ENGAGING NON-USER TOWARDS PUBLIC LIBRARY: SOME PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Aswini Masanta*   Moumita Mukherjee**

* Library Assistant,
ICFAI Business School
Salt Lake,
Kolkata,   West   Bengal,
India.

** Librarian
G.D. Birla Centre for
Education,
Ranikuthi,
Kolkata,   West   Bengal,
India.

QR Code

Abstract: - *The Public Library is regarded as the hub of knowledge for general people free from any barrier of age, sex, cast, creed, religion, or educational level. Various initiatives have been taken by RRRLF, State Central Library and Mass Education Extension & Library Services Department, Government of West Bengal for continuous development of public libraries in West Bengal. Library automation, digitization of documents, information sharing through library network is some of the example of few initiatives taken by the Government. In spite of the initiatives taken, it has failed to draw people towards the libraries as shown in various reports and surveys.*

This study conducted in a specific district of West Bengal to understand the views on public libraries among masses. The purpose of the survey reported in this study was to assess the views of publics on the need for public libraries. A structured questionnaire was prepared and data was collected by applying random sampling method. The survey included 434 respondents and was conducted in several locations including academic institutions, local places, and book stores, recreation areas located in and around Kolkata. Considerable number (68%) of respondent are not a member of any public library. Identified the reasons of not interested in public libraries and propose some recommendations after analysis data for a considerable amount of non member of public libraries.

Keywords : - Public library, Public libraries in Kolkata district, Public library services, Non-users.

Introduction

Public libraries are establish and develop to cater the information needs by the general people. But a large number of people has remained unwanted to avail the benefit of library and information centers and their services. We have many libraries of national importance located in Kolkata district such as National Library of India, Asiatic Society,

State Central Library and Kolkata Metropolitan Library. There are also various policy making bodies such as RRRLF, Mass Education Extension & Library services Department under of West Bengal, various library association as Bengal Library Association, IASLIC etc. In spite of having so many policy making bodies and initiatives taken by the Government to improve the conditions of the public libraries in and around the city such as Library automation, digitization of documents, information sharing through library network, it has failed to engage the common mass towards these library services. Out of the total 2480 libraries located in West Bengal, 258 libraries have been closed due to lack of staff and maintenance as per the report published in "Anandabazar Patrika" (19th June, 2017). So, in average around 45% posts are vacant in public libraries.

As per the report we can understand that there has been an alarming rate of degradation of public libraries in West Bengal in the last few years. Therefore, this study was undertaken with the motive to understand the view of public on public libraries. The valid research questions which came up in this study were whether they are interested to use public libraries? Is there any scope of engaging the non members to be a member of a public library? Do the existing members of public libraries feel the need to expand library services being given to them or this type of institutions are not required in this internet addicted society? On the basis of these questions we have formulated the objectives of the study.

Objectives

The purpose of the survey reported in this study was to assess the overall thinking and the general view of public on the need for public libraries.

The main objectives of the study focused on:

1. To identify the non members of any public library and understand their general view or motivation towards public library.

2. To justify the need of the public libraries amongst the masses.

3. To identify reasons for not being a member of any public library.

4. Identify major problems and barriers inside the library which may affect the interest of the masses towards public library.

Methodology

To meet the objectives of the study, survey method was chosen. A structured questionnaire of 16 questions was prepared with closed and open ended questions. The data was collected through random sampling methodology by distributing the questionnaire to random selected users from South Kolkata. The survey included 434 respondents and was conducted in several locations including academic institutions, local places, and book stores, recreation areas located in and around south Kolkata. It was kept in mind that the respondent's age group and educational background was irrespective of any indication.

Out of the 434 participants that we surveyed, 162 (37%) of the respondents were men, while 272 (63%) were women. The respondents' age groups are provided in Table 1.

Table.1: Respondents' Age Group

Age	Numbers (%)
16 or under	91 (21%)
17-25	147(34%)
26-40	108(25%)
41-60	78(18%)
60 or older	10(2%)

Out of 434 respondents, 21% belonged to the age category of 16 yrs or under, 34% belonged to 17-25 age group, 25% belonged to 26-40 age group, 18% belonged to 41-60 age group and the remaining 2% were 60 years or above. Since our main focus was to understand the general view of people regarding public libraries in Kolkata, we categorized the age group in broader categories. It is obvious from the above data that a considerable amount of the respondents belonged to younger age group.

Table.2: Education level of respondents

Qualification	Numbers (%)
Class 10 or below	96(22%)
High school	69(16%)
Graduation	148 (34%)
Masters	91(21%)
Higher studies	30 (7%)

Out of the total respondents, 34% had Graduation degree, followed by 22% belonging to class 10 or below, 21% had qualified Masters and 16% were in Plus 2 level. It was conclusive from the above data that all the respondents were literate and had

minimum basic qualification. The largest group belonged to college or university level students.

