Information-seeking behaviour of university teachers in Sri Lanka in the field Management Studies

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Abstract

Studying the information-seeking behaviour of users is very important for librarians and information services providers while planning and designing information services for their clientele. Information-seeking patterns can vary according to the user's educational background, subject disciplines, psychological environment, personal relations in the library and the setting of the library. Demand for information in the field of management studies has increased due to the improvement of managerial participation in both government-sector and private-sector industries. A number of universities have established separate departments for conducting courses on Management Studies and the libraries of these universities too have given emphasis to providing the information required in the field of Management Studies. In this context, this study explores the nature of the information-seeking behavior of users who are engaged in teaching and learning management disciplines in the universities of Sri Lanka. The findings made in this study reveal that the resource collections in the university libraries are not qualitatively and quantitatively adequate to fulfill the demands experienced in Management Studies. IT-related facilities and document delivery facilities should be developed while improving awareness progrrmmes for users.

Introduction

Information-seeking behaviour involves the searching, locating, retrieving, and using of information. This process is influenced by the personality, emotional variables, educational variables and demographic variables of the person who seeks information. The information searching and acquisition process has several components such as passive attention, passive search, active search and ongoing search (Aaker, et.al., 1992). Active search and the ongoing search are very important in the educational sector, as active information handling is required for the acquisition of knowledge. Ongoing search is highly required in the teaching, learning, and research and as this type of search involves a basic framework of ideas, beliefs, values, or any other requisites to update or expand one's knowledge.

According to Taylor (1991 P.230), there are eight classes of information use: enlightenment, problem understanding, instrumental, factual, conformational, projective, motivational and personal or political. These classes depend on the variety of levels and ways used in viewing problems and anticipated resolutions.

Many Librarians and information managers tend to study the information-seeking behaviour of the users so that they can identify the information needs and seeking patterns the users maintain and then can design and implement information services to satisfy their requirements. This is very essential in supplying and managing information in an environment of highly increasing information supper-glut.

The availability of information sources has drastically increased in all fields in various forms and formats during the last two decades. As the emergence of the so-called information super-glut, professionals, scholars, and the public interested in various fields tend to seek for various tools, strategies and techniques to evaluate, filter and select the most relevant information for their needs. Information needs also cause changes to the development of technology, socio-economic environment and the requirements in a sophisticated lifestyle. Most situations related to economy, education, culture, and politic are highly information-led and the availability of information is the factor that determines the strength and development in all social components. Information has become a commodity in the new age, which is kown as "information age".

A priority has been given to Management Studies all over the world for a number of decades, as a result of the development of managerial participation in the government sector as well as in the private sector organizations. The major aim of modern industries is to achieve a higher productivity level through proper management. Many of industries tend to recruit personnel with higher managerial qualities. Meanwhile, universities and other higher educational institutions have introduced various courses on Management Studies to fulfill the demand from the industrial sector personnel and from job seekers as well.

In Sri Lanka, due to the development of private sector industries, Management Studies have attracted a higher attention, especially during the last two decades. Many management personnel tend to seek for management courses in various fields from basic degree to higher degrees, and several universities in Sri Lanka have started Management Study programms to cater for this demand. Now management is taught as a discipline and also has been integrated with other courses such as Engineering, Social Science, Industrial Administration and even with Medicine. A number of universities in Sri Lanka have established separate departments for Management Studies while some universities such as University of Ruhuna and University of Colombo are maintaining separate faculties for Management & Financial Studies. Courses are conducted from the basic degree level to the MBA level. Meanwhile several private institutions also conduct various management programmes to educate the management community.

Teaching and learning are greatly associated with the handling of information and the libraries play a prominent role in the provision of information sources and services to facilitate the teaching and learning process. Especially, academic libraries have a prominent role in providing information to the teaching and learning communities to enable them easy and timely access to the desired kind of information. Academic libraries are involved in planning, designing and implementatig information services in their respective institutions and the librarians contrive strategies to develop information skills among the users in their institutions. Libraries are required to identify the needs and wants of the users and study their information-seeking behaviours in order to design the ways and means to promote the use of library facilities.

Many studies have investigated the nature of information-seeking behaviour of users in different fields of discipline. Yet studies on the information-seeking behaviour of the users in the field of

Management Studies seem to be overlooked in Sri Lanka. It is also very rare to find literature on information-seeking behaviour of Management Studies users. Having recognized this gap the present author makes an attempt to research the information needs and wants and the informaton-seeking behavioural patterns of the user in the fields of Management Studies.

The objective of this paper is to explore the nature and patterns of information-seeking behaviour of the teachers in the departments of Management Studies in the universities of Sri Lanka. Attempts are made to investigate the information needs towards the curriculum related activities, research and personal matters. The study also attempts to identify the purpose of information seeking, the satisfaction provided by the information sources and services available in the library, and the problems the users encounter in their information behaviour. Emphasis is made on investigating the effectiveness of information services related to Management Studies in the university system of Sri Lanka.

