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INTRODUCTION

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1.0 Introduction

Information is a vital source, which is essential for survival in today's competitive and wired world. It is an indispensable raw material for right decision-making from the governmental and institutional to the personal level. It is a vital ingredient for the socio-economic and cultural development of any nation or individual. According to Kemp (1976), 'information is considered as the fifth need of man ranking after air, water, food and shelter'. Hence, everyone deals with it in many ways throughout his/her life. Information collection, transfer and use are all pervasive and universal activities in all walks of life. Individuals, knowingly or unknowingly, during their life and work involve in the generation, recording, processing, repackaging, transfer, use and application of information.

Information becomes more meaningful and effective, when it is transferred and communicated. Both are equally important for the efficient and effective management of any organization or industry. They also have definite relations with the performance research and development organizations. The purpose of transfer and communication of information is its use. On the other hand, from the point view of individuals, seeking and communicating of information are two faces of the same coin, both having the same purpose i.e. use.
Information, which has no use, is considered as no information. Thus, the central thread of the whole range of activities relating to information transfer and communication is nothing but use. Hence, the emphasis is laid on use and user orientation to communication and information from formal or informal sources.

The information itself and the way it is accessed have undergone a tremendous change owing to the developments in information and communication technology, which may be considered as a second big revolution after print technology. This may be called an era of information and knowledge revolution. The present electronic environment has brought in a plethora of whole new range of resources in the form of CD-ROM/DVD and on the Internet. This has made available over-abundant supply of information, including the print sources and has a great impact on the way researchers seek, communicate and make use of information. The use of libraries as places of search for information is being replaced to some extent by access to electronic resources from the scholar's desktop. This has brought in new challenges for developing information systems and services that help user in his or her search.

Information seeking is human's intellectual activity. It results from the need of some information. According to Wilson (1981), "information seeking behaviour results from the recognition of some need, perceived by the user, whom as a consequence makes demands upon formal systems such as libraries, information centers, online services or some other persons in order to satisfy the perceived need".
In other words, quest for information seeking arises, when someone’s existing knowledge fails to provide answers to certain queries.

The task of information seeking has undergone tremendous changes due to the availability of information in various formats owing to the influence of information and communication technologies (ICT). The information is now available more and more in electronic form, thus forcing researchers to adapt themselves to changing nature of information and to learn new methods of retrieval of information.

Information seeking behaviour of users varies from discipline to discipline. Every user in the fields of Sciences, Social Sciences and Humanities seeks information to undertake his/her teaching and research activities. The information needs and information seeking behaviour of Scientists and Technologists differed to certain extent as compared to those of Social Scientists. Even though both use similar types of information sources, methods to retrieve information and experience similar problems in dealing with the information, the extent of use of methods varies and accounts for differences in the information seeking behaviour among them. Economist’s information needs and method of seeking information match with those of other Social Scientists.

Economists are individuals who study, develop and apply theories and concepts from economics, and who write about an economic policy (Wikipedia, 2007). Economists address their subject with both scientists and policy maker’s objectivity. They approach the
study of economy in much the same way as physicist approaches the
study of matter. They devise theories, collect data, and then analyze
these data in an attempt to verify or refute their theories. Economists
make assumptions and use models to work on any economic problem
and to find solutions. As a policy maker they answer the government
causes of economic events such as economic growth, unemployment,
budget deficiency, balance of payments etc.

Economists, like any other social scientist, seek information for
the purpose of undertaking teaching and research. They deal with
various forms of information resources effectively and efficiently in
order to undertake qualitative research, which has wider implications
on the economy of a region or a country. This depends on the
information seeking behaviour and communication skills adopted by
them in information seeking and dissemination of information. They
need to be constantly updated by seeking the latest information
available in print and electronic formats, so that they can be effective in
bringing about desired changes in the economy. The type of
information required for them includes economic policy documents of
governments, data on imports and exports, banking and finance,
insurance etc. Economists, apart from referring to research documents,
most of the times work with the time series statistical data, before
making any economic forecasting. None of their conclusions are drawn
without empirical evidence. Their preference for statistical resources
can be widely seen in the present and similar other studies compared to
other types of resources.
Economists adopt various means and methods to seek information such as visiting libraries, through informal channels, through CD-ROM databases and on the Internet. The present study is designed to ascertain their information needs and information seeking behaviour in the present Internet era that reflects their professional interests and character. Among other things, the primary objective of the study is to showcase the whole range of information requirements of economists, wherein the needs of various types of information, the use and non-use of information sources, including those available in electronic format, their approach to various information sources and channels, their search strategy, use of new technology, patterns of communication etc., are particularly predominant.