Table.3: Employment Status of respondents

Employment Status	Numbers (%)
Student	247(57%)
Employed or self-employed	91(21%)
Homemaker	74 (17%)
Retired	13 (3%)
Unemployed	9 (2%)

Table3 shows that out of 434 respondents, 57% are students, who are selected from various institutions. 21% are employee of any organization or self-employed. 17% of the population is homemaker and 3% are retired persons. Only 2% of the total respondents are unemployed.

Member of a public library	Not a member of any public library
139 out of 434 respondents (32%)	295 out of 434 respondents (68%)

Out of 434 participants, 68% respondents were not a member of any public library while the remaining 32% were members of any public library. It is obvious from the data that considerable percentages of people are not members of any public library.

Analysis and Discussion

Through this survey we found that considerable percentage (68%) of public is not a member of any public library. Most of them are not aware of the activities of the public libraries. There is no one to suggest them how public libraries can fulfill their information needs or how public libraries play an important role in our society.

Table.4: Member of a public library in the past 10 years but now have discontinued

	Numbers	Percentage
Have been a member but discontinued	23	8%
Never been a member	272	92%

Out of the 295 respondents who were non-members, 8% have been members of any public library in the past 10 years but discontinued while a considerable percentage 92% have never been members of any public library. On probing the 23 respondents that why they have not continued their membership, the answers varied ranging between lack of their time or needs to discontinuing the renewal of membership due to lack of interest.

Table.5: Reasons for not being a member of any library

Reasons for not being a member of any public library	Numbers Of respondents	%
Poor book collections/services	18	6%
Poor conditions	29	10%
High membership fee	0	0%
I am not interested	133	45%
Others	115	39%

Out of the 68% of total respondents who were not members of any public library, we found that 18 (6%) people have not been any members due to poor book collections/services, 133 (45%) respondents are not interested in any membership, 39% stated other reasons for not being a member, 10% stated because of poor conditions of the libraries. A considerable percentage was not interested in the membership of any library.

On probing more, some of the problems discussed by them were that

a. Library hours do not match with the working professionals.

b. Easy accessibility of books through online and free pdf version of e-books.

c. The conditions of public libraries are shabby and deplorable.

d. Not aware of the activities or the services provided by the library which might be useful for them.

e. More interested in door to door service of borrowing books or mobile libraries.

f. Information need is already fulfilled by accessing internet at home.

Despite new services and the introduction of ICT with the opportunities it provided in enhancing the services of the public libraries, it has failed to attract new members within its purview. Even though the membership fees of a public library is minimum as per government provision, huge number of people are still not a member of any public library. Therefore, it is required to discover new patrons' needs in order to develop new services.

Problems identified by existing members

Out of the total 434 respondents only 139 (32%) are members of any public library in Kolkata district. The study finds out what are the major problems inside the library which drive people away from becoming a member. Some structured problems which were identified are given in Table 6.

Table.6: Major problems identified of public libraries

Problems of public libraries	Agree	Partially agree	Disagree
Less funding	87 (63%)	52 (37%)	0 (0%)
Proximity/Accessibility	26 (19%)	99 (71%)	14 (10%)
Infrastructural issues	35 (25%)	71 (51%)	33 (24%)
Library collection	46 (33%)	79 (57%)	14 (10%)
Lack of staffs	83 (60%)	54 (39%)	2 (1%)
Lack of user awareness programme / extension services	56 (40%)	72 (52%)	11 (8%)
Lack of online resources (Database/ e-journals, e-books)	85 (61%)	51 (37%)	3 (2%)
Lack of computers	73 (52%)	45 (32%)	21 (15%)

From the above table it is clear that libraries lack in promotion and marketing their resources amongst its users. Users need to be aware of the services a library is providing. A library has to create a friendly welcoming environment in order to draw users to the libraries. It should be located in proper prime areas of the city which is well connected with transport.

How to attain the interest of patrons to become a member of a library

1. Increase the numbers of libraries in different localities to enable the access by people at nearby places.
2. Increase recreational collection such as journals, magazines, and newspapers, travel guides.
3. Create a welcoming environment within the library with coffee and tea counters where users can relax as well as read.
4. Free internet browsing and surfing to enhance the services.
5. Increase the working hours of the libraries.
6. Enabling the access of library databases from home
7. Develop architecture as comfortable to spend leisure time.
8. Holding discussions or book reading sessions enable the users to interact with one another creating a welcoming environment.
9. Having movie shows, activity workshops, storytelling sessions for the children will draw kids as well as their parents to the library. The children's section should be a creative corner within the library with appropriate furniture and resources to attract the kids.
10. Keeping the libraries open even on weekends or holidays will draw users to the library.

Recommendations

There are few recommendations that could be given on the basis of the survey findings. Even after 38 years of enactment of the Public Library Act (1979), most of the people are not aware about the importance of public libraries in their social life. Government has not taken many initiatives to make awareness program about public libraries like pulse polio immunization, aids awareness, Sarva Siksha Mission etc.

