

Chapter 5

Information Needs of Users in the Tech Savvy Environment and the Influencing Factors

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ABSTRACT

The concept of information needs was coined by an American information scientist, Robert S. Taylor, in his article “The Process of Asking Questions” published in American Documentation (Now the Journal of the American Society of Information Science and Technology). There are many definitions of information need. According to Case, information need is a recognition that your knowledge is inadequate to satisfy a goal that you have. He explains that having information is not the same as being informed. Information need is one of the cognitive needs of humanity. Information need determines information-seeking behavior and these concepts harmonize one another. Information need is influenced by a number of factors. This chapter provides an overview of information needs of users, their types, and also the various factors influencing the information needs of users in the digital age.

INTRODUCTION

Information environment is enough rich, characterized by a growth in information sources as well as providers, a variety of approaches and techniques for accessing information, and a redundancy of content from multiple sources. In this “overloaded” information environment, many information users tend to experience a sense of insufficiency in locating the precise information which leads to anxiety. In this complex information environment, understanding the way individuals choose to satisfy their information needs takes on new urgency. Insight into information seeking can be gained by understanding how users seek information sources and how they locate the desired information to meet their needs (Chandra, Lynn, Lawrence & Lillie, 2007). The concept of information needs was coined by an American informa-

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tion scientist Robert S. Taylor in his article “The Process of Asking Questions” published in American Documentation (Now is Journal of the American Society of Information Science and Technology). There are many definitions of information need. According to Case (2012) information need is a recognition that your knowledge is inadequate to satisfy a goal that you have. He explains that “having information” is not the same as “being informed.” Information need is one of the cognitive needs of humanity. Information need determines information-seeking behavior and these concepts harmonize one another. Information need is influenced by a number of factors. It is revealed from the literature that ‘information scattered in too many sources’ and that too in multi-formats is the problem often faced by users. For fulfilling the information needs, users access different sources of information Sources. Scientists, engineers and technologists in general use encyclopedias, handbooks, textbooks, periodicals, abstracts, indexes, standards, patents, etc. for their research and development works. He showed that information needs of scientists, engineers and technologists are equally based on their knowledge about those sources of information and accessibility of these information sources (Gayatri, 2006). Post Graduate students and Research Scholars mostly use journals, library books and textbooks for completing their course work (Fidzani, 1998). The information needs of teachers were found to be mostly related to guidance on administrative procedures, having lesson plans ready, mechanisms for evidencing work, etc (Williams, 2005). Further, information needs of the General people are found to be varied. The areas in which they needed information are diverse. These range from the information needs of the farmers, to that of the petty traders, artisans, blacksmiths, weavers, painters, fishermen, postmasters, labors, adult learners etc (Kadli & Kumbar, 2011). This chapter provides an overview of information needs of users, their types and also the various factors influencing the information needs of users in the digital age.

BACKGROUND

Developments in the present tech savvy information world have been witnessed only since when the communication of information has been speedy and rapid. Information is the fundamental unit of communication. Communication is the transmission of information in the form of signs and symbols which gave birth to the concept of data. Data is a codified and communicable symbolic representation of entities, properties and their states. They have content (representation) and form (record) that allow storage, retrieval, transfer, aggregation, and analysis. Data can turn into information if they are put into a context and given meaning. Information is a string of signs and symbols that can be interpreted as a message. It can be transmitted in the form of signals. Information is any sort of event that changes the state of a dynamic system. The meaning of this concept varies in various contexts. Information is closely correlated to notion of data, message, knowledge, wisdom, meaning understanding, perception, communication etc (Silvio, 2006). According to some authors, data are understood to be symbols that have not yet been interpreted, information is data with meaning, and knowledge is what facilitates people to allocate meaning and thereby generate information. Data have generally been taken as simple facts that can be structured to develop information. Information is the English word which is apparently derived from the Latin stem (*informatio*): this noun is derived from the verb “informare” (to inform) in the sense of “to give form to the mind”, “to discipline”, “instruct”, “teach”. *Inform* itself comes from the Latin verb *informare*, which means to give form, or to form an idea of. Furthermore, Latin itself already contained the word *information* meaning concept or idea, but the extent to which this may have influenced the development of the word *information* in English is not clear (Wikipedia, 2013).

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