Methodology

This study employs an exploratory survey method and a structured questionnaire as a research technique to collect primary data from the sample. The sample population was selected proportionately from teachers related to Management Studies in the universities of Sri Lanka. The total samples was 168 teachers selected from Universities of Ruhuna, Sri Jayawardanapura, Rajarata, Sabaragamuwa and the Post-Graduate Institute of Management at the University of Sri Jayawardanapura.

Findings and Conclusion

The respondents were engaged in teaching, learning and research under various subject areas. In the investigation of the preferred mean of information sources, the majority of respondents (89%) indicated that they prefer the combination of electronic and printed resources. The responded group preferred only electronic resources was 5%. This indicates that university libraries should have a qualitatively and quantitatively comprehensive resource collection. The content of the collection should cover the printed materials as well as the electronic resources required in various fields. The present university environment has not developed to utilize purely digital resources but there is a tendency to use more digitized information sources in addition to printed materials.

In relations to the satisfaction of the availability of resources in the lending section, 92.42% of respondents have indicated that the amount of resources available was not satisfactory. Only 18.18% of the respondents accepted that the available reference services were adequate and updated; and 81.82% of the respondents were not satisfied with the currency of the information sources and services. Therefore, the content of the resource collection does not meet a satisfactory level. Therefore the university libraries should update their collection with current resources as well as with a number of copies to meet the demand from the increasing user population.

The purpose of information seeking varies according to the needs of the respondents. Among the objectives of using the library, users have shown that they use the library for higher education, teaching, learning research activity, broadening the subject knowledge and obtaining information for day-to-day requirements. Table 1 indicates how the respondents ranked the purposes of information seeking.

Table 1 - Purpose of information seeking among users of Management studies

Purpose   **Rank order**

Purpose	Sri J-Pura	Ruhuna	Rajarata	Sabaragamuwa	Wayamba	Postgraduate – Colombo
Further education"	1	1	1	1	1	1
Teaching	2	4	4	3	2	2
Research	3	2	3	2	3	3
Improve subject knowledge	4	3	2	4	4	4
Other needs	5	5	5	5	5	5

Highest demand for information services occurred in the fields of Management and Economics while the most preferred form of information was the combination of printed and electronic formats. Regarding the medium, both Sinhala and English languages were required. This indicates that the medium of local language or foreign language is not a matter but the content.

Most of the users expect a well-developed, updated and comprehensive lending service. The study shows that the users are not satisfied with the available lending collection because the majority of the users are of the view that the content in the lending collection was not adequate to fulfill their needs. This issue highly occurs in the newly established universities than in the old universities.

The majority of the users are satisfied with the content of the extra-curricula resources at the library. A 54.55% group of respondents indicated that they found extra-curricula resources they required at the library. The study also reveals that the subject coverage of the content has increased while the university is getting old and matured. That means old universities have a more comprehensive collection than that of new universities.

A group of 57.58% of the teachers agreed that required journals are updated. Majority of users have indicated that journal collection in the Library do not meet their demand. Journals available are not adequate and not updated. The same result is seemed in the reference section too.

Of the respondents, 83% were satisfied with the photocopying service available at the library while 42% were satisfied with the inter-library loan service. In relation to the document delivery, the photocopy facilities recorded a higher level of satisfaction. Inter-library loan service, current awareness services and selective dissemination of information service seem to include poor practices.

Self-search was the most preferred mechanism. The most preferred tool for searching and locating the resource was the computer catalogue. Quite a large number of users seek for the librarians help. Figure 1 shows a picture of the preferred search:

Figure 1- Preference of searching
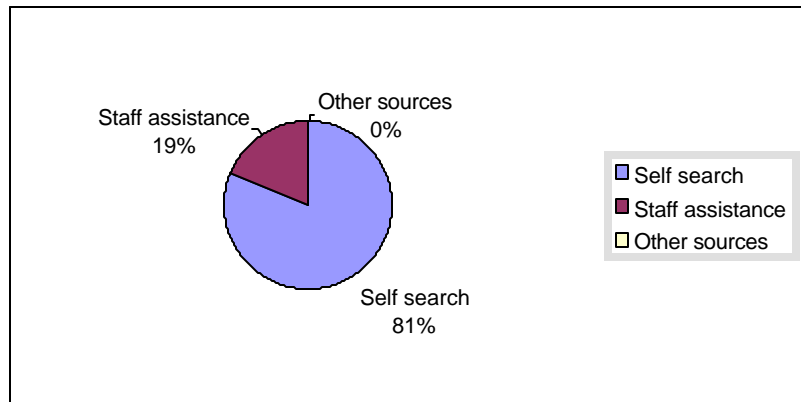
This also reveals that the users have a tendency for self-searching in IT facilitated environments while users seek for staff assistance in libraries where the staff-user relationship is higher. Figure 2 indicates the picture of self-search tendency in university libraries.

