

# USE OF RSS FEEDS BY LIBRARY PROFESSIONALS IN INDIA

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## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this study was to investigate the use of RSS by library professionals in India. A structured online questionnaire was posted in LIS-forum mailing list to collect data for the study. The study found that majority of the respondents are aware of RSS and they are using it for providing various library services. Majority of the respondents use RSS several times a day and most of them subscribes new RSS feeds through search engines. Current Awareness Service and news updates are the major RSS based services provided by librarians. According to a majority of the respondents the major disadvantage of RSS is that not every website offer RSS feed. This study provides useful information about the current use of RSS by the library professionals in India.*

**Keywords:** Internet, World Wide Web, RSS, Communication, Web 2.0, Library 2.0, Library Professionals, India.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

New technologies have probably already changed the way most librarians work as well as their work environment. Email and Instant Messaging are already under use and newer tools are emerging as part of the Web 2.0 technologies. Blogs, podcasts, wikis, photo-sharing, social bookmarking, mash-ups, tag clouds and Really Simple Syndication are some of these technologies that can be used for providing innovative library services.

RSS (Really Simple Syndication or Rich Site Summary, or RDF (Resource Description Framework) Site Summary) is a web content syndication format used to publish frequently updated works - such as blog entries, news headlines, audio, and video - in a standardized format. An RSS document is actually an XML formatted text file and it includes full or summarized text, plus metadata such as publishing dates and authorship and it is usually called a “feed”. A standardized XML file format allows the information to be published once and viewed by many different programs. They benefit readers who want to subscribe to timely updates from favorite websites or to aggregate feeds from many sites into one place.

RSS feeds can be read using software called an "RSS reader", "feed reader", or "aggregator", which can be web-based, desktop-based, or mobile-device-based. Many sites that offer RSS feeds have an “RSS” or “XML” button on the homepage that can be clicked for adding that feed to an aggregator. Most of the sites are also providing an orange RSS feed icon that can be clicked for subscribing the corresponding feed. In some cases, an aggregator may require that the URL be copied and pasted into the program. A feed can be deleted from an aggregator with a single click. The RSS reader checks the user's subscribed feeds regularly for new work, downloads any updates that it finds, and provides a user interface to monitor and read the feeds. RSS allows users to avoid manually inspecting all of the websites they are interested in, and instead subscribe to websites such that all new content is pushed onto their RSS reader when it becomes available.

RSS has been adopted to syndicate a wide variety of content, ranging from news articles and headlines, wiki pages, project updates, and even audiovisual data such as radio programs. The content summaries contain just enough information without overwhelming the reader with superfluous details. If the reader is interested and wants additional information they can click on the item in the feed, accessing the website which contains additional details. RSS is a great supplemental communication method that does not burden the publisher with maintaining lists or following strict privacy guidelines. Publishers no longer need to be concerned with spam, privacy policies, and age guidelines. As per the statistics from syndic8.com (a search and indexing engine for RSS feeds) more than 700000 (Seven Hundred Thousand) RSS feeds are

available in the web including more than 32,000 (Thirty Two Thousand) professionally published sources such as the BBC, CNN and The New York Times.

Many blogs are catalogued in an RSS feed, with each blog entry summarized as a feed item. This makes it easy for visitors to scan blog posts for items of interest. Articles are often placed into feeds to alert readers when new articles and content are available. Many forums now have add-ons that allow participants to receive forum posts via RSS. The RSS feeds often will show the latest discussion topics; if users are interested they simply click to enter the forum to participate in the discussion. As the topic is updated they will see new entries in the RSS feed. Schools, clubs and organizations will often use feeds to communicate meeting times, places and events that might be occurring. The RSS feeds are often used to publicize events, notify the community of schedule changes or meeting agendas. Retail and online stores have begun using RSS feeds to deliver their latest specials and discounted offers. Some online retailers have taken this step further, allowing users to create their own feeds based on keywords or phrases. Companies or individuals interested in receiving headline news based on a specific brand or keyword can use RSS feeds to monitor news sources. Technical professionals in specific industries have also developed RSS feeds as way to market, promote or communicate within their specific industries. In many cases, this has expanded their reach and increased communication with current and prospective customers and clients. Content feeds can also be used by universities to communicate sports scores or event schedules. Computer service professionals can create feeds to notify clients of potential security breaches, virus risks or outbreaks. Ultimately, RSS is molded to meet the communication needs of many sectors.

