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Library Users and Their Needs: A Preamble

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ABSTRACT

Library users have diverse needs, ranging from academic research and professional development to casual reading and community information, which libraries address through various services, collections, and user-focused programs like training and digital access. User groups can include general readers seeking leisure, specialized researchers needing in-depth resources, professionals requiring practical problem-solving tools, and students pursuing academic goals, with their specific needs varying over time. Libraries serve as vital knowledge hubs that cater to the diverse requirements of their users. The needs of library users vary according to their academic, professional, cultural, and personal interests. This study emphasizes the importance of identifying user expectations and behavior patterns to ensure effective resource utilization. It highlights the growing demand for digital access, user-friendly cataloguing systems, and personalized services in addition to traditional print resources. The findings underscore that user satisfaction depends not only on the availability of resources but also on accessibility, relevance, and quality of services provided. In this article, library users and their needs: a preamble has been discussed.

Keywords: *Library, Users, Needs.*

INTRODUCTION

Library users and their needs emphasizes that understanding diverse user groups and their varying demands—from basic readers to specialized researchers and non-reading users—is crucial for effective library service. By analyzing community demographics, user characteristics, and evolving information behaviors, libraries can use data-driven approaches to develop inclusive services, acquire relevant resources, and adapt to new technologies to meet the distinct information needs of each user, fostering continuous improvement and community engagement. By analyzing user profiles—such as students, researchers, teachers, professionals, and the general public—the study seeks to assess how libraries can adapt to evolving information-seeking behavior in a technology-driven era. Understanding these needs is crucial for enhancing library services, resources, and facilities. Hence, a systematic evaluation of library users and their needs is essential for shaping user-centric policies, ensuring inclusivity, and strengthening the library's role as a dynamic center of learning and knowledge dissemination. (Anuradha, P., 2017)

Libraries have long been recognized as vital institutions for the preservation, organization, and dissemination of knowledge. In today's information-driven society, the role of libraries extends far beyond the storage of books; they have evolved into dynamic centers of learning, research, and community engagement. The effectiveness of a library, however, depends largely on its ability to identify, understand, and address the diverse needs of its users. (Sharma, O. & Modak, A., 2019)



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Library users may include students, teachers, researchers, professionals, and the general public, each with distinct expectations and requirements. While some users seek academic or professional information, others turn to libraries for recreational reading, access to digital resources, or guidance in information literacy. Consequently, the modern library must offer a balance of traditional print materials, electronic resources, and user-friendly services that foster inclusivity and accessibility. (Dalve, D.P. & Nawathe, M.S.S., 2017).

Understanding the needs of users is essential for libraries to remain relevant and effective in the face of rapid technological advancements and changing patterns of information-seeking behavior. By conducting user surveys, analyzing usage patterns, and integrating feedback mechanisms, libraries can tailor their services to support both individual growth and collective progress. Thus, studying library users and their needs not only helps in the optimal utilization of resources but also ensures that libraries continue to serve as gateways to knowledge, culture, and lifelong learning. (Chatterjee, S., 2020).

LIBRARY USERS AND THEIR NEEDS

An academic library serves the students and teachers of a specific school, college or institution. Special library, attached to an R&D organization, serves personnel involved in research and development activities and a public library serves the local residents of a region. Thus, each library serves a specific user population. Each user group need information for some purpose or other. Information demands differ from person to person. When users need recent developments in their fields of interest on regular basis, the need is known as current information need. When user wishes to have complete and detailed knowledge, the need is known as exhaustive information need. This type of information need is generally sought by researchers. Everyday information need is for a specific information required by users in their day-to-day operations. The demand is generally for factual information normally available in conventional reference books. Catching-up information requirement arises when a user, not versed with a particular topic field, seeks an account of overall development of that subject in short and compact manner. (Burhansab, P.A., Batcha, M.S. & Ahmad, M., 2020).

Libraries utilize many approaches to carry out user research. These approaches are direct and indirect ways. Direct techniques are based on establishing contact with the users and active involvement of the users under study. While, indirect approaches are based on library's own analysis of its records and other sources, without the involvement of the people under study. (Trivedi, R., 2019).

