THE NEED FOR CATALOGUE USE STUDIES IN INDIAN LIBRARIES

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The importance of catalogue use studies, particularly in the context of database development for networking, is discussed. A review of literature on the subject reveals that most of the studies are conducted in western countries which may be grouped in three categories viz., i) user studies, ii) studies relating to search failures, and iii) experiments with methodological aspects. The need and importance of more such studies in the Indian context, particularly in view of library network development in the country, have been stressed.

INTRODUCTION

As library is the heart to an academic institution, so is catalogue to the library. “A library catalogue is an essential and important tool in a library. It is a must for library, especially when the collection becomes large. A library without a catalogue is like a town which has been developed without a plan. Without it, it would not be possible to know what is available and where” [1].

A catalogue is a major key to the holdings of any library which serves as a retrieval tool rather than an inventory. In whatever form and type the catalogue may be, it shows through varieties of approaches like authors, subjects, titles, series etc., what is available in the library. It is essential to assess from time to time the efficiency of such an important tool particularly in the context of modern development of information access.

NEED FOR CATALOGUE USE STUDIES

Focus on catalogue use studies in university libraries has assumed added significance due to proliferation and complexities of publications, users and their diversified demands and also, shrinking budget coinciding with the rising cost of book production. Study of user’s approach to find and locate a document helps to improve the effectiveness of a catalogue. As early as 1876, Cutter gave utmost importance to the convenience of the public while drafting his code ‘Rules for a printed dictionary catalogue’ [2]. Summarizing on card catalogue use studies, Gorman observed that, “the most vital aspect of cataloguing theory and practice which remains unexamined is the use made of the catalogue. Until the aim of catalogue construction has been clearly stated on the basis of the objective and accurate surveys of catalogue use, all cataloguing theory will remain unscientific and open to doubt” [3].

Many catalogue use studies, embracing all types of libraries and users, were conducted and reported in the literature of western countries. The growing realisation of the importance of catalogue use studies in India, though very limited, is reflected through a few Master's degree theses submitted by students of library and information science courses, and articles published in professional journals in India. Thus, there is vast scope and need for the studies in this area especially in the context of the development of library networks, such as, Information and Library Network (INFLIBNET). The successful operation of INFLIBNET depends on two pre-requisites — a) standardisation of cataloguing practice among the participating libraries, and b) automation of libraries. Catalogue use studies will help to establish the best practices in cataloguing and go a long way in making library networks like INFLIBNET, a success. This communication attempts to reflect on the need for catalogue use studies in Indian libraries based on the review of available literature. For convenience, the literature are examined under three broad groups:
THE NEED FOR CATALOGUE USE STUDIES IN INDIAN LIBRARIES

i) User studies;
ii) Studies relating to search failures; and
iii) Experiments with methodological studies.

i) User Studies

In this group, types of users' purpose and frequency of use and degree of efficiency of catalogue are considered.

Randall [4] observed that the improvement of the catalogue could not be done "by any study of catalogue themselves or of the rules by which they are made, neither can it be done merely by an examination of the books to be catalogued". But he pleaded for "an intelligent study of the patrons themselves, their mental equipment, their background knowledge and needs". Susan Grey Aker's study [5], based on 10 Liberal Arts Colleges, identified the bibliographical items used by undergraduate students. Rolland E. Stevens [6] and Frarey [7] have provided useful summaries on catalogue use studies. F.W. Lancaster [8] provided an excellent critical analysis of catalogue use studies.

American Library Association (ALA) [9] conducted a catalogue use study during 1955-56 in 39 libraries to identify actual user demands on the catalogues and to measure the extent to which these demands are satisfied. Tagliacozzo, et. al. [10] and Tagliacozzo and Kochen [11] reported on catalogue use study of the University of Michigan which covered users of one public library catalogue and three university library catalogues to investigate that aspect of information seeking behaviour which has to do with searching through four card catalogues which are like a directory. Another study of the University of Michigan General Library was conducted by Palmer [12] to determine who used the catalogue, for what purpose, in what way, with what degree of success and whether most of the users' requirements could be met satisfactorily with some of computer based catalogues. Lipetz [13] carried out a catalogue use survey at Yale University library for over three year period ending within 1970 to determine volume of catalogue use, characteristics of users, types

of searches conducted and degree of success attained. Brooks and Kilgour [14] reported on a study conducted during one week period in 1963 of the Yale Medical Library catalogue to determine the type of use. A study was conducted at Chicago University under the direction of Don R. Swanson [15] to find out information content of future catalogues and how well the information should be organised and made available to users.

