Pattern of card catalogue consultation in a special library[*]

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ABSTRACT

A three day sample observation of card catalogue consultation by users at ISRO Satellite Centre (1SAC) Library has been made and results recorded. Users have been subsequently questioned about the purposes for which catalogue was consulted. The paper describes the card catalogue system of the library, the method followed and limitations of the study. The data in appropriate tables has revealed that classified catalogue is not used, Report Number Catalogue is least used and subject catalogue is consulted to the maximum. It is also found that more than half of the consultations of card catalogue are to locate documents, one-fourth is to interact with circulation system, one-tenth is to make a comprehensive search for references on a topic and rest for miscellaneous purposes. It is concluded, based on the results, that arrangement of charged out tray at circulation counter be changed to classified order and classified catalogue itself may have to be dispensed with.

KEYWORDS

User studies, use studies, card catalogue consultation, bibliographic access

INTRODUCTION

Library catalogues are largely based on a series of assumptions, which are not normally questioned from the point of view of needs of users. The number of studies on use of catalogues reported in the profession has been considerably less compared to large number of document use studies. In a recent study[1] it is estimated that more than fifty major catalog use studies have been done since 1930. From India, not even few such studies are reported.

In the present day popular card catalogue system the standard types of catalogues are assumed to be necessary based on traditional so called 'standard approaches' of users. A catalogue code is often meticulously followed for the choice of heading and description of the entry irrespective of type of library and nature of users.

Descriptions such as place of publication and collation and entries such as added entry for editor of a series are almost unnecessary. As such library catalogues have been silent victims of both over-enthusiastic and disbeliever of catalogue codes. In this connection "Cavan Mc Carthy has amusingly described the sanctification of cataloguing in some developing countries as a kind of handicraft art for art sake". [2] In a recent study about the description of catalog entry by different systems Gorman and Hotsinpiller came to "… the conclusion that, in many library environments, the conventional catalog entry description is largely useless"[3] and they advised the critics of conventional cataloguing to concentrate on real problems such as silly subject headings, unsought author heading and lack of reader orientation.

Library catalogue is only one of the many means by which users discover bibliographic references of their potential interest. So says Wilson "The catalog of a particular library is just one more piece of bibliography among thousands of others".[4] Analysing in a very unusual yet pragmatic way the objectives and functions of traditional catalog, keeping in view the requirements of users and the implications on online catalog, he traces the limitations of card catalog from its basic stated objectives. He further says "… the unique contribution of the catalog is after all … to help locate copies of books and texts that may have been learned about elsewhere".[5]

The objective of the present study is to examine the habits and attitudes of users towards the card catalog of the library by analysing how far the card catalogues of ISAC Library are used by scientists, engineers and other technical stat!, which type of catalogue is consulted more frequently (and obviously which is less consulted) and to examine closely the purposes for which the card catalogues are used.

CARD CATALOGUE OF THE LIBRARY

ISAC Library has a classified catalogue for books (about 14000 in number) based on UDC and a report number catalogue for technical reports (about 6000 in number) based on alphanumeric report numbers. A subject catalogue based on standard descriptors of NASA thesaurus, an author catalogue and a title catalogue are also maintained for the same books and reports in a combined way with colour codes to distinguish reports from books. An unit card method and AACR-1 for choice of heading and description are roughly followed with provision for analytical entries in selected cases.

METHOD

Observation and recording of user interactions with catalogues at central catalogue area of the library for about 24 hours randomly apread over a month during January 1985 has been done. Equal representation has been given for all timings of a working day (by dividing working day into eight hourly blocks) and to different days of the week. Thus a sample recording of card catalogue consultation during three working days (at 8 hours a working day) has been done. Each of the users who consulted the card catalogue during the sample period has been questioned immediately after his search to ascertain the purpose for which catalogue was consulted. During the period of the investigation, the library had about *1150* members. The majority of the collection of the library is oriented towards little over 800 core technical staff members of the parent organisation.

