CHAPTER: II

USER AND THEIR NEEDS FOR INFORMATION

User means those who use a library. There are various terms to represent 'user' like client, reader, customer, inquirer, member, etc. The user is an important component in any information system without which an information system loses its whole purpose. The users in academic library constitute faculty, students and educational administrators. In a library or information centre environment the users are the last link or recipient of the information in the communication cycle. User can visit the library or information center for various purposes like-

a) To browse the collection/latest additions.

b) For workplace i.e. as a study hall to make use of his own material.

c) To read journal/particular documents, etc.

d) To borrow books.

e) To obtain factual information.

f) To meet people/friends.
All these activities make the user and librarian’s interactions in many ways. That means the user continuously interacts with the information unit. In fact, the very existence of an information unit owes to its users. The collection of varied sources of information, designing of an information unit, services planned—all are governed by his needs, attitudes, demands and characteristics. In fact the user is the focal point of all information systems.

The user is involved in most operations of the documentary chain. User knows certain sources of information which he is able to weigh up and communicate. User can contribute to the selection of and sometimes even decide on new acquisitions. User can facilitate access to non-conventional literature about which user is more directly informed. User may utilize the products and services of the information unit and states what he wants and how it should be presented. User may also play a key role in the circulation of information. In fact the user is the essential consideration to the design, evaluation, improvement, adaptation, stimulation and the operation of the information system.

In some cases user may not be always aware of his needs. Use can occur without a demand being expressed or even without a want being felt. One of the problem of meeting users’ needs is that it is difficult to ask them, what they want, because they do not know what range of possibilities are. Users do not by any means reacts to changes. All information system designers do not realize the need to build the system around the user. Instead, attempts are made to mould the user to fit the system than the vice-versa. If we are to serve users, then we must know users. In reality we find that the designers of library and information system hardly bother to study their potential users before designing the services, or to evaluate the services when it was started. Even in many cases it is difficult to guess the
user group at whom the services are aimed. Particularly in India, the users have been neglected while monitoring the library and information services. The collection and services should be tailored to meet the needs of users. This is possible only when we really understand their needs, their priorities, etc. Getting to know people is not in itself enough. We have to gain their confidence; convincing them that we professionals are on their sides and our only concern is to give them the best services we can within the resources owned by us. Understanding of users, their needs should lead to a continuous improvement in the services otherwise it will be of no relevance and purpose.

Every one at various times needs information of one kind or another. The complexity in life is increasing, simultaneously the volume of information, variety of media and the means of access has also increased. New indexes, abstracts, reviews, current awareness bulletin are appearing and their number is also increasing day by day. On the other side the people tend to make only a minimal effort to obtain information. Hence the information agencies have to increase ease of use. The aim is to see that the users get the information they need. (Kumar: 2004:34)

To create information awareness and to promote the use of information, it is very much essential to know/understand:

a. User need

b. User attitude/behaviour
2.1 Information Need

The need for information is an objective demand of the user i.e. information need is oriented towards reality practice and tasks. (Prasad: 1992:29)

The various related terms with need are want, requirement and demand. It is found that in literature, the above terms have been often used interchangeably without an attempt to have a clear distinction in the meaning. There is often confusion due to imprecise use of the above term in context to user needs.

However Lin has made an attempt to define these terms as under-

**Need**: What an individual ought to have for his work, his research, his edification, his recreation, etc.

**Want**: What an individual would like to have, whether or not the want is actually translated in to a demand on the library. Individuals need an item they do not want or want an item they do not need.

**Requirement**: It can mean what is needed, what is wanted or what is demanded and can therefore be usually employed to cover all three categories.
Demand: What an individual asks for; more precisely a request for an item of information believed to be wanted (when satisfied, the demand may prove not to be a want after all) Individuals may demand information, they do not need and certainly need or want information they do not demand. Demand is partly dependent on expectation, which in turn depends partly on existing provision of library or information services. (Kumar: 2004:45)

2.1.1 Definition

J E Rowley (1980) and C M D Turner (1980) have suggested that a ‘need’ is generally conceived as describing what an individual ought to have, for his work, education, recreation, etc. Pinpointing a need implies a value judgment; one person may regard a piece of information as vital, while another, in the same situation may attain the same goal without it, possibly by putting more effort into other activities. It can thus be said that any piece of information, recorded and unrecorded, that a scientist may ‘need’ in connection with his study, teaching and research activities may be called as information need. In the words of N. Lin and W.D. Garvey (1972), ‘Information needs are generally interpreted as having to do with kinds of messages in terms of subjects, currency, language or source, but the term has also been used to signify the means for supplying them’. (Kumar: 2004:42)

According to H A Murray, ‘a need is construct’, which represents a force in the brain region. It leads to organized action. It usually persists and causes overt behaviour and fantasy. (Kumar: 1986:443)
Need refers to-

i) What an individual ought to have

ii) Circumstances under which something is lacking, therefore requiring some course of action

iii) That which one cannot do without

iv) That which is necessary for an organism's health and well being.

