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Apart from Open to all: Assessing the Status and Community participation of the Public Library Nonusers

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Abstract

Purpose: Despite the all-encompassing discourse of open for all and local gateway to information, academic profiling and understanding of the nonusers of public libraries remains weak. In fact, most of the studies concentrate on the library users' part keeping aside the crucial issue of nonuse of the public libraries. This study attempts to assess and develop an understanding about the public library nonusers by mapping their socio-demographic characteristics and community participation.

Methodology: Profiling the characteristics of nonusers requires data from community. For this purpose data has been solicited through survey and interview mode with specified questionnaire from the samples. Data has been analysed using tables and findings have been revealed.

Findings: The study upholds the socio-demographic profiles of the nonusers of public libraries depicting their age, gender, formal education, income, work pattern etc. The profiles of the nonusers indicate role of different factors related with the issue of nonuse. The study finds that nonusers' participation in various forms of community engagement like volunteering, creating social support group, taking part in local decision making, collaborating with the community, advocating for others is less practiced.

Keywords: Public Library; Nonuse; Assessment; Nonuser; Community Participation; Community Activity

1. Introduction

The main goal of the public library is to provide services and resources in a variety of media that meet the public's needs (IFLA, 2001) with equal opportunities for everyone (UNESCO, 1994).

Public libraries are not mere collections and buildings, above all, libraries exist for the communities (Anglada, 2014). As 'libraries are about people, not books' (Booth, 1993), there would be no library without patrons. Public library is a community-centric institute and at the same time creates scope for community engagement for all. Public libraries are open to all and termed as 'Peoples' university'. In spite of its openness, nonuse of public library is a pertinent issue that deserves assessment. Despite hundreds of user studies, we still know rather little about the real information needs of the various communities' information services are designed to serve. The characteristics of the nonusers of the library, their motivations for not visiting the library and their preferences and requirements constitute essential data for understanding the perception of existing services and improving them or creating new ones (Connaway,2015). Prosocial people involve themselves in various community activities which also accelerates the eagerness to use the public library. What knowledge we do have may be more detrimental rather than beneficial in the management and design of the services rendered by the public libraries. It is the utmost necessity, perhaps to abandon user studies and to concentrate instead on a more productive area of research – that of nonuse and nonusers of information services.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Public library nonuse

Public library aims to provide information access for all (Sin and Kim, 2008). Generally, a public library is a place for community members from where all kinds of information and knowledge can be obtained readily and free of cost (Wijetunge, 2000). For the community development public libraries have catalytic roles (Madu, Onyeneke, and Azubogu, 2018). IFLA/UNESCO (2001) guideline indicates that public libraries are set up within their community's culture and the impact of that culture has a role in shaping the services of the public libraries, but services like free access to information, knowledge and services to all members irrespective of race, nationality, gender, age, religion, economic and employment status are generally common. Although through many studies for year, we have gathered some knowledge about the academic, economic and other characteristics of the public library users, we almost know little about the nonusers of public library (Madden,1979). Thus, the public library and community are very much integral to each other. But only a portion of the community or public uses its resources, facilities, services or programmes (Sin and Kim, 2008). Empirical evidence from different studies on public library establishes their

value that warrants to maintain public libraries in the community (Sorensen, 2021). But the concern for the nonuser is overshadowed by the demands of library's record keeping activities in many cases (Ladendorf,1972). Understanding the identity of the nonusers of public libraries is critically important (Sin and Kim, 2008) for the libraries' strategic planning. Houston (2011) applying retroductive recognition of absence method in his study regarding nonuse of information, concluded with a hierarchical taxonomy of the mechanism that compel a person not to use information and that was intrinsic somatic conditions, socio-environmental barriers, authoritative controls, threshold knowledge shortfall, attention shortfall and information filtering. Reaching the unserved people demands an active concept of library activity or service. (Ladendorf, 1972). Systematic efforts have not been effected to understand the public library non-users, unserved, under-privileged, underserved and deprived users (Sridhar, 1994). The non-users' issue is relevant to all for information professionals surveyed but it appears that non-users have different demographics (Sbaffi and Rowley, 2014). It is essential to investigate the role of public libraries within the community whether it provides an environment that can motivate them to become conscious citizen (Hashmi, 2019). Multiple studies on public library nonusers have dealt with different types of characteristics and indicated different aspects of nonusers.

