User Information Seeking Patterns :

Retracing Ranganathan to Some Noetic Perceptions

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Abstract

The studies on user information seeking patterns have been undertaken since long time and are continuing with contemporary developments in LIS. The change is visualised as user demand has moved from books to to specific information. The information seeking underlies search process and has now been influenced by the application of IT to library resources and services. Ranganathan from his very first book 'Five Laws' considered "Reader" (user) as one of the components of the trinity. Similarly he perceived information seeking patterns of users in the design of tools and techniques like long range reference, chain indexing, documentation and so on and also now their applications are being retraced in the IT application environment. So an examination of these tools and techniques is presented in this paper to present a new vision to Ranganathan's classic contributions.

Introduction:

The study of the user information seeking patterns as perceived by Ranganathan, can be set in motion with "The Five Laws of Library Science" (Ranganathan, 2006) first published in 1931. It is worth recalling here that he conceived all library materials as "documents" and categorised them as, conventional, neo-conventional and non-conventional from the point of development phase further categrorised them on the basis of their thought content as Macro, Micro and Meta Documents (Ranganathan, 1973).

He conceptualised "Documentation" as a specialised service to the specialist readers who need pin-pointed information from micro-documents. The classification system and the Indexing system designed by him would go as a basis for user information seeking by subject approach to document. The chain indexing procedure and the rendering of the subject headings, has inherently conceived the user information seeking pattern, from General to Specific – the last link of the chain. And present some of perceptions from the Reference Service; he saw different types readers coming to the library; and their behaviour patterns, information seeking pattern and how the library staff should deal with each type of Reader/User coming to the library and catering

to his or her information needs with right material and in right time and in a right manner. Ranganthan idea of reference service meant to "establish contact between Right Reader and Right Book / Document / Information in Right Time". The paper would highlight some of the perceptions of Ranganathan from his work in different areas in the present context.

Information Seeking: Basic Concepts

The meaning of the term "seeking" according to wordweb has several synonyms, such as; searching, looking for, attempting, browsing and chancing are functionally well articulated in the library and its resources and services (wordweb.info). Kuhlthau (2003) in book has stated that Seeking means a search process, and "provides essential knowledge and user centred approach for anyone proving library and information service". Information seeking imply several concepts, it can be need, behaviour and the need-based on the changing information environment. According to ones needs and patterns information products and services are designed and created. For instance the "Periodical" is an information channel to cater to the current and nascent information needs of the user.

Nicholas et al (1999) have mapped the changing information seeking behaviour in the changing information environment due to the impact of Internet in particular and the influence of information communication technologies on library resources, services. It was Ranganathan, Bradford and others conceived the idea of documentation as a specialised library service to cater to the needs of specialists' information needs. Wilson (1981) gave a model constituting the concepts of "information need, information seeking, information exchange and information use" as a means of charting the behaviour of an individual faced with the need to find information. Ellis and Haughan (1997) have identified "surveying (exploring), chaining, browsing, differentiating, monitoring, extracting, verifying and ending as the components of information seeking behaviour" and these are changing with changes in information environment. In the light the above conceptual framework on seeking, some of the classic works of Ranganathan can be examined also presenting some recent innovations.

Five Laws and OCLC Perception:

The five laws of library science enunciated by Ranganathan, bear the focus of reader in every law. As information seeking involves, exploring, browsing, the implications of each law facilitate each one them. For instance the first, fifth and the fourth law advocate for "Open Access Racks" for stacking books, which facilitate the user to browse, search and select the book(s) he or she needs. The five laws have been re-stated in many forms to suit the changing library and information environment (Sen , 2008). Connaway et al (2015) state that "there have been attempts at reformulating these laws to suit the present context of the web, e-resources, multimedia resources and the resulting developments in information services". According to them the fourth law "Save the time of the reader" has been proposed as the new first law, as "the Recent research indicate that in the changed environment both saving time and convenience have become important to today's information seekers". The entire paper examines the five laws in the today's environment focusing the users.

