Information Seeking Behaviour in Digital Environment: A Study of the Social Scientists of Manipur

Informative Abstract

Users have their own purposes for the need for information. In order to satisfy these needs they actively undergo the process of information seeking. The attempt of the user in obtaining the needed information has been resulted from the recognition of some need, perceived by the user. Information seeking behaviour is mainly concerned with who needs what kind of information and for what reasons, how information is found, evaluated and used, and how their needs can be identified and satisfied. It is a process in which the users purposefully search for information by identifying, searching, selecting, interacting and analysing with the appropriate sources of information. Social sciences constitute a major component of the existing universe of knowledge. Scientists who are engaged in different branches of social sciences, can, loosely, be taken into consideration as the social scientists. They constitute one of the biggest components of the user communities who accumulate process and analyse, retrieve and disseminate information in the field. As a group of information users the social scientists have their own nature and purpose of information needs. To meet their varied and complex information needs, also they undergo a number of strategies and activities in the process of seeking the right information in different environment. Their information needs have to be satisfied by the libraries, information centres, systems, etc. through their services and other facilities. In today’s digital era, ICT-based services play an important role in serving the needs of the users. They can be benefited in many ways from the newly emerged digital environment. A new shift in the information seeking behaviour of the social scientists has also been observing since last few decades. They are found to use different e-resources through various modes. Use
of internet by them, since recent past, has become a common phenomenon in the process of seeking for web-based resources.

While reviewing around 150 related literature as a part of the present study, it has been confirmed that a number of users studies have been conducted across the world on various aspects dealing with a number of issues. Social Scientists are also found to be a major group of users on whom studies have been taken up to transact different issues associated with the same. As such Users Study and its major component Information Seeking Behaviour is one of the important major areas of research in Library and Information Science.

In the present study Information Seeking Behaviour in Digital Environment: A Study of the Social Scientists of Manipur undertaken to assess their information needs, information seeking behaviour in digital environment, use of ICT-based services, the problems and barriers encountered, the stock of availability of digital resources in social science and its related organisations has attempted to suggest for designing a model through which the social scientists can meet their information needs. Based on the findings of some preliminary studies the study has also formulated five hypotheses to test their validity which mainly focused with the set objectives.

The work has been organised into six chapters comprising of (a) Introduction (b) Literature Review (c) Methodology adopted (d) Social Scientists and Digital Information Resources (e) Analysis and (f) Conclusion. The study has extensively employed different techniques and methods such as (a) survey of the social sciences and their related institutions, (b) survey of the Social Scientists engaged/ associated in such institutions, (c) semi-structurally designed questionnaire to collect data from the scientists, (d) selecting social scientists using stratified simple random sampling method based
on their nature of work, (e) simple statistical techniques to analyse the collected data and (f) discussion with scientists, librarians, experts, etc.

The study covers 463 Social Scientists who are engaged in a number of social science and its related organisations/ institutions of Manipur. While surveying these institutions the investigator along with her team of deputed enumerators came across more than 1000 Social Scientists of which 800 were identified for the study. From among them, 600 scientists were selected to whom the questionnaires were distributed. In the process, 463 duly filled in questionnaires which were correct in almost all the aspects and received during March 2009-March 2010 have been taken into account for analysis. The sample size comprising of 46.87 percent female and 53.13 percent male components have been categorized as Teachers (T-22.46%), Teacher cum Researchers(TCR-33.48%), Researchers(R-19.65%), Social Workers(SW-3.67%), Professionals(P-14.48%) and Others(O-6.26%) based on their basic nature of work and other activities. Majority of them are from Manipur University (44, 28%) followed by representatives from Colleges (32.83%), NGOs (7.34%), Professional bodies (6.05%), Government departments (4.32%) and so on. The subject domain of the scientists includes Economics (14.25%), Political Science (13.61%), History (10.15%), Law (9.72%), Education (7.28%), Library and Information Science (7.56%), Defense and Strategic Studies (0.65%), Extension Education (0.65%), Rural Development (0.86%), Mass Communication (0.86%) and Psychology(2.16%). While 24.19 percent of them possess Ph.D. degree 20.30 percent has M. Phil degree with NET/ SET/JRF, 13.61 percent pursuing for research leading to Ph.D. / M. Phil and rest 12.95 percent possessing with professional degrees. Of the 463 Social scientists, 58.32 percent are Computer literate of which the rate is highest among the group Teacher cum Researcher (TCR-19.22%) followed by Researcher (R-16.19%) and Teacher (T-13.17%). They have developed skills to carry out different activities such as E-mailing (76.03%), using
internet resources (73.87%), access to websites (65.01%), online search (59.40%), and handling of computers (58.10%). Majority of them are also aware of the terminologies like websites (76.46%), digital library (71.92%), INFLIBNET (72.14%), E-journals (70.41%). Cent percent of the scientists seek information for updating their level of knowledge. Most of them (84.45%) spent up to one hour for internet browsing and 79.70% of them spent same hour for other purposes. On certain aspects, 87.04% of the scientists use internet. Less than half of the institutions/organizations (44.92%) make available internet facility to the Social Scientists, 36.93percent of them use internet from cyber cafes while 34.77percent are getting the facility from the institutional libraries. CIC/CSC provides this facility to a small section of the scientists (4.10%). Among the scientists “Google” is found to be the most popular search engine (84.85%). For the teaching community, their own collections, Cable TV, Mobile phone and Library and Information Centres as well are used extensively. 50.70 percent of the scientists enjoy with the libraries available in their respective institutions. Only 13.17percent of the Social Scientists have the habit of visiting library daily, while majority of them (25.05%) visiting sometimes. It is remarkable to learn that majority of them i.e.75.81percent of the Social Scientists maintain their own collections and 82.62percent of them found their collections suitable to meet their needs. They give more preference on Documentary resources (91.58%) followed by Institutional resources (72.14%), Digital resources (60.69%), Human Resources (56.37%) and E-resources (48.38%). Major access tools for the scientists mainly include: references collected from journal articles (58.09%) and books (49.46%), library catalogue (46.69%), academic website (44.28%).Use of journal articles, reviewed articles, general books and reference books are common among Teachers, Teachers cum Researchers, Researchers & Social Workers. E-mail is found to be mostly used by different groups of Social Scientists (76.03%). Majority of scientists (88.98%) , on the other hand, also encounters a number of problems while seeking information in the digital environment.
The findings of the study thus have revealed us many indications that: (i) *Information Seeking Behavior* is one of the core areas of study in the field of Library and Information Science, the phenomenon being global;(ii) Existence of a number of Social Science Institutions is observed in Manipur including Manipur University, Colleges, Government Departments, Professional Bodies, Independent Research Organizations, NGOs, etc;(iii) A number of Libraries, Information Centres, Information Units, etc are in existence in these institutions.(iv) Also there are different such Centers in the State like Special libraries, Common Services Centres, Public libraries, Information Centres, Cyber Cafes, etc;(v) Different groups of Social Scientists are working in such institutions in different capacities who have their different purposes of information needs for which they undergo different strategies to seek and get the information;(vi) Excepting Manipur University Library, availability of digital resources in majority of these institutions is not up to the mark. To serve varied groups of users in this digital environment they need to enrich their collections with digital resources;(vii) In this prevailing situation, the Social Scientists of the state are not satisfactory at all with the resources available, services and other facilities rendered in such institutions, and as such the need for designing a new digital information system of social science has been felt.