In the early days of RSS, users needed separate reader or aggregator applications for their RSS subscriptions. Increasingly, Web browsers and even operating systems incorporate RSS functionality, giving a much wider range of users access to RSS feeds through applications they already use. Now apart from the standalone RSS aggregators some browsers, such as Mozilla Firefox and Internet Explorer 7, include RSS functions within them. It should also be noted that now RSS consumption is not limited to desktop applications alone – PDAs, smart phones, tablets and other wireless devices can be set up to receive RSS feeds. Its ability to deliver short news messages

in text-only format makes it the most efficient content delivery method for small screen devices. (Joly, 2006)

The potential of RSS as means of effective communication can be utilized by librarians for providing various novel services. Even though there are many types of RSS feeds, news and blog updates are the most common use of RSS. Hammond et al (2004) describe some of the feeds that science publishers are starting to provide, including other content aside from Journal Tables of Contents, such as citation alerts, news, jobs, product releases, press releases, reviews and events. Some important application of RSS feeds which are identified by Gold Dust Project (2006) as useful for academics and researchers are journal tables of contents, calls for papers, forthcoming conference and events announcements, funding opportunities, new theses and dissertations, new book announcements, subject related news, new items in institutional repositories, professional society news, patents and new teaching and learning resources announcements.

## **2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

There have been many studies focused on different aspects of RSS. Mahamood and Richardson (2011) conducted a study on Web 2.0 applications in the websites of 100 member academic libraries of the Association of Research Libraries (USA). All libraries were found to be using various tools of Web 2.0. Blogs, micro logs, RSS, instant messaging, social networking sites, mashups, and podcasts were widely adopted, while wikis, photo sharing, presentation sharing, virtual worlds, customized webpage and vertical search engines were used less. Libraries were using these tools for sharing news, marketing their services, providing information literacy instruction, providing information about print and digital resources, and soliciting feedback of users. Shi and Chen (2011) conducted a study about application of Web 2.0 in Chinese university libraries. The top 30 Chinese university libraries were selected to investigate the application of Web 2.0 technologies. Two-thirds of Chinese university libraries deployed one or more Web 2.0 technologies. RSS was the most widely applied, while Wikis was the least. Tripadi and Kumar (2010) conducted a study on

the use of Web 2.0 in academic libraries. The purpose of this study was to provide a reconnaissance of major academic libraries located in Australia, Canada, the U.K. and U.S.A. that have embraced Web 2.0 tools for enhancing library services. RSS, Instant Messaging and blogs were popular in academic libraries.

Mu (2008) conducted a study to assess the use of RSS feeds and social book marking tools. In this study the investigator discussed how the advent of new technologies such as RSS and social book marking tools have enhanced traditional emailing alerting service and provide dynamic tool for students to keep abreast of new literature and developments in their subject field. Linh (2008) conducted a study on Web 2.0 in Australian university libraries. At least two-thirds of Australasian university libraries deployed one or more Web 2.0 technologies. Harinarayana, Kumar and Pradeep (2007) conducted a study on RSS based information services in libraries. The study covered 30 library websites which provides RSS feeds and the results indicated the use of RSS has grown tremendously in last few yeras. Clyde (2004) conducted a study about library blogs and it is found that among the 55 weblogs selected for study only less than half provided an RSS feed.

In general the use of RSS are studied and discussed at different levels. However studies that focus on the use of RSS by the library professionals in developing countries like India are not seen. Thus, there are gaps in this area that are available for future research. This study provides an insight into the current use of RSS among the library professionals in India. Librarian's awareness about RSS, the purpose of use and degree of implementation are some of the objectives of the study. This paper will enable library professionals in India to intensify their efforts to enhance the use of RSS for providing value added information using emerging interactive web environments.