Documentation and Specialist Reader:

The phase of change in the library services was suggested by Ranganathan and Loosjes and others by an innovative service termed as Documentation. It was primarily conceived as "a division of labour to cater to the needs of the specialist readers". So the user information seeking pattern with the introduction of documentation changed from locating books (Macrodocuments) to locating nascent and current information (microdocuments)

The definition of documentation succinctly states, it is a generic term used to denote two activities "Documentation Work and Documentation Service". The documentation work and service places emphasis on micro-documents – particularly on nascent micro documents and to meet the information needs of specialist readers. On the other hand Loosjes suggested "Active and Passive" documentation, which concurs with the work of bibliographic control. The bibliographic control facilitated searching and locating the required document and it is nothing but the " Bibliographic databases", which inherently provide for searching information held by them using the several kinds of indexes – author, title, keyword/subject heading and so on. A best

unique example of bibliographic control is the National Bibliography such as British National Bibliography and Indian National Bibliography.

Among the several documentation services, Abstracting and Indexing Services and the Digest Service are directed to the users' changing information needs and have also reinvented the information seeking pattern. Number of case studies have been presented by Ranganathan on this account (Ranganathan, 1973; Ch. B.) which show how a documentation service different from other library and information services.. He even suggested developing a repository function as a documentation work and maintaining it to all research scholars of the organisation. In recent years, building "Institutional Repositories" (IR) has become one of the primary function of specialist libraries and IR has been a replica of documentation work carried out in the libraries. So the proposal of documentation is another phase of user information seeking pattern and that traces how it has been inherent in library services.

Reference Service:

The primary function of reference service has been conceived already as linking Right book, with right reader at right time in right manner. The pre-requisites of reference service are; i) Know thy books ii) Know thy readers and iii) Know thy self. Ranganathan enumerates different types of books;

New Books
Old Books
Intangible Books
Books with message
Books with flair
Orientation books
Seminal works
Pedestrian Books

He also probes into the 'psychology' of readers and their analysis, their minds and mental build-up and temperament.

Based on these psychological traits he identifies the following types of readers coming to the library.

Normal Reader
Meek Readers
Inferiority Complex
Superiority Complex
Traumatic Complex
Self Reader
Difficult Reader

Each one the types of books and readers characterize the pattern of information content and the user behaviour patterns which can also be experienced in the present information environment. Number of cases studies in each of the types – books and readers are substantiated by the case studies as evidence to such types of readers' presence in the libraries. However all types of readers can be provided with due attention as “the floor of a library is always believed to be a place of great equality. Conversely the OCLC(2015) monograph has also provided a new kinds of users of the IT based information environment. They are; Baby Boomers, Millennials, Digital Natives and Adults, studied their information seeking behaviour. So there is a relation between type of users and their information seeking behaviour also.

Long Range Reference Service:

Another pattern of information seeking can be viewed in the long range reference service. The long range reference service involves tracing information through a long series of books, periodicals and other documents, especially micro-documents. It involves prolonged searching and browsing through various materials. By recalling the components of “information seeking” as suggested by Ellis and Haugan (1997), the long range reference service also constitutes these components.

So long range reference service, types of books/documents, types of readers present a host of information seeking patterns which retrace the Ranganthan's perceptions in this context. In the ICT environment the emergence of digital library in the virtual space present the process of searching, browsing and linking different information sources spread across the web, and echo the concept of a long range reference service.

Chain Indexing:

One of the seminal contribution of Ranganathan in the area o in information storage and retrieval process is Chain Indexing. It is the only indexing system that derived the subject headings based on facet analysis of Class numbers in particular Colon Classification. The choice and rendering of subject headings is based on concept of "Sought heading" which ranges from general to specific, and maps the and provides subject-headings by relevance and extent of specificity sought by the user.

The potentiality of the chain indexing was equated to Yahoo search engine by Glassel(1998). The author expressed " her views on the relationship between the work of S.R. Ranganathan, the famed Indian classificationist and librarian, and that of Yahoo! the online subject directory of Internet resources". She concludes stating " So, was Ranganathan a Yahoo!? Perhaps it's a matter of semantics. Considering his complex notation scheme developed for the Colon Classification, as well as his principles of facet analysis as applied to the organization of digital information, I would say yes".

Conclusion:

An attempt is made here to retrace some of the key contributions of Ranganathan and correlating them to the contemporary changing information environment and also realisation on the impact of ICT on Library resources and services. This paper is a first and the only in this direction and further research in these and other areas of his contribution can be attempted.

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