Many libraries depend on analysis of their records and statistics, like, circulation records, reservation records, reference query files, etc .to determine the information requirements of their customers. These methods are known as indirect methods. Library records contain vital information. For example, records of reference inquiries and literature search can give an insight into the type of queries received, type of publications used and time needed to answer a query, etc. Similarly, circulation data can be studied to assess the activity of the library as well as to establish the reading patterns of library members. Indirect approaches provide useful information. However, for finding views of the user, indirect methods are not appropriate. For example, indirect approaches cannot provide information linked to user's thoughts about library services and his/her attitude, opinion, or preferences or conduct as an individual. It consequently, becomes vital to see or challenge them directly. (Chand, S., 2020).



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Libraries have traditionally stood as crucial institutions of knowledge, culture, and learning. In current times, their significance has extended beyond mere warehouses of books to vibrant centers of knowledge, technology, and community interaction. At the foundation of any library system are its users, whose needs, interests, and expectations determine the services, resources, and programs that libraries must supply. Understanding library customers is therefore crucial to ensuring that libraries stay relevant, responsive, and effective. (Rathna, P. & Divyananda, K., 2018).

The demands of library users differ among categories such as students, teachers, researchers, professionals, and the general public. Some seek academic resources for study and research, while others look for pleasure reading, cultural enrichment, or digital information services. The emergence of information and communication technology has led to a growing demand among users for access to e-resources, online databases, and remote services. Simultaneously, conventional necessities—such as tranquil study environments, reference support, and availability of printed resources—persist in their importance. (Anuradha, P., 2018).

Identifying these varied requirements is crucial for formulating library policy, infrastructure, and services. A user-centric strategy guarantees that libraries not only conserve and distribute knowledge but also adjust to the changing social, educational, and technological environment. Consequently, the examination of library patrons and their requirements constitute the basis for efficient library planning, resource distribution, and service provision. (Raja, T. & Kennedy, I.R.K., 2019).

Types of Library Users:

- General Readers: Seek light reading materials for entertainment, hobbies, and general knowledge.
- Academic Users: This group includes students and educators who need resources for assignments, research, and teaching.
- Researchers: Require comprehensive information to keep up-to-date, find new research areas, and avoid duplication of work.
- Professionals and Executives: Need information for day-to-day problem-solving, decision-making, and policy development in their fields.
- Specialized Users: Individuals with unique needs, such as visually impaired patrons or those seeking information on a narrow subject field.
- Non-Reading Users: Use library materials that are not books, such as audio-visual resources, or use the library as a community space.

Common User Needs:

- Access to Information: The fundamental need for current, comprehensive, and relevant materials, whether for research, study, or personal interest.
- Information Skills: Users need help finding and using information efficiently, leading to demand for training and user education programs.



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- Digital Resources: With the rise of e-based literature, users require easy access to online databases, eBooks, and other digital platforms.
- Specific Services: Depending on the user group, there is a need for services like interlibrary loans, specialized databases, and resources for specific needs like travel or job searching.
- A Welcoming Environment: Libraries serve as community hubs, and users often need spaces for study, meetings, and access to various community resources.
- Assistance: Users may need help from librarians to find the right resources, navigate complex information systems, and utilize library services effectively.

Understanding Library Users:

- Categorization: Users can be broadly categorized as general readers, subject-specific readers, and special (e.g., those with disabilities) or even non-reading users who use audio-visual materials.
- Demographics and Characteristics: Factors like social, economic, cultural, and professional background influence a user's information needs and behavior.
- User Studies: Methods such as questionnaires, interviews, and ethnographic approaches are used to gather data on user experiences and preferences, offering insights into user needs.

User Needs and Information Demands:

- Information Types: Needs can range from current awareness (requiring up-to-date information) to ad-hoc needs (for a specific, one-time purpose).
- Format Preferences: Users have diverse needs for information in various formats, including print, digital, and multimedia, depending on their technological literacy and the nature of the information.
- Accessibility and Inclusivity: Libraries must ensure their services and resources are accessible and inclusive for all community members, including those with disabilities.

Evolving Landscape and Library Adaptation

- Technological Shift: The rise of the internet and digital resources requires libraries to evolve beyond traditional roles, incorporating digital gateways and managing a variety of electronic formats.
- Digital Divide: Libraries must address challenges posed by the digital divide, ensuring both "digital natives" (familiar with technology) and "digital immigrants" (less familiar) receive appropriate support and training.
- Community Engagement: Libraries act as active community hubs, with user studies helping to align services with evolving community needs and foster engagement.
- Data-Driven Decisions: Libraries leverage data analytics to inform collection development, service enhancements, and resource allocation, promoting continuous improvement and strategic adaptation.