### **3. RESEARCH DESIGN**

The universe of the study was confined to the library professionals subscribing lis-forum mailing list. An online structured questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. Google Docs application was used to design and develop the questionnaire. The questionnaire was posted in Lis-forum mailing list to collect data during the

month of March 2012. First 200 responses were selected for data analysis. Among these responses 14 responses were rejected as they were not properly filled and completed. Finally responses from 186 library professionals were selected for analysis. The data collected through the questionnaires were exported into spreadsheet. The data were analysed and inferences were made based on standard statistical methods.

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **4.1. Awareness and Use of RSS**

The library professionals were asked to indicate their awareness and use of RSS and the responses are summarized in the Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Awareness and Use of RSS**

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Awareness of RSS</b>	<b>Use of RSS</b>
Yes	173 (93%)	159 (85.5%)
No	13 (7%)	27 (14.5%)

It is found that among the respondents, 173 professionals (94 per cent) are aware of RSS and 13 professionals (7 per cent) indicated that they are not aware of RSS. It is also found that a large majority (85.5 per cent) of the professionals use RSS. Only a very few (15 per cent) of the professionals do not use RSS.

## 4.2. Frequency of Use of RSS

The respondents were asked to indicate the frequency of use of RSS and the responses can be seen in the table 2.

**Table 2**  
**Frequency of Use of RSS**

Sl. No.	Frequency	Total
1	Several times a day	60 (37.7%)
2	Once a day	35 (22%)
3	A few times per week	18 (11.3%)
4	Once a week	17 (10.7%)
5	Less than once per week	29 (18.2%)

From the table it can be seen that 37.7 per cent of the respondents use RSS several times a day, 22 per cent of them use it once a day, 11.3 per cent use it few times a week, 10.7 per cent use it once a week and a further 18.2 per cent use it less than once per week.

The frequency of use of RSS may vary according to the information requirements of the professionals and the nature of library work they are undertaking.

## 4.3. Subscription of RSS

The library professionals were asked to indicate the method of subscription to RSS and the responses are summarized in the Table 3.

**Table 3**  
**Subscription of New RSS Feed**

<b>Sl. No.</b>	<b>Methods</b>	<b>Total</b>
1	I choose RSS feeds from a list available in the reader/aggregator I use to access and read my RSS feeds	63 (39.6%)
2	I actively seek out sites I am interested in and manually add the URL.	73 (45.9%)
3	When I encounter interesting content on the Web I subscribe by clicking on the Orange RSS button.	75 (47.2%)
4	I found RSS feeds through search engines.	99 (62.3%)

As shown in the Table 3, the analysis reveals that all the four methods listed in the table are adopted by the library professionals to identify and subscribe to RSS feeds though in varying degrees. Search engines are the most popular method (62.3 per cent), followed by the subscription through clicking the orange RSS button (47.2 per cent) and manual addition using the site URL (45.9 per cent). Also a good number (39.6 per cent) of the professionals choose new feeds from the list available in their RSS reader.

The popularity of different methods of subscription among the library professionals shows their familiarity and understanding of the technology and sources of availability of RSS feeds.

#### **4.4. Tenure of RSS Feed Usage in Library**

A question was asked to know how long the library professionals are subscribing to RSS feeds and how long they are offering RSS feeds as a library service. The responses are summarized in Table 4.

**Table 4**  
**Use of RSS for Library**

<b>Sl. No.</b>	<b>Tenure</b>	<b>Subscribing to RSS</b>	<b>Providing RSS as a service</b>
1	Less than one year	38 (23.9%)	47 (29.6%)
2	1-2 years	43 (27%)	54 (34%)
3	2-3 years	50 (31.4%)	41 (25.8%)
4	More than 3 years	28 (17.6%)	17 (10.7%)

Study reveals about the tenure of usage of RSS feeds by the librarians as a subscriber and as a feed provider. Among the respondents majority of the librarians started subscribing to RSS feed from two to three years (31.4 per cent) and a good number of them use it from one to two years (27 per cent) and some from less than one year (23.9 per cent). Only a few of the librarians (17.6 percent) had started subscribing RSS feeds before three years.