1.1 Statement of the problem

The present study is an attempt to examine the information seeking behaviour of Indian economists in the Internet era. The study attempts to know the nature and type of information requirements of economists and also to know how these are met satisfactorily. The study examines the factors, which motivate one to seek and collect information. The study also discusses the methods and approaches used by economists in seeking information from various sources such as print, electronic and Internet. It also paves the way for knowing how economists communicate the information. Hence, the present study, suitably entitled “Information seeking in Internet era: A case study of Indian economists”, is undertaken.
1.2 Need for the study

There is a predominance of research on information needs and information seeking in the area of library and information science user studies in different disciplines. However, the majority of the studies undertaken depict information seeking by a group of users using traditional sources of information. There is a small body of knowledge, which explores information seeking by different users, especially professionals in the present Internet era.

From practical experience it can be seen that users approach to information is changing due to the availability of a vast array of information resources on the web. They no longer depend on print sources and libraries to seek information. There is a need for library and information science professionals to study user’s information seeking behaviour in the web environment in order to understand their needs and to provide effective services. The present study has been carried out in this backdrop to analyze the information needs and information seeking behaviour of economists in the Internet era.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the present study are:

1. To identify the nature and type of information needs of economists;

2. To identify the types of information resources used by economists in seeking information;
3. To investigate the different approaches and methods used by economists in retrieving information and references from print, electronic and Internet information sources;

4. To find out the non-documentary sources used to seek information by economists;

5. To examine the factors, which motivate the information seeking behaviour;

6. To study the impact of academic and research experience and other official matters on their information seeking and communication patterns;

7. To examine the impact of these systems, i.e., Internet, E-mail, etc., on communication and exchange of professional knowledge among economists; and

8. To investigate, to what extent, library staff influence their information seeking behaviour.

1.4 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses have been formulated, based on the related literature and objectives set for the study:

Hypothesis 1: There is increasing awareness and use of electronic information resources and services among the economists;

Hypothesis 2: The age has a bearing on the use of electronic resources and services on the economists;
Hypothesis 3: Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has a significant impact on the economists’ information seeking behaviour;

Hypothesis 4: Internet enabled services enrich information seeking behaviour of economists; and

Hypothesis 5: The library staff is taking good care of economists by providing timely information services in meeting their information needs.

1.5 Methodology

The nature and scope of the research study necessitated adoption of multiple investigation methods and data collection tools and techniques, like questionnaire, interview and observation. To meet the main aims and objectives, a structured questionnaire with both closed and open questions was designed and distributed among economists working at different academic and research institutes of India. Its purpose was to collect information regarding the use of print and electronic information resources and the patterns of different practices used by economists to retrieve the required information.

The comprehensive literature review presently undertaken covers a rich wealth of documentary sources giving the details of user’s studies in the field of library and information science. The review has identified previous and present research projects on information seeking behaviour in general and specific to the fields of Sciences and Social Sciences followed by use of print and electronic—both online and offline
sources of information and the possible impact of the electronic environment on academic information use. These studies assisted to gain a better understanding of the complexity and diversity of the subject. The studies have been comprehensively reviewed in Chapter-5.

1.5.1 Pilot Study

To test the suitability, reliability and relevance, the first draft of the questionnaire was distributed among around 10 economists working at IGIDR, Mumbai. Based on the feedback received, the questionnaire was then adequately and suitably modified and mailed to the selective samples of 225 economists, working at different academic and research institutes in India. A follow-up of the questionnaire was done through respective institutes' librarians, fellow economists, and for non-respondents repeated reminders were sent from time-to-time over post and e-mail.

Among the total samples of 225 economists, 194 (82%) have responded. Given relatively high response rate, it is found that it is reasonable to assume that the answers are representative for the whole population of Indian economists. The responses received were analyzed by using different statistical methods such as Skewness, Chi-Square etc., to substantiate the collected data.

1.6 Organization of the study

The entire research, together with its results, is presented in this thesis into seven chapters. The first chapter deals with the statement of
the problem, need, objectives, hypotheses and scope and limitations of the study.

The second chapter elucidates in detail the development of economic thought in India. Third chapter has dealt with development of economic institutions in India. The conceptual framework of information seeking behaviour has been presented in Chapter four. The comprehensive literature review on the topic has been covered in Chapter five. The chapter six has dealt with analysis and interpretation of collected data. The seventh chapter presents a summary of the findings, a few suggestions for further research based on analysis of the data and the results of the study, and finally, conclusion.
References

