LIS Forum: Professionals Dias in ICT Era

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Abstract

In information technology era, different on-line forums in different subjects are now working as a guiding tool, news providing tool, information providing tool, etc. These forums are playing the role of on-line conference, seminar, workshop, etc. author of this article is a member of nearly five to six online LIS Forums. It is useful to keep in touch with the LIS activities of known and unknown LIS professionals. Forums are also used to discuss on news, events, problems, etc. Authors have tried to analyse the 1110 communications made on MLOSC forum's by its members during the period of June-November 2012. Mails categorised in nineteen different heads. A main objective of this study is to see the information seeking trends of LIS professionals in ICT era.

Keywords: Information Seeking, LIS Professionals, MLOSC Forum

1. Introduction

Library and information science profession itself is a profession which fulfils information needs of others. But, the professionals working in this field are also in need of information. Some of the reasons for this are:

1. To know the latest developments in LIS.

2. To get help on some problem

3. To know better employment opportunity

4. To seek advice from experienced professionals.

5. To know about forth coming conferences, seminars, workshops etc.

6. To request the references from other libraries to serve the users.

LIS professionals express these and other unlimited-nature of information needs. Other professionals fulfil their information needs from us and we professionals fulfil our information needs from our professional colleagues.

2. Internet Forums

Every day, millions of users log on to their favourite online forums, communities, and social spaces and interact with others to get advice and discuss everything from the latest news and trends to their hobbies and professions to whatever else strike their fancy. Administrators have to lead these communities, deal with difficult users, manage staff members, and make tough decisions.

Since long ago forums are in operation in different fields, professions, subjects, etc. Unions, associations, peoples organisations are also called as forums. People of same interest come together and form a forum, to

discuss, exchange ideas as well as to fight for common cause for the betterment of profession. Now a day's information technology is playing a vital role in building up forums. Internet forums in different professions are increasing day by day. An Internet forum, or message board, is an online discussion site where people can hold conversations in the form of posted messages. They differ from chat rooms in that messages are at least temporarily archived. Also, depending on the access level of a user or the forum set-up, a posted message might need to be approved by a moderator before it becomes visible. Forums have a specific set of jargon associated with them; e.g. a single conversation is called a thread

A discussion forum is hierarchical or tree-like in structure: a forum can contain a number of sub-forums, each of which may have several topics. Within a forum's topic, each new discussion started is called a thread, and can be replied to by as many people as so wish.

Depending on the forum's settings, users can be anonymous or have to register with the forum and then subsequently log-in in order to post messages. On most forums, users do not have to log in to read existing messages. Early Internet forums could be described as a web version of an electronic mailing list or newsgroup (such as exist on Usenet); allowing people to post messages and comment on other messages. Later developments emulated the different newsgroups or individual lists, providing more than one forum, dedicated to a particular topic.

3. Benefits of On-Line Forums

1. An opportunity to articulate ideas on a topic and receive feedback on one's   contribution;
2. An opportunity to reflect on the ideas and perspectives of others, particularly of one's peers.
3. Help as and when it is needed;
4. A social environment which increases motivation and supports learning.

4. Maharashtra Librarians Online Study Circle

It is the study circle of the librarians, by the librarians, for the librarians and with the librarians. A Google group entitled "Maharashtra Librarians Online Study Circle" has been formed to solve various issues relating to librarians and LIS field. Information on routine problems, innovations, research needs, new software, how to apply newer technology, employment, new opportunities for the librarians (especially newcomers in the field) are the main attractions of this group. Here the members themselves help their colleagues getting better jobs in the field. Presently more than 4,490 members are registered on MLOSC forum. Even though it is a forum of Maharashtra librarians but the members are from different corners of the world. Author of this article is the member of this forum from last 4 years.

Reasons for Selection of this Topic

Present study is undertaken to assess the information needs of LIS professionals. It is observed from the last four years that members of the MLOSC forum are not only sharing their views but they are also

interested to get professional help, guidance, etc. From this it was decided that communications on the forums constitute a kind of information need of LIS profession. Therefore analysis of e-mails received on my e-mail which is registered with MLOSC forum is under taken.

5. Scope of the Study

Study is undertaken to analyse the e-mails received on authors e-mail account i.e. dr*****29@gmail.com from MLOSC forum during 1st June-2012 to 30 Nov. 2012. Forum mails received during these six months were selected for analysis.

6. Objectives of the Present Study

Present study is under taken with a view to:

1. Study Role of forums.

2. Study the trends of communications on forum.

3. Study male female participation in MLOSC forum communications.

4. Study language used in communication.

7. Methodology

As per the scope and objectives of the present study, the data from the e-mail account is collected from 1st June-2012 to 30 Nov. 2012. Based on the past personal experience the subject matter of the forums mails were categorised in nineteen main topics. Daily observation is recorded in MS Excel sheet. Extreme left vertical columns are recorded with categories of mails and extreme upper horizontal columns were allotted for dates from 1st June-2012 to 30 Nov. 2012.

8. Mails received are Categorised as under

1. Requesting for help: Many a time working LIS professionals needs a help. Students, researchers also need help from other LIS professionals. Such professionals post their query on forums expecting the reply from others. Many a time they get help. Sometimes they fail to get help. The professionals those who are confident about the answer reply.

2. To provide the news in LIS: Professional internet forums are working as a media for giving the news of particular event/functions, etc. These news originate from individual and perform the function of a professional news paper.

