancing its effectiveness as a means of information exchange.

Early models of user studies are more related to the document seeking and library use. Researchers used to confine their work on the practical aspects of library usage by the users. The centre of their attention was more of the library than that of the user. All the early models of user studies were primarily concerned with document seeking or library use than with the characteristics of behaviour which might usefully discriminate among information users and provide guidance to service planning. On the other hand, Wilson (1981; P.3-15) also recognizes the necessity of identifying the ends served by the information seeking behavior within the wider contact of users' totality of experiences or users life-world centered upon the individual as an information user. He feels much of the user studies in the past have suffered from a concentration as the means by which people discover information, analyzed in terms of how the users ought to have been seeking information.

However, during the later period, there was a shift in the focus. The behavior of the users and the coverage received utmost attention in most of the studies. Information user, as an organizational user, influenced the whole spectrum of information environment and was taken as a model of study. "Information Requirement of Social Scientists (INFROSS)", a study taken at Bath University (Line et.al; 1971) can be accepted as a remarkable example in the field of user studies. This
study, in fact, gave a new direction to the problem associated with the user study especially in social sciences having identified the deep understanding of the behavioral pattern of the social science users.

Another study conducted at the Bath University in 1973 on 'Design of Information Systems for Social Science project', a milestone in analysis of the requests made to the National Children's Bureau Questions and Answers Service, is a user evaluation of an Information Service in Social Welfare (Satish; 1994; P.34). This study, in fact, had shown that while 65% of the enquirers were for information in a great variety of particular subjects, less than 35% of users, on the other hand, asked for references, various research findings and statistics.

A three-phased research project on Information needs and Information services in local authority Social Science Department (INISS) undertaken in 1975 to experiment the multifaceted problems of the users aptly concludes that, specialization of information services according to the scheduled work roles where common needs can be discerned is desirable and information services should be integrated in the organizations communication pattern (Wilson and Stretfield; 1979; P.120-130)

The foregoing studies have, therefore, established the fact that a more comprehensive description of all facts of scientific communication in a given discipline becomes the prerequisite for every information system. The scholars in present trend should, therefore, agree that user studies should primarily be concerned with the document seeking approach of the library users rather than their behaviour.

### 2.4 User Studies in India

An in-depth review of literature on the subject clearly shows that a considerable number of user studies have been conducted concerning to the use of individual libraries by the various scientists and the general public alike. the outcome of few such studies which have set examples for the future scholars and the LIS professionals, testing the gravity of the individual library environment, provided a sufficient scope for the library concerned to revamp the whole system and to rebuild the library collection so as to make it more purposive, need-based and meaningful for those it is intended.
Carl M. White's study on University of Delhi Library in 1965 was the first of its kind in India which gave a detailed account of the library development in regards to its services. No definite standard for use in developing a university library programme exists. Among other things, the quality aspects of the library development rather than 'users approach' seem to have been predetermined in his recommendations.

Krishan Kumar's study (1973) on the use of Sapru House Library serving Social Science teachers and scholars provides sufficient clue concerning the average number days and hours the library is put to use, along with the priority of information sources being explored, thereby giving a scope for the library administrator to reorient the library system suitable to the requirements of Social Scientists.

Dhanyi conducted a survey of 100 readers at Rajasthan University Library in 1974 which revealed that readers demonstrated their interest more in using the library at college level with an optimal approach to library catalogue and handling reference books. The study stressed the need for user education for the new entrants of the college library.

The other such studies that deserve mention include the study made by Karuna Shah (1975) on the quantum of library use and pressure of demand from various categories of users; the study of Karki (1982) on 'Analysis of Industrial Information Service in India, Rajgopalan and Rajan's (1985) on user studies on users of Library and Information Science Periodicals' are some of the notable works in the field.

The seminar on User Studies and User Education held in Osmania University in 1985 also stressed the need for conducting User Studies in Indian University Libraries. The libraries have to conduct user studies so that they can prepare an acquisition policy which can help in acquiring appropriate information best suited to their clientele.

The work on user studies, particularly in India, very often followed the findings of the studies taken place in U.K. and U.S.A. which are primarily based on theoretical and review type without providing adequate data on observation. In addition to these, several such lesser studies have also been conducted at Master and
M.Phil level dissertations of library schools in the country, but are relatively inaccessible as most of them remained unpublished.

2.5 User Study on Journalists

Journalists occupy a very distinct place in the communication system of a country, as because they shape ideas, events, opinions and problems in terms of news that tremendously influence the society. Journalists significantly dominate a whole print media of a nation, which apparently reflects their social position, profession and missionary objectives in making the nation more informative. Since public opinion is more crucial and viable force than the contribution of the journalists, truthful and unbiased news reporting is highly essential to the successful working of any democratic system (UNESCO, 1980, P.233).

Journalists of the developing countries in particular, very often make the right to seek information imperative without any hindrance so as to communicate the same more effectively. Hence, journalists' access to, and need for information appears to be of great significance for research scholars of LIS.

It is the distinct obligation of a librarian or information scientist, among other things, to know the user community better by assessing their information needs and determining their information seeking behaviour. In performing such a difficult task, the librarian has to understand the users and to acquaint himself with their myriad information requirements so as to ascertain the impact of the library on the life style of the users who can contribute substantially to social, political and economical environment of the nation.

Studying users and use of resources will ultimately pave the way for the librarian to design an effective information system tailored to the needs of the target audience. Hence, users study is one of the crucial weapons through which the information requirements of the journalists can be better addressed and the significant results thereof can be analyzed to find out the most suitable methods of service/delivery which can help to develop an appropriate information system for them in India. Since no such comprehensive study has yet been undertaken concerning to journalists as potential users of the libraries, the present study becomes imminent.