In United Kingdom (UK) also a major catalogue use study was conducted in 39 libraries under the aegis of cataloguing and Indexing group of Library Association in 1971. Maltby reported the survey with both users and non-users [16]. Maclean [17] also reported a study of catalogue use in New Zealand. The questionnaire developed for the UK study was used almost unchanged in the New Zealand study. Ayres et. al. [18] reported on comparative accuracy of author versus title information brought by the users to the catalogue.

ii) Studies Relating to Search Failures

Lyon's [19] study at the University of Chicago on proportion of user failures and Riddle's study [20] on searching problems of catalogue use at the Texas State College for Women come under this category. Seymour [21] measured reader failure at the catalogue through catalogue query slips at four academic libraries in England. Perrine's study [22] on user difficulties at the catalogue also comes under this category.

iii) Methodological Studies

In these studies, methods other than observation, questionnaire and interview are used. Malcolm's [23] study at the University of Pittsburgh on searching effectiveness by simulation method, Spalding's study [24] of call slips at the Library of Congress, Quigley's [25] analysis of subject requests received from branch libraries by the inter branch loan office of the New York Public Library and Morris's study [26] at the University of New Castle Upon Tyne in England in which instant diary technique was used, are worth mentioning.
The above review shows that though the number of studies in the area are limited, yet they shed light on important aspects of catalogue use, viz., characteristics of users of libraries, causes for search failures and many related aspects. Most of the catalogue use studies selected a single population for their enquiry. They also covered various types of catalogues. In most cases either questionnaire or interview method formed the basis for eliciting information from the users. They have also contributed to methodological aspects like simulation, critical incident technique and diary method. But, all the studies are conducted in the western world. As such, they are of limited use, if any, to understand and reflect on the nature and problems of catalogue users in the third world countries.

**A CASE FOR CATALOGUE USE STUDIES IN INDIAN CONTEXT**

As mentioned earlier, in developing countries resource constraints and competing demands on resource allocation are likely to limit funding for library development at university level. This calls for efficient use of the available facilities through resource sharing. In fact, this is exactly what is sought to be achieved under INFLIBNET programme which aims at elimination of duplication and effective use of the available resources through inter library cooperation. To facilitate this process, plans are also afoot for computerization of the university library catalogues. Thus, the total absence of catalogue use studies of university libraries in third world countries and the compulsions of the challenging tasks that the university libraries are expected to meet, call for scientific studies to gauge the present status of catalogues in use. Such studies can broadly be classified into three types viz., a) before computerization, b) during computerization, and c) after computerization [27].

The scenario in Indian libraries is totally different from the western world where they have to serve different groups of users depending on the type of the library. Broadly, there are three types of libraries viz., academic, public and special. Out of these, special and academic libraries foster research, but the later also performs teaching function. Some of the special libraries attempted computerization while very few of the academic libraries are attempting for it. In general, Indian libraries are lagging behind the western countries in respect of modernisation. Primarily, this is due to lack/paucity of resources for modernisation, and inability of individual institutions to afford the implementation of the computerization programme. Secondly, technical manpower is not generated within the organizations to meet the change. As such, the funding agency like the U.G.C. should take initiative to engage teams of experts to study the available manual methods being followed in various libraries which are likely to be a part of the proposed network. On the basis of the studies, the data elements that are commonly required for computerization must be identified or a standard format be developed and followed unequivocally by all the libraries in the country so that whenever required they may join the network. This type of proposals are suggested for Indian conditions since libraries in India are at different stages of development, with varying sizes of collections, following different codes of practices and also different schemes of classification.

One of the objectives of INFLIBNET is computerization of libraries. Another objective is to train personnel in utilizing the computers for library requirements. So far, no effort has been made by INFLIBNET to directly participate in computerizing the libraries. It is only pulling the data collected from various participating libraries to develop a database relating to serials. The problems involved in computerization of participating libraries are: a) dearth of funds, and b) shortage of technically trained staff having knowledge of library requirements coupled with computer expertise. Hence, the need to recruit and train personnel in both the fields under the auspices of INFLIBNET arises. Participating libraries should divert some of their resources to train their own personnel to make this common endeavour a success. The participating libraries should examine their manual catalogues to identify the defects that are existing in such catalogues before going in for computerization. It is therefore, essential that more number of catalogue use studies, based on the different clientele requirements be conducted in various libraries.
THE NEED FOR CATALOGUE USE STUDIES IN INDIAN LIBRARIES

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