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Key Factors for Library Success:

- User-Centric Design: Libraries must be designed with the user in mind, from the layout and furniture to the accessibility of services.
- Accessibility: Services and information need to be accessible both physically and digitally, with options for users who cannot visit in person.
- Up-to-Date Information: Collections must be current and relevant, with a focus on providing the information users need to support their studies, research, and personal growth.
- Digital Transformation: Moving services online, creating user-friendly platforms, and leveraging the internet are critical for reaching users in the modern information landscape.
- User Education: Providing instruction and training helps users become more independent and skilled in finding and utilizing information resources.

Evolving Needs of Library Users:

- Demand for Speed and Ease: Users want quick access to information with minimal effort and efficient workflows.
- Flexibility: They require flexible structures for accessing and using information, often needing resources beyond the library's physical walls.
- Diverse Users: Libraries serve a diverse user base, from homogeneous academic and special library users to heterogeneous public library users, each with unique needs.
- Social and Community Roles: Beyond information provision, public libraries serve as "third places" for social connection and community engagement.

Challenges and the Path Forward:

- Budget Constraints: Libraries face economic challenges and budget cuts that can limit resources and staffing, impacting service delivery.
- Adapting to New Realities: Staff need to adapt to new tools and procedures, and libraries must move away from outdated systems and standards.
- Staff Wellbeing: To sustain quality service, libraries must prioritize the needs of their staff, fostering a supportive environment for librarians to continue serving patrons effectively.
- Ongoing Assessment: Regular user studies are crucial for understanding how well services meet user needs, identifying gaps, and ensuring user satisfaction.

Implications for Libraries:

- User-Centered Design: Services, collections, and physical spaces must be designed with user needs in mind to improve their satisfaction and foster engagement.
- Digital Integration: Libraries must provide robust digital gateways and electronically accessible resources, recognizing the growing reliance on online information and reducing the need for physical presence.



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- Enhanced Accessibility: Libraries should improve their accessibility by offering services like mobile libraries and user-friendly online portals, especially for patrons with mobility or other challenges.
- Effective User Education: Training programs are essential for helping users navigate complex information environments and utilize both traditional and digital resources effectively.
- Environment & Infrastructure: Libraries need to offer environments that meet user expectations, including quiet study areas, appropriate lighting, and comfortable furniture, as well as flexible spaces like 24-hour learning zones.
- Streamlined Workflows: Users expect simple, efficient online workflows and flexible database structures, which requires libraries to modernize their systems and integrate data more effectively.
- Addressing Frustration: Unmet needs can lead to user frustration, manifesting as negative behaviors. Libraries must ensure their resources and services meet user expectations to foster positive interactions.
- Staff Support & Retention: Libraries must support their staff, who face burnout from economic pressures and increasing demands, to ensure they can provide high-quality service and retain experienced employees.
- Advocacy for Resources: Libraries face external challenges such as budget cuts and legislative threats, requiring them to advocate for resources and policies that allow them to continue serving their communities effectively.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, understanding library users and their evolving information needs is essential for libraries to remain relevant and effective, requiring a shift from traditional collection-focused services to user-centered, flexible, and accessible models. This involves adopting digital tools, offering user education, and ensuring resources are current and easily accessible, whether in-person or online. By continuously assessing user satisfaction and adapting their services through user studies and feedback, libraries can fulfill their core mission of providing timely, relevant information to diverse communities. (Patil, V. & Fernandes, J. (2017).

Libraries play a vital role in meeting the diverse information, educational, recreational, and research needs of their users. Understanding user requirements is essential for designing effective library services, ensuring equitable access to information, and enhancing user satisfaction. Different categories of users—students, researchers, teachers, professionals, and the general public—approach libraries with varied expectations, ranging from academic support to lifelong learning and leisure reading. By continuously assessing these needs and adapting to technological advancements, libraries can remain relevant as knowledge hubs in both physical and digital environments. Ultimately, a user-centered approach not only strengthens the role of the library in society but also contributes to the personal growth, academic achievement, and intellectual empowerment of its community. (Tekale, R.B. & Dalve, D.B., 2017).



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