User Needs : A Case Study of Community Information Centres of Manipur State

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Abstract

An attempt has been made to study the IT awareness of the user community in the State of Manipur. The paper highlights the information needs and dependence of information on Community Information Centres (CIC) are analysed. The conclusion focuses on the considerable work and effort needed for imparting computer literacy, information literacy for preparing and powering the masses for the construction of knowledge based society. Further, according to the requirements of the user community, content preparation is necessary and it has been suggested that, the information available on internet may update on a frequent basis usually in local language for the benefit of local communities.

0.   Introduction

Today, the world is shrinking and increasingly becoming a tightly knit global village. Perhaps in no sense is this truer than in the provision of information. Traditional barriers to the access of information resources are more and more diminished. The ever increasing number of users of information and the difficulty in having informal personal communication; the large geographic distances involved in certain routines of information acquisition; the urge to use modern developments in the related fields of electronics, computers, and telecommunications; the increasing role of information in shaping the economy of a society; and the changing notion of the information from something to know to something to have as any other commodity have resulted in the need for improving the information services.

In recent times, development in Information Technology (IT) have made it possible to overcome many of the above mentioned problems. Application of IT in information centres raises the efficiency of information acquisition, processing, storage, and retrieval. The use of IT and electronic document delivery systems on the information service centres promising the accessibility of relevant information to the users on one hand and enhancing the productivity of information work and services on the other. The explosive growth in networked connectivity and rapid advances in computing power are replacing the older notion of stand alone information utilities with newer notions on inter connected World Wide Web or Wide Area Networks commonly known as Internet.

Under the Prime Minister's Agenda for Socio-Economic Development in North-East and Sikkim, announced in 2000 at Shillong during the meeting of Chief Ministers of all the North-East States, it was decided to proliferate the use of Information Technology (IT) throughout the country and with this objective, the Ministry of Information Technology, Government of India is to set up Community Information Centres at 446 Blocks of 7-North Eastern States and 40 Blocks of Sikkim. All Blocks will connect the District and State Information Centres through a dedicated satellite based VSAT under this scheme.

For Manipur State, 33 CICs are set up during 2000-2002 and functioning at different level. The investigator has made an attempt to study the existing situation in the CICs and information needs of the user community.

1. Objectives

The objectives of the study are :

1. To identify, study and survey the existing infrastructure built at the information centres;
2. To study the information needs of the user community, and to examine whether they are getting the right information or not;
3. To examine connectivity to all the leading educational and research institutes in the country;
4. To take care of economic, educational, social, cultural and informational needs of the user community;
5. To study computer literacy, information literacy of the rural and urban user community; and
6. To indicate the development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and their application for the development of rural people.

2. Scope of the study

Out of 33 CICs of Manipur State 11 CICs from valley districts have taken for the study. An attempt has been made to study the user community of these centres.

3. Methodology

For the present study a questionnaire was designed for the user community of the CICs (along with the one questionnaire for each service centres of CICs) and distributed during 2003-04 (till date) and surveyed the centres. It covered 550 persons through simple random sampling method, of the 550 questionnaire distributed, 335 were received. The data thus obtained were analysed to draw the conclusions.

4. Observation

4.1. Infrastructure

The centres are running under the coordinated efforts of Ministry of Information Technology, National Informatics Centre, and the State Government. Table no. 1 shows distribution of CICs at valley districts of Manipur State.

Table no. 1
Distribution of CICs at valley district of Manipur

Sl. No.	Districts	Block/District HQ	CIC Site & Address
1.	Imphal East	Imphal East I	Office of the B.D.O., Sawombung Block
2.	Imphal East	Imphal East II	Office of the B.D.O., Keirao Bitra Block
3.	Imphal East	Ji ribam Block	Office of the B.D.O., Jiribam Block
4.	Imphal East	Imphal East	State Youth Centre, Khuman District HQ Lampak
5.	Imphal West	Imphal West I	Govt. Polytechnique, Takyelpat

6.	Imphal West	Imphal West II	Office of the B.D.O., Wangoi
7.	Imphal West	Imphal West	State Central Library, Imphal District HQ
8.	Bishnupur	Bishnupur Block	C.I. Collage, Bishnupur
9.	Bishnupur	Moirang Block	Moirang Multipurpose Hr. Sec. School, Moirang
10.	Thoubal	Thoubal Block	Office of the B.D.O, Thoubal
11.	Thoubal	Kakching Block	Office of the S.D.O., Kakching

Source : Manipur Today, DIPR, Govt. of Manipur

Each CIC is equipped with 6 (six) nos. of computers including 1(one) server and 5(five) client computers connected to the internet through a VSAT which is a satellite link connected to a Central Internet Hub. Two (2) computer personals were engaged in the CICs to operate the computers.

