INFORMATION : CONCEPTS AND PREMISES

Information is one of the most extensive and amorphous areas of study and research. The traditional view presents it as a kind of "Disciplinary Schizophrenia" in which the research approach and research data as well as one’s experience stand divided as deterministic and relativistic aspects. Indeed there are a number of assumptions such as the absolute information or the objective information coming under the logical positivism. Information is set to exist independent of thought or of sources or of receivers. It is something which describes reality that can be discovered, described and predicted. Within the library and information Science, it is explained as the structure or order of any text that is capable of changing the image structure of the recipient. There are also many operational definitions. Here it is considered in the context of messages or thoughts contained in published records i.e. objective public knowledge.

Many terms like need, requirement, demand, use(s), users, sources, channel, seeking, behaviour, gathering, etc. used in association with the word information have specific meanings although, at times some of them are used interchangeably. In the first instance, need, requirement and demand merit explanation. Both the words namely requirement and demand stem from need.

Information need is determined by how one views information. Need can be a demand as well as a want. Requirement may be associated in two ways, with the individual’s necessity as well as the consequent creation of conditions for its fulfillment. The requirement therefore, is a matter of creating or structuring an information system responding to the needs.

Need is a complex concept difficult to define, isolate and measure, because a need
may be expressed, unexpressed and unfelt as well. We understand what constitutes need by observing individuals who seek or goes about any information. In the first instance, need can be categorized as immediate or deferred ones. It is shaped by an activity, i.e., problem solving or decision making. Here it becomes observed one. It can be latent and be passive and simply gets stored. Neither any effort for it or any immediate use of it is seen. Needs also vary according to the stage of activity. Need being internal, it varies with the individual and the situation. Here, quite often, the user behaviour, i.e. the expressed demands are considered. The assumption is the demands and seeking activities point out the needs. Need, further is affected by the kind of work in which one is engaged. The work may be basic or applied and may pertain to some discipline. Need is also influenced by the systems available to an individual. This is to say both the quality and the quantity assured in fulfilling the system's requirements. Further environmental factors also have their play. Factors such as the social, political, economic, legal or other systems within which one operates and the interpersonal relationships that one develops are also important. In addition, psychological factors also influence the need. One's personality, role, the importance of the information, the consequences of lack of information, the availability and non-availability as well as the cost etc. also are definite determinants of seeking and using particular information. So information need is a subjective one existing in the mind of an individual although he can have it from a source. The source obviously can be a document, a person, or a library or information centre. Effecting communication or transfer using any of these media constitute the channel. From all these explanations, it is to be understood that demand and supply constitute further important elements which also form part of information need that is embedded in use, uses and users studies.

**Demand** refers to expressed needs requiring the system to respond. This response in
providing the information that is demanded in what is known as Supply. Both are
interrelated, one contributing to the other. However, while the expressed demands may
be continuous and changing, unexpressed and unfelt demands are also important. The
system should also devise possible measures to identify such likely demands. These
become anticipated demands and requires the system to be in readiness to supply. It is
possible to subsume the seeking and gathering habits as well as the use and uses either
under demand and supply factors or under users and their behaviour. The use is normally
taken to mean consumption of information while the uses refer to the sources and their
preference.

The problem in information studies precisely stated is two-fold: a lack of unifying
theory and weak concepts that are employed in investigating a multitude of problems.

Notwithstanding the emerging new directions (and methodologies) in information
research based on the premises of situational theory employing the concept of user
construct (rather the observer construct). The status of all studies remain less satisfactory.
Proper tools capable of predicting information behaviour are still not available.

This being a general and comprehensive user study conducted to obtain valid and
empirical data relating to the information needs of demographically distributed specialist
groups in the field of disability also with a view to suggest a national information network,
the well tested survey method was employed. The reason is obvious. The complexity of
the task require quantitative techniques which entails the use of survey instrument as
better alternative.