LIMITATIONS

For clarity's sake we may note here that catalogues of standards and bound *(back)* volumes of journals kept separately are not covered in the study. Secondly, title catalogue has been developed recently. i.e., since last *3-4* years and hence it covers only about half of the books and reports available at the library. Searching strategies of users, difficulties faced, multifaced search, repeated sear consulting library staff, abandoning a search and results of search such as success/failure rate in retrieving a desired reference, description of the catalog entry, the length of time spent at catalog etc. are not examined in this study. Nor any comparison of use of catalog with user characteristics is planned. As such, to that extent this should not be thought of as a comprehensive catalogue use study. The study also excluded the use of card catalogue by library staff. Thus it is a simple exploratory catalogue use survey based on observation and interview methods to find out the habits and attitudes of users about the library card catalog. However, the total number of failures of catalog search and retrieval of desired reference/document are found to be very few due to extensive personal reader assistance rendered by professional staff and the regular corrections carried out in catalogues as and when errors are detected. The two type of failures left out of the study are searches of users with incorrect and/or incomplete details of a document and searches for documents not available in the library. A large majority of former failures have lead users to a second trial with either slightly modified author, title or subject heading with the same catalogue or another type of catalogue. As many as *35* users in the survey have attempted, as first trial to consult the author catalogue with incomplete and/or incorrect name of the author and later switched over to subject catalogue. Such unsuccessful first consultations on the author catalogue have been

excluded from the data. In other words, data about one consultation of each user is recorded in this study. The data is slightly under represent the use of catalogue due to obvious difficulties in recording the data.

DATA

Table 1 gives a picture of consultation pattern of different types of catalogues during the survey period. Thirty two persons have consulted the card catalogue of the library on a working day. Out of total 96 consultations, a maximum of *52* searches or *54.2%* of total searches have been made on subject catalogue followed by 34 searches on author, 8 on title and 2 on report number catalogues.[6] No user has searched the classified catalogue.

TABLE I

Number of Consultations of Catalogue
During 24 hour Sample Period

Catalogue Type	Consultations	
	No.	%
Subject	52	54.2
Author	34	35.4
Title	8	8.3
Report Number	2	2.1
Classified	0	0.0
Total	96	100.0

The same data of card catalogue consultation is presented in Table 2 against eight hourly blocks of a working day.

TABLE 2

Catalogue Consultation at Different Hours of a Working day

Hours	Consultations in a 3 hour sample (for each hourly block)	
	No.	%
9 - 10	7	7.3
10 - 11	11	11.5
11 - 12	6	6.3
12 - 13	8	8.3
13 - 14	17	17.7
14 - 15	13	13.5
15 - 16	19	19.8
16 - 17	15	15.6
Total	96	100.0

By questioning users, different purposes of consulting card catalogue have been elicited. The purposes have been broadly divided into six groups and the same data is presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3

Purposes of Card Catalogue Consultation

Sl. No.	Purpose of consultation/ Information sought	Consultations No.	%
1.	Call number to locate document	54	56.3
2.	Accession number to check its issue status in circulation system	24	25.0
3.	References on a topic/subject	9	9.4
4.	Report number to locate document	5	5.2
5.	References of an author	2	2.1
6.	More details of a document	2	2.1
	Total	96	100.1

The natural question which arises out of the inquiring into purposes of searching in card catalogue is that how these purposes are related to different types of catalogues consulted. So the data has been reformatted and presented in Table 4 to facilitate how purposes of catalogue consultation is distributed among different types of catalogues.

