The library contributes to the achievement of the institution’s goals and objectives in teaching, research and services. The interest groups within the system play an important role in the library’s efforts to carry out its functions.

User occupies a key place in the library and information system. The objectives of this review of the state-of-the-art of user studies are:

(i) to find out information-seeking attitude of users
(ii) to indicate gaps in our knowledge of users
(iii) to suggest areas of user attitudes for research and
(iv) to outline techniques which might be useful for undertaking further research.

ATTITUDE OF USERS

For finding out information seeking attitudes of users the following questions may be asked:

a) What do users require from the library in terms of type, quality and range of services to satisfy their needs?
b) What does the user do about his/her needs?
c) How does the user select available resources?
d) How does the user carry out a search for information?

Need to Study ‘User’

There is a need to study user because:

a) User attitudes are essential considerations in the design of the library services;
b) Users have ways of doing things and these should be accommodated in the design of services; and
c) Users have ways of doing things that should be changed.

WHY USER STUDIES

The students and faculty are users of the academic library, towards whom all services are directed. Their attitudes reflect the extent to which the efforts of the librarians are successful in developing the resources & services of the library to meet their needs.

The reasons for conducting various user studies are:

(1) Identifying the actual strengths and weaknesses of library resources and services;
(2) Identifying the levels and kinds of user needs;
(3) Identifying faculty and student priorities for library resources and services;
(4) Identifying the limitations or problems which seem to discourage the use of the library;
(5) Identifying the level of involvement or participation of faculty and students in the library programme; and
(6) Improving the organization and planning for library services at both the local and national levels.

FINDINGS OF USER STUDIES

Many studies were conducted in USA and UK. The findings of major studies are given in the following lines:

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Line[1] conducted a survey of student attitudes to the university library at Southampton which revealed several problems and deficiencies and a number of changes in library policy and practice were instituted. The survey also revealed that women were more likely to use catalogues than men.

A follow-up study by Line & Tidmarsh[2] revealed some changes in student attitudes, some of which can fairly be attributed to the new policies. The two surveys are an excellent illustration of the concept of survey, policy evaluation, policy implementation and re-survey - a sequence which is rare in this field.

Urquhart & Schofield[3] conducted two major surveys to measure readers' failure at the shelves in three university libraries. The results of a failure survey will enable the librarian to establish priorities. The difference in rates of failure for different subject areas of the library may call for a reassessment of book purchasing policies. The third use of the survey is to have better understanding of reader problems and behavior.

Burns & Hasty[4] conducted a survey of user attitudes towards selected services offered by the Colorado State University libraries, and concluded that “most user studies have emphasized the descriptive rather than the analytical in their reporting and were conducted by practising librarians or information scientists with little or no attention to the adoption of rigorous methodology”.

Lord[5] conducted a survey on research user behaviour in university libraries with three objectives viz. to study user behaviour with the explanation of observed phenomena, the prediction of behaviour, and the control of behaviour by manipulation of conditions. The most important finding of this study on user behaviour is that it has yet to be demonstrated that the use of libraries has any definite influence on anything else.

Canarie[6] conducted a study on “attitudes of secondary school administrators towards school librarians and school library service” to assess the attitudes of secondary school administrators towards librarians’ personal attributes the capability or aptitude of the librarian for fulfilling the role, and the effectiveness of library service. The findings of the study suggested that the attitudes of secondary school administrators towards school librarians and towards school library service are highly positive.

Kennedy[7] in her study tried to explore the attitudes of academic librarians towards older adult users of the library. It was found that age is not necessarily a debilitative factor with regard to learning and motivation to learn in older adults.

Churchlands & Nedlands[8] carried out surveys of student attitudes to their respective college libraries in Western Australia. Information was sought on student attitudes to the college library and attitude scores were recorded by relating students' actual feelings about the college library, to their concepts of the "ideal" library. Detailed analysis of the data has yet to be undertaken for each library.

Miner-Van-Neygen[9] conducted his study of students' attitudes towards the behavioural approach to library and information sciences: an experiment involving the group as an agent of change, and revealed that there is a significant correlation between sex, level of exposure to the behavioural sciences.

Olanlokun[10] reported a study conducted to determine the attitudes of the major interest groups in Nigerian universities on library policy, use and service specifically, the attitudes of the faculty, students and librarians on adequacy of resources, quality of library collections and library services. The findings strongly suggested more interaction with the patrons. Users needs should also be given greater attention.

Dhyani[11] conducted a study with a sample of 100 readers at Rajasthan University Library. The study emphasized that there should be well-trained librarian offering reference service to the readers. The need for library instruction to readers in Rajasthan University Library is also stressed. Preparation of a manual like known your library is suggested for the readers. The dissemination of latest information to the faculty is also suggested.
SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

While a large number of studies of information needs have been carried out, results are difficult to compare directly owing to the lack of standardisation in methods.

We need to know more about the context in which information needs arise: this may involve studies of attitudes and environment surrounding members of the target group so that information seeking attitude may be better understood.

REFERENCES