
INFORMATION HANDLING IN THIS E-ENVIRONMENT

Rakesh Kumar Pal

Abstract

We are living in an information world. This has come because of the unbelievable scientific and technological progress. So much information is being generated that we are confronted with information explosion, information pollution and exponential growth of information. This is causing a concern for the communication, distribution, availability, access and exploitation fronts of information, particularly so in science and technology. Management of information is thus drawing greater attention. Information is recognized as both national and international resource and it should be utilized for the socio-economic, scientific and technological progress of mankind as a whole. Information is the basic need of the human beings. The crucial role that information plays can be gauged from the vast areas of human activities in which it finds application that includes: growth of knowledge and wisdom, decision-making and management, research and development, manufacture and industry, education and training and academic writing. No one can deny the fact that information is a vital input in research, education and training etc more so in the current digital environment.

Keywords: Information handling; Digital environment; Digital resources

1. Information needs and uses in the current digital environment

Most of the studies concerning information needs and uses have concentrated in characterizing users by their needs and uses. One way to group user needs and uses has been subject disciplines and many government and non-government agencies have recognized and supported broad information channels according to disciplines such as chemistry, physics, biology, medicine, psychology, aeronautics, etc. The information contained in reports, articles, monographs, books and other media are not often provided through a common channel. Periodicals, of course serve as a mechanism to further augment the outreach of the information to the user at the right time. But still there exists a gap between their publication and ultimate reach to the users.

Information has only dormant value unless it is used. One uses information sources either to acquire or to retrieve specific information or browse to discover new facts. Information itself is used to:

1. Support or disprove a theory
2. Describe and, or
3. Create new ideas
4. Modify an existing material
5. Recreate a piece of information

The purpose for which information is acquired or used by the individual indicates his role and decides the type of information he seeks. A scientist generally needs latest information of original nature, whereas a development engineer is more concerned with information of applied nature, preferably structured and illustrated. Similarly, a manager's interest is more likely to be in information on marketing, production, government policies etc.

2. Information Handling

The subject of information handling as a discipline field for the serious investment of effort and money has as yet a very short history, only since the postwar period of the late 1940's has there been any substantial activity in variously termed as documentation, information retrieval, data processing and information processing. Each of these terms describes a particular branch of the generic subject-information handling. The first objective of information handling system is the systematic presentation of current material. It is aimed at saving money for the organization because it reduces the time and effort expended in the preparation of active research. Thus, the information handling activity is known as the process of acquisition to dissemination of information to the right person, at the right time in a right fashion.

The phenomenal increase in research and the enormity of manpower employed in such activities, coupled with the high growth rate of industries and defense activities have changed the whole complexion of information generation, communication and transmission in the last 25 years or so. Recent developments in computer technologies have given a new dimension to this activity. While the role of information is becoming more and more crucial. Its collection, organization, dissemination and usage is becoming more and more complicated. This is mainly due to (a) the generation of information, (b) different languages in which it is communicated; (c) proliferation of transmission media; (d) unevenness of quality of information, security, restriction; and high rate of obsolescence.

To handle this new type of information there is an urgent need for new information handling agencies with all the new requisite technologies. And the already existing agencies {such as libraries, information analyses centers, Publication announcement distribution and disseminating centers (Learned societies etc), Document generators/ user's organizations, Documentation centers etc.} needs to reorganize their services and activities in such a way so as to satisfy the users needs in a changing scenario. Their activities in the present era should be something like this.

2.1 Libraries

The primary function of a library is acquisition, processing of these newly acquired items and all other traditional functions. But despite the tryst with computer and IT for library facilities there is a need for concerted efforts on the part of library professionals on leasing digital access rights to commercial sources as well as other such agencies engaged in digitization of copyright owned/free local contents. Despite the technology getting cheaper with its every advance, the information products are becoming dearer and dearer. Perhaps one reason, which accounts for this inverse relation is the fact that the information products which have made a mark internationally are being produced in the developed countries where the labour cost is exorbitant. Only those who can judiciously apply the technology will be able to provide better information services, and that is the lesson we have gathered in the last decade. As we move on, we still see more opportunities of an eventful 'Cybrarianship'.

2.2 Information analyses centers

These centers concentrate on information rather than documents. With the emergence of new technology, their sources of information have increased manifold and also diversified. From these diversified sources like earlier they have to acquire, catalogue, and index with a view towards reviewing, analyzing, evaluating, synthesizing, integrating and otherwise reporting on the content and substances of documents both in formal and in digital forms. Here in these information analyses centers the emphasis is on specific subject areas of interest of the specialists. The output consists of reports, reviews, forecasts and abstracts etc.

2.3 Publication announcement distribution and dissemination centers (Learned societies and other organizations)

The primary function of such centers is to acquire, abstract, index, copy, publish, announce and disseminate documents for the purpose of providing documents or secondary material to a large number of users. The only change that they will encounter is the wide range of sources available now on-line and off-line.

2.4 Document generators/Users

Government departments and industrial organizations primarily come in this category. They are chiefly concerned with the origination and use of information and in the pursuit tends to be mission oriented and would encompass most available information sources from a vast reservoir of resources.

2.5 Documentation centers

It is an extension of the traditional library functions with the collection emphasis moving from books and journals to articles, reports and other special materials. The services are geared to meet intensive individual and group information needs rather than general loan and reference needs. Other functions discharged by such centers are translation and reprographic services which have maintained their relevance even in the current cyber environment.

2.6 Information Handling Activities

Information is the basic need of human beings. Because of its importance to national development, is concerned as a national resource. To make full use of this resource, it needs to be managed properly. No single country can handle effectively all the important information produced all over the world.

Classification and indexing techniques aid in the storage and retrieval of information/documents. Abstracting provides access to the vast reservoir of information discipline wise. Various reprographic devices and equipments enable us to reproduce, publish literature in suitable forms and sizes, thereby making supply and distribution quicker and easier. Computer typesetting has cut back printing time. The real breakthrough in information handling has come from computer and communication revolution. Theoretically, it is no longer necessary for each unit to collect, store and organize information. Through central processing and storage one can have access via terminals. Conferences and meetings can be conducted through video-telephones and hook-up. Electronic books are gradually replacing paper books, though progress along these lines provides solution to information problems.

Information technology is a recent and comprehensive term, which describes the range of processes for the acquisition, storage, transmission, retrieval and processing of information. Such processes may be mechanical, electrical and micro electrical in nature. These modern technologies include multimedia, Internet, electronic publishing, superhighway, worldwide web, electronic bulletin board system etc. which help in information handling activities.

3. Conclusion

The ultimate objective of any information agency is to fully meet the requirements of the user. To what extent the agency succeeds in fulfilling this is the sole criterion of measuring its effectiveness. To succeed in this task, the intermediary, whether a librarian or an information scientist, must be resourceful, have sufficient subject background, understands the user and his needs and most importantly should be well versed with the current emerging technologies and should be skilled in various information processing techniques.

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