TABLE 4

Purpose of Card Catalogue Consultation Versus Type of Catalogue

Type of Catalogue	Codes for Purposes of Consultation*						Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Subject	30	9	9	3	0	1	52
Author	17	14	0	0	2	1	34
Title	7	1	0	0	0	0	8
Report Number	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
Classified	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	54	24	9	5	2	2	96

Key:*, For codes see Sl.No. in Table 3

DISCUSSION

A defined set of about 800 technical staff members of ISAC were earlier asked through a questionnaire about how they get relevant references of their requirements. Out of 535 responded, 367 (69%) have expressed that library catalogue is one of the sources for getting references, (two have not answered and three have become invalid responses) and the rest of 163 (31%) opined that they do not consider library catalogue as a source for references. As mentioned earlier, library catalogue supplements other sources or means to which users have access. "Based on a review of the literature Meyer summarised, most people avoid the catalog when they can. Many particularly in public libraries, never use it at all".[7] It was also acknowledged by others that the nonuse of card catalogues may not be limited to a particular type of library and it may be a universal phenomenon. Further some users find books by browsing the shelf and consulting the colleagues and library staff. As stated earlier, learning about references may be elsewhere than from catalogue alone. The relative importance of other sources for getting references/documents according to above questionnaire survey in terms of

percentage of users depending as against not depending are: Consulting colleagues and fellow professionals (68%), Searching in library shelves (61%), Consulting experts in the field (51%), Citations in current reading materials (48%), abstracting and indexing periodicals/journals (47%), References from bibliographies and review literature (45%), Consulting library staff (40%), and Current awareness bulletins of library (39%).

Looking at the data presented in the previous section, it is very difficult to say whether 32 consultations of card catalogue by users in a day is adequate or not. But the relative use of different types of catalogues has some lessons for the library. It is evident from Table 1 that none of the sample searches are made on classified catalogue. If so, one would wonder at the utility of the classified catalogue. Is it just to satisfy the theory of cataloguing or cataloguer's or librarian's ego? Keeping in view the fact that the cost, time, and efforts needed to create and maintain classified catalogue are same as that of an author or a title catalogue, it is certain that its non-use does not justify its presence in a special library. In a slightly different context an experimental study showed that **"...** the card catalog does not have a significant influence on circulation..." in a public library and hence the author concluded that "Serious consideration should be given to the amount of time and money expended on cataloging and classification. Perhaps the less expensive bookstore model, where card catalogs are not available and where users locate materials in a browsing, is worthy of further study and exploration."[8]

The meager use of the report number catalogue (vide Table 1) is partly due to the fact that reports themselves are very much less used than books[9]. It is widely accepted that technical reports are more frequently known by their report number and as such reports are arranged alphanumerically by report number and the report number catalogue is the 'classified catalogue' for reports.

There is a heavy use of subject catalogue suggesting that users depend more on subject approach through natural language than other attributes. This implies that it is worth putting more efforts in subject indexing by the Library.

Table 2 has shown how on a typical day the library card catalogues are used. While first half of the day (first 4 hours tilt lunch) has resulted in one-third of the total use with maximum of 11 searches (for 24 hour sample) around morning tea break, in the second half of the day the rest of two-third of consultations are made with maximum of 19 searches (for 24 hour sample) around afternoon tea break. This typically matches with visit of users and inhouse use pattern of the Library reported earlier.[10]

The data on purposes for which users have consulted card catalogue has shown that a majority (54 out of 96) wanted to know the call numbers of books and another five wanted to know report numbers of reports in order to locate them on shelves. Twenty four of the 96 consultations are made to know the accession numbers of books and reports which is a prerequisite of the circulation system to know checked out status and to reserve a document checked out to other users or sent for binding. Nine searches were made to retrieve references on a particular topic or subject. These are quite comprehensive searches for retrieving multiple references. Lastly, two consultations each were made on catalogues to know documents of specific authors and to know more details of vaguely known documents, in other words, more than half of the use of card catalogue is to locate specific documents, another one-fourth of the use is towards aiding circulation system to find out the checked out status of documents and possibly to reserve if checked out, one-tenth of the use is for comprehensive subject search and the rest for miscellaneous purposes.