Majority of the librarians started providing RSS feed as a service one to two year's back (34%). A good number of them are providing RSS feeds from two to three years (25.8%) and some others (29.6%) from less than one year. Only a few of the librarians (10.7%) started providing RSS feeds before three years.

Librarians have started using RSS feeds from more than three years back and most of them started the use within a period of one to three years. Hence the technology has a good reach within the library community and most of them are well experienced with the usage.

#### **4.5. Services Provided Through RSS**

The professionals were asked to indicate the library services provided through RSS and the responses can be seen from the Table 5.

**Table 5**  
**Services Provided Through RSS**

Sl. No.	Services	Total
1	Current Awareness Service	117 (73.1%)
2	Conference and Event Announcements	55 (34.4%)
3	Library guidelines	66 (41.3%)
4	Table of Contents	22 (13.8%)
5	News updates	110 (68.8%)
6	New books	77 (48.1%)
7	New journals	65 (40.6%)
8	New thesis and dissertations	58 (36.5 %)
9	Time schedule	51 (31.9%)

The analysis shows that majority of the professionals provide Current Awareness Service (73.1 per cent), and news updates (68.8 per cent) through RSS feed. A good number (41.3 per cent) of the professionals use RSS feeds to inform updated library guidelines to the users. A few of the library professionals provide announcements (34.4 per cent) and time schedule (31.9 per cent) and only a very few (13.8 per cent) professionals use RSS feeds for providing Table of Contents of journals and books. About the half (48.1per cent) of the professionals use RSS feeds for new books arrivals and a good number of them (40.6 per cent) are providing new journal lists through RSS. New thesis and dissertations service is also provided by a few (36.5 per cent) librarians.

The results show some important deficiencies in the RSS feeds offered by the librarians in India. Table of Content of journals are an important information to the users and only a very few librarians provides this service through RSS. Information regarding new dissertations and theses is also not provided through RSS in majority

of the libraries. These two services are very important and useful for the readers and librarians should address these issues.

#### **4.6. Problems Faced While Using RSS Feeds**

Library professionals were asked to indicate the problems if any for the use of RSS and the responses are summarized in the Table 6

**Table 6**  
**Problems Faced While Using RSS Feeds**

<b>Sl. No.</b>	<b>Problems</b>	<b>Total</b>
1	Not every site offer RSS feed	117 (73.1%)
2	Some feed expire after a time period	71 (44.4%)
3	Unavailability of RSS aggregator	47 (29.4%)
4	Non availability of full fledged Internet access	17 (10.6%)

The analysis shows that a majority (73.1 per cent) of the library professionals consider RSS got a disadvantage as not every site offer RSS feed. A good number (44.4 per cent) of the professionals feels that some feed expire after a time period. A few (29.4 per cent) of them faces the problem of unavailability of RSS aggregator. A very few (10.6 per cent) of them faces non availability of full fledged Internet access.

As more and more web sites are now started offering RSS feeds the major problem faced by the librarians regarding the RSS will be resolved.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

An attempt has been made by the investigators to study the use of RSS among the library professionals in India. A set of suggestions and recommendations are also put forward to improve the use of RSS and to use Web 2.0 technologies effectively. It is found that majority of the library professionals use RSS. A large majority of the

librarians use RSS feeds in libraries for news updating. Some others are using RSS for journal updates, time schedule, conference and event announcements, new book and new e journal services. CAS is the most important service provided through RSS feed. Major hindrances found in the use of RSS feeds are that every site does not offer RSS feeds, some feeds expire after a time period, unavailability of RSS aggregator and non availability of full-fledged Internet access. It is observed that RSS has a very important role in the field of library services as a tool for information dissemination. Librarians are thus challenged to make the maximum use of technologies like RSS to improve their services and further research can be done to access the effectiveness of these services.

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