2.2 Assessment of Nonuse and Nonusers

The importance to knowing who are the nonusers of public libraries is of immense importance. This warrants the assessment of the nonusers' profile and their involvement and motivation and that will obviously help the library professionals, decision makers and others to comply with the ideals of public library. As public libraries are integral part of the community and has an immense role in community's overall well-being (Scot, 2011), carrying out an assessment of the users and nonusers of it helps identifying the characteristics of the community (Shin, Jeon and Lee, 2022). Exploration of the community characteristics of the public library's service area is, thus, so crucial. The final goal of library assessment is to increase the efficiency in managing library resources and services effectiveness (Galluzzi, 2014). According to May (2009) busy adult males visit the public library less, teenagers think public libraries are not cool and many people opine that public libraries are simply outdated. Nonuse of a library may be due to lack of strong need or lack of awareness of need on the part of nonusers (Sridhar, 1994). Leguina (2021) observes that in the context of gradual rising of budgetary constraints, socio-economic inequalities and growing crunch for public

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services, it becomes necessary to know and assess the community need and accordingly prioritize continuation of services. Most likely, the reason behind the lack of interest towards libraries shown by educated and affluent (Sbaffi and Rowley, 2014).

2.3 Community Participation

Community involvement is meaningful, consistent participation in activities that support and improve upon social wellbeing (Appropedia, 2020). Human beings as socio-political unit in the community they interact in many forms among other community members. But the level and forms of prosocial involvement in community activities requires certain positive motivations which in turn lead to be involved in other community organizations. Community involvement generally includes engaging with non-profit activities, volunteering for some person or organization, donating for some causes, local associations, local-level government etc.

2.4 Problem Statement

Every institute existing in the community tries to serve its targeted user or people. Public library is no exception. Since the inception of the modern-day public library, it tries to encompass each and everyone of the community member under its service destination. The long cherished and upheld values to act as a university for the people with their immediate information and other needs is yet unaccomplished. For certain reasons a major portion of the community cannot or do not use the broadly open public library. The nonusers of public library are thus deprived of the services and products and values. This is why it is very pertinent to involve into the process to learn about the socio-demographic status of these vast portion of nonusers. Irrespective of any kind of discrimination, access to information, fostering life-long learning and centre of community participation are at the core of designing public library resources and services. Public libraries are, thus, community centres to bring a positive change by the resources and services. But for certain reasons a major portion of community members do not use the resources and services. Thus, the study tries to focus on the following problems:

1. Who are the public library nonusers?
2. What is their socio-demographic status?
3. What is the status of their community participation?

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3. Objectives

Public libraries are service-oriented and public organisations whose aim is to respond and serve to the needs of their patrons or community members.

i.   To develop community profiles of nonusers of public libraries by identifying and collecting socio-demographic and economic data.

ii.   To bring out library nonusers' general attitude towards community participation

iii. To assess the status of community participation of the public library nonusers.

4. Methodology

In order to achieve the objectives mentioned above, it is necessary to adopt the survey method. The present study on assessment of nonusers' socio-demographic data and their areas of community participation or involvement in various activities needs the application of the method of gathering solicited evidences. Therefore, to opt survey method by which data has been obtained by means of questionnaires and interviews. Data has been gathered from 385 public library nonusers (respondents) of five districts under the Presidency Division of the state of West Bengal. Sample size has been determined in two steps – first, calculation of the sample size for infinite populations and second, adjust the sample size to required population. The formula used here to calculate the sample size is, **$S= Z^2*p(1-p)/M^2$** (Cochran,1977) where S is sample size for infinity population; Z is Z score; p is population proportion and M is margin of error. Thus, the sample size for infinity population for 32,741,224 (according to 2011 Census of India) under the Presidency Division of West Bengal is 384.16. Gathered data has been analysed with the help of simple tool like tables to serve the interest of the study.

5. Data analysis

Descriptive Statistics

Data gathered from the survey has been analysed with the help of simple tables as follows

Gender	Respondents	Percentage
Male	217	56%

Female	168	44%
Total	385	100

Table 1: Gender

Amongst the 385 (100%) respondents 56% (217) belong to male nonusers and 44% (168) respondents belong to female.

Age group (in Years)	Responses	Percentage
Up to 16	68	17.66%
17-30	90	23.37%
31-45	103	26.75%
46-60	85	22.07%
Above 60	39	10.12%
Total	385	100

Table 2: Age group

In table 2 population up to sixteen years old covers 17.66 % (68) and most of them are students of school. Age group covering 17 to 30 years of age is of 23.37% (90). Nonusers of the age group between 31 to 45 covers highest population with 26.75% (103). Among the nonusers 22.07% (85) are under the age group of 46-60. Senior citizens cover 10.12 % (39) of the total population.