This should be differentiated from wants. Wants are restricted to 'what an individual would like to have'. Psychologists have divided needs into three categories of psychological, cognitive and physiological needs. User needs are basically of the cognitive type because those involved need to plan and learning of skills. Those are however closely allied with psychological needs. Thus cognitive and psychological needs are to be taken into consideration jointly for the purpose of defining user needs.

The Encyclopaedia of psychology has given a comprehensive and clear explanation of the term need. 'Need' is one of the several English words (the other being drive, motive, want, urge, desire and so on) each in some respects unsuitable—used by the psychologist today to designate an internally or externally aroused, brain-located force (often coupled with an accelerating emotion), subjectively experienced as an impulsion or felt necessity (a mild or intense urges) to act (immediately or later) so as to produce a certain specifiable
terminal effect which is ordinarily expected to be beneficial to the actor and/or positively
hedonic (less painful, more pleasurable) relative to the arousing situation (Laloo:2002:11)

The academic libraries are of four different types of users. They are as given in Table 2.01.

Table 2.01 Types of User

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students Teachers</th>
<th>School Libraries</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under Graduates</td>
<td>College and University Libraries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Graduates</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Scholars</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
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Based on the user type, their information need will be varied. Of course the users of
the academic libraries are almost homogeneous in nature in comparison to the public library.
According to Mourice B Line (1998) some general requirements from the library by the
users-

1. An attractive building

2. A friendly and informal atmosphere

3. Long opening hours.
4. Comfortable seats for working.

5. A variety of work areas where, if one wishes, one can study quietly or have group discussion.

6. A coffee shop where one can relax, refresh oneself, mix with other users and the library staff.


8. A self usable arrangements and system.


11. A simple and speedy procedure for borrowing and returning books.

12. The ability to access a variety of media from one work station.

13. Speedy access to resources.

14. Copying machine in every floor of the library, easy and fast to use, cheap and reliable.
15. Friendly and helpful staff who are bibliographically and technically knowledgeable, who are visible and who invite inquiries.

2.2 Type of Need

The present age of information explosion has resulted in an escalating growth of micro-documents vis-à-vis the information needs of the user has become varied and multidimensional. According to Melvin Voigt (1961) Users’ information requirements are of following types: they are–

1. The current approach

2. The everyday approach

3. Exhaustive approach

4. Catching up approach

2.2.1 Current Approach

Each member of the user in an academic library must keep himself aware of current development. In this approach the user interacts with the library/information system in a general way praising through his favourite periodicals, going through the abstract journals,
etc but there will be no specific search for information. This approach requires constant interactions with library or information system.

2.2.2 Everyday Approach

This is the need for particular items of information essential to the day to day work of users. The nature of information sought in such a situation is very specific and quick answer is usually found in certain sources of information.

2.2.3 Exhaustive Approach

This approach for which dependence document is very much necessary and hence had attracted the attention of documentalists to help in meeting the information requirements of the user, when a research work or team of research workers want to take up a new area of investigation.

2.2.4 Catching Up Approach

This approach is also called occasional approach. A user may at a times needs to have a brief, but a complete picture of the recent developments of related subject or which did not come within the area of his main interest. This is likely to be an area in which he is not an expert. As a result of this he is not quite current with the subject. Hence in such a situation he expects to have in the communication system a device which will help quickly catching with the subject. (Dhiman and Sinha: 2002:449)
The purpose of an academic is to meet the information requirements of its user community. Its collection services and retrieval practices can be tailored in the direction to meet the users need, once the needs of the users community is studied and determined.

Abraham Maslow has put forward a theory of human motivation. This theory arranges needs along hierarchy and priority or potency. The hierarchical order from most potent to least potent is given below-

1) Physiological needs (such as hunger of thirst) are requirement for a healthy body

2) Safety needs are requirements for crime avoidance, traffic rules, emergency procedures, basic literacy, sex education, etc.

3) Needs for belongingness and love for multicultural awareness, emotional awareness, leisure activities, interpersonal skills, ethics and values, sex education, etc.

4) Esteem needs for multicultural awareness, social system knowledge, values, etc.

5) Needs for self-actualization for formal education, leisure activities, etc.