4.2.   General Overview : User Study

Of 550 questionnaire distributed 335 were received back which amounts to 60.91% response. Table no. 2 shows, the highest percentage of response has come from Imphal West, CIC attached to State Central Library has 84%, next is 78% from Govt. Polytechnic, followed by 74% from State Youth Centre, Imphal East and the lowest percentage of response has come from Imphal East, CIC attached to B.D.O., Jiribam block has 40%. Similar responses has occur from four CICs and remaining other centres as shown in the following table no. 2.

Table no. 2
Distribution of questionnaire to the CICs and their responses

Sl. No.	Name of CIC distributed	No. of questionnaire	No. of questionnaire received back with %	
1.	State Central Library (Imphal West)	50	42	(84%)
2.	Govt. Polytechnic (Imphal West)	50	39	(78%)
3.	State Youth Centre (Imphal East)	50	37	(74%)
4.	B.D.O., Thoubal Block (Thoubal)	50	35	(70%)
5.	S.D.O., Kakching Block (Thoubal)	50	32	(64%)
6.	Moirang Block (Bishnupur)	50	32	(64%)
7.	Wangoi Block (Imphal West)	50	26	(52%)
8.	Sawombung Block (Imphal West)	50	25	(50%)
9.	C.I., College (Bishnupur)	50	25	(50%)
10.	Keirao Bitra Block (Imphal East)	50	22	(44%)
11.	Jiribam Block (Imphal East)	50	20	(40%)
Total		550	335	

Source : Questionnaire

4.3.   Category wise distribution of respondents

Table no. 3 shows that, out of 335 total respondents 55.22% of respondents were students (mainly under graduate, graduate, post graduate students) and it was reveals that, the major user of each and every

CICs in the State of Manipur are students and other category of user community are very less number as shown in table no.3.

Table No. 3
Category wise distribution of respondents

Sl. No.	Category wise distribution	No. of respondents	Percentage
1.	Students	185	55.22
2.	Unemployed Youth	47	14.03
3.	Service holders (Teachers, Professional employees etc.)	41	12.24
4.	Businessmen/Small traders	26	7.76
5.	Social Workers	18	5.37
6.	Farmers/Cultivators	11	3.28
7.	Housewives	7	2.09
	Total	335	99.99%

Source: Questionnaire

4.4. Opinion about the use of Information Technology (IT)

The respondents are requested to indicate their awareness about the use of IT, whether the CICs are providing the need –based information services to the users or not. Most of the users were aware of the computer handling, knowledge of IT and Internet access (52.24%) and availability of need based information (45.67%) but majority of the users were not aware of the digital objects (61.19%) has been indicates in the following table no.4.

Table No.4
Use of IT by the user community

Sl.No.	IT Based Services	No. of respondents with percentage		(Total %)
		Yes	No	
1.	Awareness of computer handling, knowledge of IT and Internet access	175 (52.24%)	160 (47.76%)	100%
2.	Availability of need based information	153 (45.67%)	182 (54.33%)	100%
3.	Knowledge of digital/digitization	130 (38.81%)	205 (61.19%)	100%

Source: Questionnaire

4.5. Purpose of information access and facilities enjoy by the users

Table no.5 shows that, 79.40% of the respondents use to access the internet which is the highest percentage and enjoy the facilities like, e-mail, chatting, surfing, browsing, web searching etc. 64.18%

are interested to participate the computer training programme facilities. 53.13% of user response the academic and knowledge updating information like, exam result, admission date & time, current events, job and employment guidance etc. And 46.57% of respondents access the information on recreation of mind like, entertainment programme, music, games etc.

Table No.5
Information access and facilities enjoy by the user community

Sl. No.	Purpose of information access	Facilities enjoy by users	% of respondents
1.	To access internet	e-mail, chatting, surfing, browsing etc.	266 (79.40%)
2.	To participate computer education & training programme	DOEACC, IGNOU CLP, IT awareness course	215 (64.18%)
3.	For academic and updating knowledge	Exam results, admission time & date, current events etc.	178 (53.13%)
4.	For recreation of mind	Entertainment, listening music, video games etc.	156 (46.57%)

Source : Questionnaire
Note : Percentage is more than 100 because of multiple choices

4.6.   Information services and dependence of information by the users

From the present study, it is observed that, out of total respondents, 21.49% of users are aware the services provided by the centres on internet facility and the users accessed to internet which is highest amount of percentage. Next is followed by computer education and training programme services which has 19.10% and remaining other information services and their dependence of information by the users from those services are indicated in the following table no.6.