Marital Status	No of Responses	Percentage
Unmarried	138	35.84%
Married	218	56.62%
Widower and Divorcee	29	7.53 %

Table 3: Marital Status

Marital status of the nonusers of public library covers 35.84% (138) by unmarried population. The largest portion of the respondents goes to the married population at 56.62% (218) and there are also widower or divorcee people that covers 7.53% (29).

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Formal Education	No of Responses	Percentage
Primary	69	17.92 %
Secondary	159	41.29 %
Graduate and above	143	37.14 %
Illiterate	14	3.63 %

Table 4: Formal education

Table 4 deals with the respondents' formal educational level and it is found that 17.92% or 69 people are with primary level, 41.29% (159) comprises the largest share of the population. People with Graduate and above level of education is of 37.14% (143) shows that nonusers are also from higher level of education. At the same time 3.63% (14) population is illiterates who also comprise a portion to the total of nonusers.

Occupation	Respondents	Percentage
Agriculture/Forestry/Fishing	55	14.28
Self-employed	46	11.94
Production Worker	53	13.76
Office Worker	39	10.12
Professional	33	8.57
Student	72	18.70
Housewife	63	16.36
Unemployed	24	6.23

Table 5: Occupation of the Nonusers

Data from Table 5 shows that nonusers of public library come from almost every walk of life. 14.28% population comes from agriculture, forestry or fishing profession. Self-employed persons are 11.94%, production workers are of 13.76% and office worker are 10.12%. among the nonusers students are of 18.70%, housewives are 16.36% and unemployed respondents cover 6.23%.

Part-time job/ Overtime	No of Responses	Percentage

Yes	174	45.19 %
No	211	54.80 %

Table 6: Involvement in part-time or overtime job

Data from table 6 shows that a large section of population (45.19%) is involved in doing or providing part-time, overtime work or multiple tasks. 54.80 % population although is not involved in part-time or overtime works.

Income Group (In Rupees)	Responses	Percentage
Poor (Less than one lac/Year)	118	30.64
Lower Middle Class (1-2 lac/Year	103	26.75
Middle Income Group (2-5 Lakh/Year)	106	27.53
Upper Middle Class (5-10 /Year)	47	12.20
More than 10 Lakh /Year	11	2.58

Table 7: Income group

Table 7 shows that more than 57% population belong to poor and lower income group. Coverage of middle-income group is only 27.53%. Upper middle-income group is only 12.20% and the affluent or rich income group is only 2.58%.

Community Participation	Yes	No
Take part in volunteering activity	154 (40)	231(60)
Participate in local decision making	119(30.90)	266 (69.09)
Creation of social support group	167(43.37)	218(56.62)
Attempts in collaborating with community	127(32.98)	258(67.01)
Advocates for others	173(44.93)	212(55.06)

Table 8: Community participation

Community participation among the public library nonusers exhibits a mixture of responses. Majority of the respondents (60 %) does not take part in voluntary activities. Regarding participation in the decision-making process of the local authorities almost two-third (69.09%) of

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the population do not take part. In the matter of creating different types of social-support group the above table shows that 56.62 % people are inactive. Regarding attempts to collaborate with other communities is also a minority (32.98%) activity, as 67 % people do not participate. On the otherhand advocacy for others' causes or issues is also lower (44.93%).

5.1 Findings

- The study finds that vast majority of nonusers are from poor, lower and middle-income group people.
- Role of forma; education among the nonusers deserve further study as both less educated, illiterate and
- Among the public library nonusers married and widowed or divorcees are majority.
- The study shows that public library nonusers are from different occupations. Students, housewives, farmers, office goers, production workers comprise the totality of nonusers.
- The study on nonusers of public library finds that participation in community activities is a minority activity among the participants which may fuel the idea of exploring further in the issue.

6. Conclusion

The study findings indicate that a number of economically less-advantaged people and exhausted by overtime work or part-time work are still to be nonusers of public libraries. Community participation and public library nonuse are related to with each other. Certain prosocial forms of community engagement have strong relational value between these two. Public library being a community centric institute, therefore, deserves inculcating and indulging in creating more community space for transforming the nonusers into users or designing services for the relevance of community.

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