The above descriptions have shown that the Social Scientists are not fully satisfied while seeking information in the existing digital environment to meet their varied purposes. The general findings of the study, the problems they encountered and their willingness towards improvement of the existing system with specific suggestions have called for the need for making certain feasible suggestions for onward recommendations for implementation. The need for having an effective *Digital Information System in Social Sciences (DISISS)*, as a model for making the Social Scientists fulfill their needs, would be the ultimate goal, in this regard. A DISISS, as such, has been proposed in this work, with a plan to
network Libraries, Information Centres, various Social Science Institutions and many other related agencies with Manipur University Library (MUL) as the Central Hub/Server which should be treated as an Independent body/agency. MUL has been suggested to guide the network as it is one of the nodes of the INFLIBNET’s UGC-Infonet Digital Library Consortium and as one of the beneficiary institutions of National Library and Information Services Infrastructure for Scholarly Content (N-LIST) programme. As there is no concept of networking in the state among the Libraries and Information Centres, the proposed system has been suggested to be carried out in phases, in the first phase with MUL as the Central Hub providing leadership and organizing responsibilities and taking support from INFLIBNET, UGC, ICSSR and even from the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (MCIT).

As Social Scientists require information in all fields of knowledge besides the subject domains in Social Sciences, the DISSS can be extended to form an independent state level system of digital resources in which other groups of users, not only the social scientists, also, can enjoy its facilities and services. At the second phase, thus, a separate independent State Digital Repository System (SDRS) has been suggested which can be designed by: (i) Seeking expertise for the expert team; (ii) Developing Institutional Repositories in all the participating organizations/ institutions; (iii) Making all the participating organizations/ institutions self sustained to serve their users satisfactorily under the network; (iv) Formation of a State Digital Repository System (SDRS) expanding to other subject domains besides the Social Sciences; (v) Extending the links to other local agencies, National and International Harvesting Systems using Open Archive Initiative-Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH); (vi) Monitoring and reviewing the outcome; (vi) Conducting continuing education programme for the professionals and users community (Social Scientists).
Institutional Repositories (IRs) are visible and can be set up as the enabling technologies are readily available in India using Open Source Softwares. Establishment of a network of federated repositories, which is the need of the hour, can be realised today. Certain action plans, thus can be formulated in this regard towards implementation of the proposed model by constituting a state level body to provide advisory, financial support as well as technical services to individual repositories as done in different countries of the world at national level. Some important action plans for the same has been chalked out as mentioned below:

- **The State Government should come forward for necessary funding to Institutional Repositories (IRs) so that they can act as an essential repository of digital resources that enables scholarly communication in the digital environment.**

- **Responsibility should be given to the State Level Body to set up the SDRS that should harvest data from their respective IRs.**

- **Strategies should be developed to make IRs a permanent and sustainable part of the state and national research infrastructure.**

- **Regular workshop/orientation, etc. should be conducted for all the participating members to transact common issues and exchange of knowledge about the implementation and support of IRs.**

- **Guidelines for metadata entry and best practices to be followed should also be set.**

- **Also guidelines be mediated to all the member institutions to deposit research papers, dissertations, theses, etc. for repository.**

- **Mechanisms should be developed to link the SDRS to National and International harvesting system.**

- **Scholars and scientists should be facilitated to self archive their resources to the SDRS and National and International harvesting systems as well.**
Information Seeking Behaviour, as understood, is an important component of users study, which has been adopted by researchers as a major area of study in the field of Library and Information Science. The findings of such studies across the world have enabled the planners and policy makers to design existing information systems, libraries, etc to fulfil the needs of the users under consideration. The findings of the present study also suggested us certain clues in this regard. As such, if implemented the proposed model, the Scientists under study would be in a position to get their desired information in the new digital environment. In fact the proposed SDRS would be benefited to the needy scholars and researchers in all field of knowledge not only the Social Scientists but also scientists and researchers in all other fields of study, in the long run. Fulfilling the needs of the user’s community will foster the academic and research pursuits, which will, in turn, contribute towards societal development.

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