Table No.6
Information service facilities and dependence of information

Sl. No.	Information services	No. of respondents aware about the services	% of respondents those who need information
1.	Information exchange	43	12.84
2.	Computer education & training programme	64	19.10
3.	Resource sharing and networking	45	13.43
4.	Internet access	72	21.49
5.	Distance learning	23	6.87
6.	Dissemination and communication of information	7.46	

7.	e-governance, e-learning, e-business	22	6.57
8.	Information on weather, agriculture, rural products, advertised & sales on internet	21	6.27
9.	Downloading facilities	20	5.97
	Total	335	100%

Source : Questionnaire

5.   Findings of the Study

1.   It is found that there is no library professional staff at the centres but staff are computer science personals. This has come down the essential services like reference service, and need based information services or looking after users services and so on.

2.   It is revealed that 47.76% of the users were not aware of the IT services and 54.33% of respondents are not getting the right information at the right time ie., the availability of need based information service is not extended to the users because of lack of knowledge among the computer professionals and users.

3.   It is noted that, 61.19% of the users were not aware of the digital/digitization and its resources available in the centre. It seemed due to limited number of computers the users are to wait in a long queue to use the computer terminals.

4.   Users are keen to visit the centres mainly to use internet for E-mail, chatting, browsing, web searching etc. It is observed that majority of the users are from urban areas which is due to lack of awareness among the rural people, high rate of illiteracy and economically backwards in those rural areas and it may lead to slow awareness as well as the slow development of the new emerging IT facilities in the state and country as whole.

5.   A considerable number of users have indicated that, they are not satisfied the overall IT based services provided at the centre.

6.   From the respondents point of view, it is noted that, their information needs are identified and strongly felt that a number of Community Information Centres are to be established at the village level.

6.   Implied suggestions

The views and comments offered by the users have enabled the investigators to offer some feasible suggestions for achieving optimal services of the centres. They are given as follows:

1.   The present study has seriously considered that, the staff/instructor at these centres only the computer personals and some of them, cannot understand the techniques of the services to be provided to the users. So, it is suggested that they should get the library science degree (or knowledge).

2.   It is suggested that the centres should have content preparation programmes including continuous updation based on new technologies. Content preparation requires the knowledge of the subject, knowledge of the concerned rural areas so as to make the content area specific, knowledge of the local dialects and the terminologies used so as to communicate better and the basic knowledge of creation of multimedia packages.

3. It is suggested that the different educational institutions of the state (e.g., Agriculture college, Medical college, Science faculties, Computer science etc.) can provide all the technical skills necessary for the creation and management of the content. The subject matter can be prepared by the concerned subject specialist.

4. Content transmission at this stage that the internet and the computer come into the picture. The network would progressively have to extended to all villages. The Community Information Centres will be enabled to log on to these institution websites for the different information of their needs and content packages can be made available from the web site or through CDs. This link can also be used for providing assistance to the professional working as health professionals, agricultural extension officers etc.

5. State Institutes of Rural Development (SIRD) should be strengthen, and National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD) is an apex and all the rural development libraries at the base should form a pyramidal structure of grid system. Further, all the educational institutions, research centres, public libraries, information centres and community information centres should also integrate their coordination and cooperation with the village libraries at the local level. This will build the infrastructure in the whole of the rural areas of Manipur.

6. Government should pen down a State Information Literacy Policy, frame policies to make knowledge based society and where information should reach to all the section of the society.

7. It is suggested all the CICs should assess the need/requirement of the user community with the help of the questionnaire method.

It is known fact that without a computer networking system we cannot work into the 21st century.

7.   Conclusion

By adopting the above road map the investigator strongly felt that institutions of the state can play a major role in bridging the information gape for the rural population of the state in this era of IT, using computer and internet, they can transmit locally relevant knowledge and information in all areas such as agriculture, live stock management, water management, waste management, health, career guidance etc. to different population segments in rural areas. While conducting the survey, it is strongly felt that the needs of the user community is to be identified carefully, accordingly the required information are to be made available with the help of new emerging technologies. So the information scientist has an important role to play, his personal capabilities, character, academic and technical abilities and his human approach are deciding factors for the success of any developmental efforts.

Further, at the CICs, there is little need for the type of information that is widely available on the Internet by the use of modern Information Communication Technologies. Although the farmers and other villagers who visit the centres do have access to the Internet, the material they need is to be far more localized. Accordingly, rather than simply providing access to the Internet, the information centre may construct (and update on a frequent basis) databases of local information, usually in local language for the benefit of local communities.

8.   References

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