6) Cognitive needs such as a thirst for knowledge and
7) Aesthetic needs such as desire for beauty

As soon as needs having greatest potency and priority get satisfied, then the next needs in the hierarchy emerge and press for their satisfactions. This goes on step by step. Cognitive needs belong to the penultimate step. Thus cognitive needs, which cover thirst for knowledge, have a low order of priority. (Kumar: 1986:447)

Information centers or libraries should aim to satisfy both expressed as well as unexpressed needs of users and non users. Due to lack of adequate knowledge of the information needs of the society, information service often do not correspond with the needs of users and subsequently remain under or not utilized at all. Frequently, managers of information services fail to gear their services to the specific needs of the society. In developing countries information systems and network are often initiated without prior analysis of information needs. They are established with the expectation of being capable of creating enough demand for their services and feedback from users which often fail to materialize. (Dhiman and Sinha: 2002:446)

Information needs is in fact the darkest area in the field of library and information science on world scale. Very little is known about the actual and more so, potential needs of the users of libraries. This is especially true about users in India as well as in Assam.

Much research in to information needs has been carried out by information scientists such as specialist in communication, behavioural science, etc. librarians have rather neglected this fruitful area. This has implications for provision of services to the users.
User needs are basically three folds, they are--

a) The need to keep up-to-date information with the current progress of one's field. Most scientists spend a considerable amount of their time for knowing what of scientists are recently done or are doing, to keep up-to date information with the current progress and to give meaning to their own works.

b) The need for specific information directly connected with the research work, or the problem at hand relates to the everyday need. The everyday need arises in the course of the work requiring specific piece of information, a bit of data, a method, information about apparatus construction, and equation, an explanation of an observation and the like.

c) The need for all or almost all literature on a given subject dependence on print and non print sources of information. This need for exhaustive search arises when the researcher starts work on a new investigation. It becomes even more urgent at the time when he reports the results of his investigation in the form of a paper for publication or for a lecture or for patent application.

2.3 Identification of Information Need

According to G Kumar (1986), the information need may be expressed as input-process-output model. The basic components of the system are-
a) Problem

b) Problem solving process

c) Solutions.

The problem is analyzed to determine information needs. Process involves activities performed to move from the existing situations. Solution is the outcome of that process and will create the desired solutions. (Kumar: 2004:51)

The system model set forth by Girija Kumar of identification of information needs-

\[
\text{Input} \quad \text{Process} \quad \text{Output}
\]

\[
\text{Problem} \quad \text{Problem Solving Process} \quad \text{Solution}
\]

\[
\text{Information Need} \quad \text{Search Process} \quad \text{Information Needs fulfilled}
\]

Fig. 2.01 System model of identification of information needs

Once the user has been identified then user should determine their information needs based on systems model of problem-solving.

As the library’s objective is to meet the needs of its user it very much requires for studying the user behaviour. The effectiveness of rapport/ relation between user and the
library stuff will be helpful in studying the user behaviour and attitude. The user behaviour is also concerned / related with-

i) Nature of information

ii) The way of people interact with the information

iii) The way information is packaged and communicated to the user

iv) User’s skills in identifying the information need

v) Information provider’s skill

vi) Barrier to information like language, time, etc and

vii) Channels and sources for trapping the information.

According to Wersig and Wendel (1985), social economic and cultural factors and also status, prestige, group dynamics also influence ongoing behaviour. They propose for a more complicated model of information action which includes individual, collective and process approaches, personal conditions and psychological factors, such as traits, values, motives, attitudes etc., and group dynamics like status of job, organizational necessities etc. however, information is not sought in all instances for more action. This is specially so for academicians who do not necessarily aim to solve a problem. It is more a questioning, reassessment and persuasion requiring a wider reading and awareness. (Kumar: 2004:127)
The user reaction to the information services and products available is totally interlinked with the library stuff. Any services or products are the result of the attempt made by the staff to identify and satisfy the demanded and the anticipated needs of the users. Because practically we don’t know when, why, what and where a particular source will be utilized, the librarian has to provide both the anticipatory and demanded information services. Therefore understanding user’s reaction to provided information services and products is essential. This will also enhance the understanding of the user need and win the user satisfaction.

The study of user and their needs is an attempt to identify patterns of use and levels of awareness of users towards library services to determine success or non success of services and what are to be needed in service strategy. The goals of the parent institution of the library are to satisfy the user needs of the institution. To create information awareness and to promote the user of information, it is necessary to know the needs of users. A communication between user and staff is essential to identify the requirements of the users. The environment of communication process can be created by the user education programme which is mainly concerned with providing guidance and instruction to the users in the proper use of the library collection, individually or collectively. Obviously such programmes are organized to ascertain the users’ information needs to help the users in expression of their requirements and enable them to use the library effectively and efficiently. Therefore to satisfy the user needs and understand user behaviour to information, it is very much essential to educate user.