3. Informing about conferences/seminars: Internet forums are very much useful to spread the news of conferences among professionals. Librarians are making use of this forum at large scale for this purpose. It is a need to spot out the conferences and send paper to discuss the work activity with other colleagues.

4. To provide information about jobs, vacancies in LIS: Mainly students and higher position aspirant professionals keep watch on such mails. Advertisements about vacancies in papers or magazines do not reach to target group, but forums information reaches to target group.

5. NET/SET Related: Mostly LIS students often exchange the information about NET/SET/SLET examination. Sometimes they post the questions to get the exact answer from MLOSC members. They also needs help in suggesting books for preparation of net/set etc examinations. They also discusses on the issues of conduct of examination, results, etc.

6. Reply to help: This is very useful on the part of those who post their problems to seek help from MLOSC members. Mostly the young and newly appointed LIS professionals posts their administrative, technical, and staff related questions on the forum. Online Forums are working as a reference desk. Librarian can put his users' need of a reference source or journal article, or book, which is not available in the library, on the forum and may receive help or at least referral service.

7. Giving congratulations: Good wishes for achievements must be given for healthy professional development. Members of the forum keep this practice on.

8. Informing about workshops in LIS: Workshops for LIS professionals are regularly conducted in different parts of India. Information about this is being spread through forum's mail. Workshops are more useful to those who are in need of practical hands-on training. Short duration workshops help actual service men to perform particular task in library. Postal correspondence to inform this particular information has almost stopped. Professional forums have now become very useful to provide such information.

9. Web links directed for information: LIS professionals send mail on on-line forums about new website, blogs, link of new resources, etc. They cause awareness to colleagues about new, or newly found resource link.

10. Call of papers for journals/books: Call for papers for book, or journal, conference is a general practice. To increase the score of API, Senior lecturers, librarians in teaching category are keeping watch on such communications. To get this information one has to become the member of professional on-line forum.

11. Article/short note: Senior LIS professionals or interested young professionals express their professional feelings on on-line forums. Or even they make announcement of new innovations. To communicate this message they write small article or note on it.

12. Informing about conduct of activities: After successful conduct of activities forum member send its news along with photo gallery of the event. Or if any forum member is conducting a function he informs it through the forum.

13. Research activity: Forum members keep-on discussing their research activity, or problems in research, or requesting to trace out a reference needed for research, etc. Maximum researchers get help through it.

14. Request for government resolutions, etc: Government resolutions (GR) are the main instruments of service and administrative activities. To perform a government task or to receive service benefits one

needs to have support of GR. Therefore, on-line forum like MLOSC comes to rescue. Because everybody may not possess each and every GR, circular, order, etc.

15. To say thank you for help: Members reply to those who responded to their help mails. This practice increases the help culture among LIS professionals. But it is observed that very few members respond to help mail.

16. AICTE related information: Library professionals those who come under the service conditions of All India Technical Education will have to follow their standards and norms. Library staff of these institutions discusses among themselves their problems and solutions.

17. Request to fill up questionnaire: As said above on-line forum is very useful to collect data through questionnaire for research or even to observe the trends on particular professional behaviour.

During 1st June 2012 to 30 November 2012, a total of 1,110 posts from MLOSC were received. Of these, 246 (22.16%) were posted by female members and the rest were by males. Rank, reasons of posts, number of posts, and its percentages are as under.

Rank	Reasons of mail	Total no of Mails	Percentage
01	Requesting for Help	270	24.32
02	To Provide the news in LIS	150	13.51
03	Informing about Conferences/Seminars	120	10.81
04	To provide information about Jobs, vacancies in LIS	114	10.27
05	NET/SET Related	60	05.40
05	Reply to help	60	05.40
06	Giving Congratulations	48	04.32
06	Informing about workshops in LIS	48	04.32
07	Web links directed for information	36	03.24
07	Call of papers for Journals/books	36	03.24
08	Article/Short note	30	02.70
09	Informing about conduct of Functions	24	02.16
10	Research Activity	18	01.62
11.1	Request for GR	12	01.08
11.2	International conferences	12	01.08
11.3	To say thank you for help	12	01.08
11.4	AICTE related information	12	01.08
12.1	Refresher course	06	0.54
12.2	Requesting to fill up questionnaire	06	0.54

It is observed from the above table that maximum mails are for help. Help is further classified as under

1.	Help for book/paper/article/journals	60
2.	Administrative help	54
3.	IT Help	42
4.	Suppliers/vendors address	30
5.	Help for G.R.	30
6.	Personnel Management help	18
7.	Other help	18
8.	Help in LIS Research	12

It is not possible to see how many of them got the help. Some of them may have received help on their individual mails. It is better if they forward their help mail to MLOSC. This might be the problem for some other member also who may benefit by this mail. It has been observed that for rank five above, only 10 have replied, not individually but through forum, which is good practice. Whereas for rank no 11.3 only two have replied. Thanks for guidance.

9. Conclusion

Study presently conducted is innovative. With this kind of study professionals gets the information about latest trends in information needs of LIS professionals.

From the data above it is concluded that online forums are essentials to solve the working professionals' problems. It is also concluded that these forums play a significant role in dissemination of professional information speedily. Therefore it is essential for every professional to get membership of at least one on-line professional forum. To remain in touch with the state-of-art of this profession everyone must be the member this forum. MLOSC forum is very active in Maharashtra. Apart from the on-line discussions this forum organises get-together once every year. All this helps in understanding each other's problems and solution to it. Ultimately it supports for professional development.

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