Most of the public libraries have stopped to organize various extension activities as organizing book fairs, blood donation camps, cultural programmes etc. Lack of awareness programmes and proper advertising failed to engage non members towards libraries.

Recruitment of professional staff is one of the most important recommendations to increase library services to the people. The quality of services provided by the library should also be taken care of.

Libraries should engage themselves in mobile services and to provide online services are the prerequisite of development of public libraries.

Introduce new services such as reprographic services, internet access, notifying latest government activities are some of the examples of new services which can be helpful to the existing users as well as enrolling new users.

Conclusion

Major limitation of this study was that population of Kolkata district was 4,496,694 (census: 2011) whereas our sample size was only 434 respondents which is not at all representative of the total population. Therefore, it is not possible to make a review on the entire public's opinion. The results solely depend on the 434 respondents that we have surveyed as part of our study and thus this cannot be the absolute view of the entire mass.   However, this study shows a partial reflection of the viewpoint of general public about public library.

A large number of the population is still not a member of any public library. Even the frequency of visits of the members of public libraries is not regular. Involvement in active communication with the patrons and identifying potential members through different types of services as per their requirements can prove to be the solution to the problems. Library professionals and government should take some initiative in engaging people in a library which can prove to be the preconditions of a developing society.

References

1. Ali, A. (2015). ICT in rural libraries of West Bengal: A case study of Jalpaiguri District India. *Research Journal of Library Sciences,3 (6).13-19.* ISSN 2320–8929.

2. Bandyopadhyay, R. (2008). Information literacy and public library services in West Bengal, India. *ICOLIS 2008, Kuala Lumpur: LISU, FCSIT*,129-136.

3. Chowdhury, M (2011, March). Change of thinking: Whether the people in not interested to the library or vice versa [In Bengali]. *Granthagar*, 60(12), 324-328.

4. Das, A. K., & Lal, B. (2006). Information literacy and public libraries in India. In *Information literacy and public libraries in India.* Delhi Public Library, India.

5. Divatankar, N. I., & Lokhande, S. S. (2013). The public library system and its role in the society in the ICT environment. *Research Front.* 1(4),39-46.

6. Gokhale-Shahade, R. (May, 2014). Role of public library in knowledge society. *Abhinav National Monthly Refereed Journal of Research in Arts & Education,* 3(5), 6-10.

7. Islam, M., & Mezbah-ul-Islam, M. (2010). Community information services through public libraries in Bangladesh: Problems and proposals. *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal).* ISSN 1522-0222.

8. Kamila, K.(2013, May).Reading habit encouragement, expansion of adult education, farming, education, health & transport service- Role of community library for increasing public awareness and total development: International perspective and ourselves [In Bengali].*Granthagar*, 63(2), 40-48.

9. Koontz, C., & Gubbin, B. (Eds.). (2010). *IFLA public library service guidelines* (Vol. 147). Walter de Gruyter.

10. Kumar, P. S. G. (2011). *Library movement and library development in West Bengal & Sikkim*. Delhi: B. R. Publishing, p.405.

11. Majumdar, K. (2008). *Paschimbanger sadharan granthagar vyabasthar prasar o Bangiya Granthagar Parisad* (in Bengali). Kolkata: Bengal Library Association, p.3.

12. Majumder, K. (2017). Community Information Services through Public Libraries and Information Centres: an experience in West Bengal, India. *Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries*, 5(4), 797-804.

13. Ohdedar, A. K. (1966). *The growth of the library in modern India 1498-1836*. Calcutta: World Press, 1966, p.48.

Public libraries for their part have been slow to react to the dramatic changes in publishing and reading that threaten their ability to fulfill their core mission of promoting reading. By focusing too heavily on giving patrons access to bestsellers and popular movies, libraries risk missing the significant opportunity afforded by the explosion in the number of new books published each year. With this understanding, it's clear why large publishers might be ambivalent towards libraries. This narrow of view of public libraries misses an important dynamic, however. Like the humble starfish that preserves entire marine ecosystems by eating mussels, the American public library is the keystone species in the ecosystem of reading. Public libraries used to be the treasure house of knowledge and information but according to some people in this age of the internet they are of no importance. Of course, many people disagree with this view. In my opinion, state funded libraries certainly have become less important than they used to be; however, I cannot support the argument that they are no longer important. On the other hand, public libraries still serve some valuable purpose. To start with, the information on the internet is relatively new whereas libraries have an impressive collection of old manuscripts that are not available online. Also, much of the information online is in English whereas libraries have a huge collection of books written in a wide variety of languages. Problems and Prospects Of. Accessible Tourism In India. Ministry of tourism. As many as one-third of domestic respondents are engaged in some form of self-employment activities. Again, among those employed respondents of domestic origin, nearly 33% are working at officer/executive levels, whereas, corresponding proportion among foreign tourists works out to nearly 50%. It further shows the proportion of support staff is more among domestic tourists. Non-availability of personal aids/equipments and comparatively higher-prices of adaptable rooms also call for qualified actions. Problems and Prospects of Accessible Tourism in India. xviii.