

Chapter 10

Barriers to Information Access for Specialized Scholars: An Analysis of Information- Seeking Behavior of Social Scientists in Developing Countries

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ABSTRACT

Developing countries must overcome the obstacles to information access so that they can join the global networks of the developed world and become part of the “information age.” Studies on the information-seeking behavior and information needs of library users in developing countries are limited. This chapter examines the information-seeking behavior of social science faculty in developing nations in an attempt to explain the barriers to information access for these specialized scholars. Information users in developing countries face different challenges than users in developed nations so it is essential to understand the various obstacles that must be overcome by library and information users in developing nations. Comparisons are made to the information-seeking behaviors and information use of social science faculty in developed nations. Patterns of information-seeking behavior in social science faculty are examined and also compared to existing and proposed models of such behavior.

INTRODUCTION

Several studies exist on the information behavior of social scientists in developing countries. In addition to looking at the studies on social scientists the issues LIS educators and professionals encounter in developing countries and how these

issues affect information access of specific users and barriers to information in general for these nations will be addressed. This will allow for recommended criteria for designing library services to meet the information needs of those working in social science programs in developing countries as well as developing appropriate collections for

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those and other academic programs. Kumar, Singh, and Yadav (2011) describe a social scientist as a person who is involved in teaching and research activities in any of the following areas: Economics, Sociology, Anthropology, Political Science, Psychology, History, Public Administration, and Social Work. This will be the definition used in this chapter unless otherwise indicated in specific studies. By looking at a specialized user–social scientists—it will be possible to identify particular characteristics of this user population. As Wilson’s (1996) research demonstrates, any research into information-seeking behavior must emphasize the characteristics of the information seeker as well as the nature of their environment.

A fair amount of research has been done on the information-seeking behavior and needs of social scientists in developed countries and not as much in developing countries. However, enough research exists in developing countries to analyze the information needs of this specialized user group and determine what these needs are and what are the barriers to information access for these users. By identifying the barriers to information access library administrators will be able to eliminate these barriers and design library systems to meet the needs of their particular users. The two are interrelated. Why does the information seeker prefer print sources? Could it be that there is a shortage of computers at the university where he/she works? The barrier to information access defines the information-seeking behavior. Also, it may be that the barriers to information access are the same for social scientists as they are for other user groups. The information seeking-behavior of social scientists may contain unique characteristics but it most likely shares similarities with other library users’ information seeking behavior.

By analyzing various studies in several developing countries, a pattern will emerge that can assist LIS administrators and librarians in developing social science collections and in related disciplines as well and serve as design services for their specific user group and other users. The

pattern(s) emerging from analyzing the various studies will be compared to theories/models of information seeking in developing countries (to see how they fit); and to established models of information seeking in developed countries in order to illustrate the differences between library/information users in developing and developed countries. The barriers to information access exposed in these studies will be analyzed as well and compared to each other to identify similarities. They will also be compared to information access barriers in developed countries to isolate any differences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Marouf and Anwar (2010) conducted a research study to investigate the information-seeking behavior of social science faculty at Kuwait University. The researchers administered a questionnaire to 77 faculty members and received 54 returns. Faculty members were asked about their purposes for using various sources of information. Faculty members from the following social science disciplines were surveyed: Geography, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology, and Social Work.

Results showed that the participants depend greatly on books and journals for teaching. However, for their research needs they rely on a variety of information sources, the most notable being unpublished research, books, journals, and papers delivered at conferences (2010, p. 534). To stay current in their field they used newspapers and magazines, journals, and conference papers in that order. Results for information-searching skills showed that most faculties believe information searching is critical for faculty members and that these skills are necessary for all academic activities performed by faculty members. Each survey participant used the Internet and rated their use of electronic resources, Internet, and Web resources closer to “good.” However, 35% said they were willing to attend appropriate training if it were

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