Figure 2 - Self-search tendency
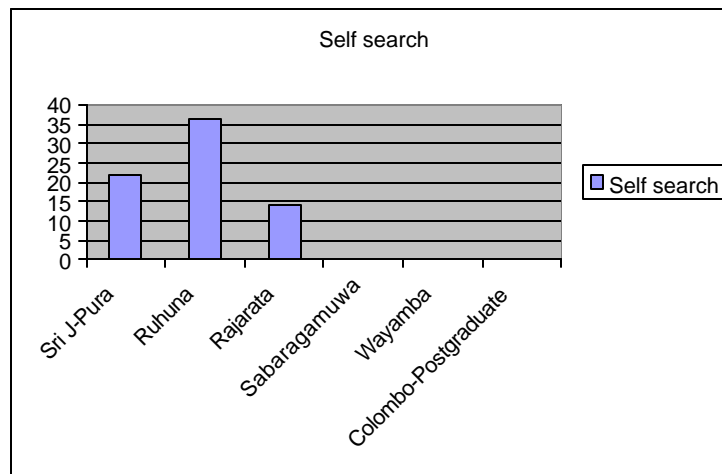
This study also focused the use of new technology in the information seeking at the library. The use of common ICT facilities such as internet search, use of E-mail and facsimiles are explored.

Figure 3 gives a picture of using internet, e-mail, and fax for their information seeking in individual universities.

Regarding the use of new information sources, 50% of users tended to use CD Roms. The rate of using online databases for their information seeking was 33%. Thus, quite a considerable number of users tend to use new information sources.

Figure 3 – Use of internet, e-mail , and fax for their information seeking
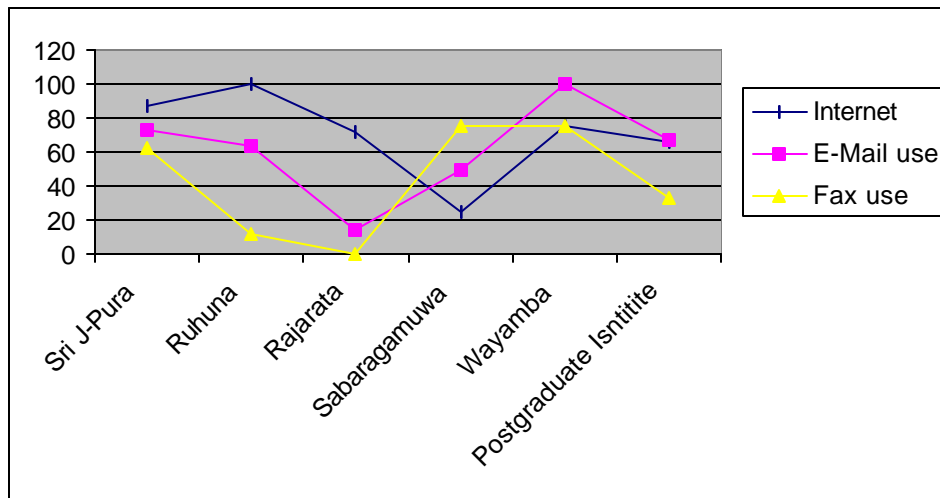
Apart from the major services of the library, the inter-library loan service achieved a highest demand. Of the respondents, 56% have indicated that inter-library loan service is essential, while 12.12% of the sample expressed that the library needs to implement database services. The respondent rate that required internet access in the library was 9.09%.

The seeking patterns vary from university to university depending on the availability of facilities and the academic level of learning environment that exists in the university. Following are the seeking mechanisms in the order of the preference of respondents:

1. Computer catalogue search

2. Shelf browsing

3. Request the assistance of the staff

4. Traditional catalogue use

5. Search new accession lists

6. Search in the visual index

Users have various problems in the information seeking behaviour. Following are the problems that respondents indicated in the study:

1. New books and journals are not available at the library.

2. It takes a long time for the purchasing and processing of resources.

3. Resources are not frequently updated.

4. No proper searching/retrieving mechanisms are available.

5. Not enough reference sources such as handbooks, dictionaries are available.

Suggestions

Considering the above factors, the university libraries have to design and implement more comprehensive resource collections and facilitate the users with new ICT-related information services. The content of the resource collection should be covered with fully structured resources rather than semi-unstructured resources. Awareness programmes should be designed and implemented to encourage the users in exploring their information through self search.

The following suggestions are made to enhance the information seeking behaviour of the users in the university libraries.

1) Digitizing of resource to facilitate users with multiple access and easy to use.

2) Increase Internet access facilities in the library. Internet is a useful tool to search and locate information in a desired field. Multimedia lab in the library is popular in University of Ruhuna.

3) Programms should be conducted by the library to develop information skills among the users. Especially, the users should be educated on how to filter information retrieved from the internet. Just the availability of sources is not adequate. The marketing of the library services is important to convey the message to users.

4) Support and suggestions from the user groups will be very important in the selection of resources to the library. Mechanisms should be implemented to gather suggestions and recommendations from user groups, curriculum development committees, and the relevant bodies of the parent organization. This will help in the designing of objectives, setting of goals, and selecting of strategies to acquire resources. Proper relationships with booksellers, publishers and authors are very much effective in this sense.

5) Proper management is required in the course of acquisition of resources, processing and shelving of resources to ensure the timely availability of resources in the library.

6) Subscribing to digital resource, such as e-books, e-journals under consortia or individually may help to manage the financial restrictions.

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