Some interesting observations can be made on the data at Table 4 wherein the purposes of consulting different types of catalogues has been presented. Nine comprehensive searches for retrieving references of a particular topic are naturally made on subject catalogue. Though classified catalogue could also be of some help for the purpose due to reasons mentioned earlier and also due to two stage search (involving an additional step of finding out class number) no user has consulted classified catalogue. Further two consultations of card catalogue to know documents of specific authors have also been naturally made on author 'catalogue. In two cases where more details of vaguely known documents are needed subject and author catalogues were consulted once each.

Out of five persons 'who consulted card catalogue to know report numbers of vaguely known reports three have searched in subject catalogue and two in report number catalogue. Surprisingly, users are not searching for reports in either author or title catalogue questioning thereby the need for author and title catalogues for reports. Of the 24 persons who sought accession number of documents, a majority (ie. fourteen) of them new names of authors. They are expected to be either repeated users of the documents or those who had correct references through other sources or both. Out of the rest of ten persons seeking accession number, nine searched in subject catalogue and one in title catalogue.

It is quite interesting to note that thirty out of 54 users who wanted to know location or call number of documents have searched in subject catalogue. Out of the rest, 17 used author

catalogue and 7 used title catalogue to locate a document. In this process, the flexibility of the subject catalogue has helped majority to concretise vague assertions about documents. Though, no conclusion can be drawn about use of title catalogue (since it is incomplete) it is obvious from the limited data that title catalogue is more used than classified catalogue. On the other hand, author catalogue is approached more when the name of the author is fairly known.

CONCLUSION

This study clearly establishes the nonuse of the classified catalogue of ISAC Library. Under the given circumstances, it may not be necessary for library to keep classified catalogue as well as shelf list. Before a final decision about classified catalogue is taken, it may be worth building, on experimental basis, an alphabetical part of the classified catalogue with class index entries to ascertain that classified catalogue is not needed at all. In case it is established, it may be worth dispensing with classified catalogue and any query to classified catalogue can be tackled with the help of subject catalogue and shelf list. The only difficulty would be in respect of compilation of quick and short reading lists based on classified catalogue.

On the other hand, subject catalogue is found to be heavily used and hence more attention and care in subject indexing is worth.

The present practice of providing access by first two authors in case of author catalogue and extent of utility of title catalogue may have to be examined further separately.

The card catalogue consultation at ISAC Library on a typical day follows a bimodal roughly symmetric distribution like user visit to library and inhouse use of library documents reported earlier.[10]

One important result of the present study is that there is a need to change the arrangement of the charged tray (of circulation system) from accession number of the document to call number/report number. The purposes of card catalogue consultation revealed that one-fourth of the total consultations on catalogues are to know accession numbers of the books or reports. Further user is very much burdened by demanding him to know/use both call number/report number to locate a document and accession number to interact with circulation system.

By and large, subject, author and title catalogues were more used than report number and classified catalogues. Subject catalogue with its flexibility of multiple keywords and dictionary arrangement of natural language words has attracted more users seeking books and reports on a particular topic, those searching for call number or accession number of a known document and those seeking more details of vaguely known documents. The author and title catalogues are found unpopular (or unused) as far as technical reports are concerned and the practice of indexing reports by author and title may also be discontinued.

As pointed out earlier, further studies about various other assumptions of the card catalogues from the point of view of needs and approaches of users is necessary. Finally, many other interpretations and inferences of the above data are possible. As an example, one can see the obvious implications of this study on automating the catalogues of the library.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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6. "Sidney Jackson in <u>Catalog</u> Use <u>Study</u>, found that in one study of 7,000 large university users, about *52* percent of users made subject searches and about 48 percent made known- item searches", see <u>Quantitative methods</u> in <u>librarianship: standards,</u> <u>research,</u> <u>management</u>. Proceedings and papers of a Institute held at the Ohio State University, 3-16 August 1969, ed. by Irene Braden and Alice S Clark, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1972, (contributions in Librarianship and Information Science, No.4) pt. I Group Discussion, p 24-25. Almost same percentage of searches made on subject catalogue is found in the present study.

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