

THE ever increasing use of the buzz words 'information explosion' and 'information superhighway' and the innovations of 'Information Technology' do not mean that all are set and running well. My basic argument in this paper is that all are neither well, nor running well. I would like to explain this argument in terms of the problems and attempt to find possible avenues to minimise them.

The Two Businesses of Information and Knowledge

There are distinctly two different businesses in this sphere, one is the 'information business' and the other 'knowledge business'. I call them 'business', because in the days when everything is 'business' including the business of idealism and intellectualism, the vast network of satellite communication on which the high sounding 'globalisation of information' rests has generated and will probably generate more business than Henry Ford or Cadbury dreamt of. But the information or knowledge business is claimed to be different from that of Ford or Cadbury in the following two respects: firstly, it is conducted in the sphere of our 'intellectual capabilities or higher faculties', and secondly, it works to overcome the human, geographical, political, social and even individual constraints that have existed among us from time immemorial.

The two, 'information business' and 'knowledge business', we have to admit, are different, yet complementary to each other. Generally speaking, information may be ephemeral and it may act as an index or a guide to knowledge. Knowledge on the other hand, is the accepted and acceptable theoretical developments proven either by logical arguments or by proof. (This difference is generally valid despite instances of

information becoming knowledge by certain style of its use and interpretation, thus forming part of our historical consciousness, e.g. history made from data and information.)

When we the librarians talk of information, we do not always realize that our clientele may be receiving different signals. We are talking about 'information', but the clientele may think that we are meaning 'knowledge'. The confusion about the two concepts is very common, not only in developing countries, but also in the developed world. Information is not knowledge, but a gateway to knowledge. In the libraries, access to Library of Congress Catalogue is often taken literally as if it gives the clientele access to the books (i.e. knowledge).

Globalisation of and Access to Information

In order to assess the significance of the relationships of the concept 'information' with the activities 'globalisation' and 'access', we would, first of all, need to ascertain the nature of this 'information', and then to what end the 'information' is to be used. The concept 'globalisation' is the bridge made possible by what is commonly known as the 'information technology' (IT), comprising of an array of technologies and human interface. Let us first discuss these two activities and their problems.

Globalisation: Someone has to put the information into the net. This 'someone' may be an individual or an organisation, whether commercial or non-commercial. It means that the activity of globalisation is performed from the viewpoint of this 'someone'. Of course, this 'someone' is aware of his/her audience, or at least some idea about who might use them. This cannot strictly be called a 'participatory' situation.

The Access: The present state

Globally available information is not organised in the way that enables a busy academician or a common person to have access easily and quickly. In order to solve this problem, it is suggested that well defined Information Requiring Communities (or IRCs) have to be developed along with an Organiser (IRC Organiser) to whom the IRC members can approach in the same way as they approach a librarian or information scientist. In the present set-up, individual attempts to receive information via Internet are meeting with more frustration than success. Therefore, there is the need for institutionalisation or de-individualisation of the access to global information.

of Information Technology (IT) allows anyone who has a computer with reasonable capacity, a modem and a telephone line to reach the world's information (via an ISP) that has been made available through the web sites, or may be via telnet or PC Anywhere direct to another computer's hard disk. It is as simple as that, but the questions are 'Does the user get the information required?' and 'How well is the user served?'

The Problematic of Globalisation of Access to Information

There are two kinds of problematic in this, one is technological and the other is filtration of information. The globalisation of access is a technological matter which means certain gadgets and their usability have to be guaranteed. Assuming that the technology is running without hitch in the western developed countries and NICs, the same may not be true of all countries of the world. This should also take into consideration that access to the technology is severely limited to urban centres of many developing countries mainly for the lack of an efficient telephone network of ISPs.

The second problematic filtration of information means that there are too much of information. The user is often bewildered and lost, despite adequate facilities for searching index and in many instances by keywords.

The two problematic arise due to commercial and business reasons. This statement may come as a shock to many of us. The fact is that despite Internet being a non-property, its service has been propriety in one way or other. The acceptable part of this is the commercialisation of technology, and the non-acceptable part of it is the monopolisation of information commercially.

Developing a Theoretical Framework

In order to overcome the above problematic, we may offer a theoretical framework in which we the librarians and information scientists may develop our work strategy. The theoretical framework I propose is to consider the globalisation of information as a global library and information centre into which all users have equal access. This equal access means that the users should get their required items or information in the shortest possible time and spend less time on searches. In conventional library system, a very large library is arranged in a way that should enable this performance. This has become possible because the service has been institutionalised. By this I mean that the service operates within an institutional framework, and the institution offers a filtration service.

The difference between this conventional library system and a global library via Internet upto now is that the latter is more individual-oriented than the former. Even in the cyber cafes, the time bought is for an individual, and in many cases the individual is guided by an experienced staff. Because of the enormity of the information available, and the amount of time required for downloading information from a host, the desired output may not always be what is expected within a fixed period. On the other hand, the user may not have been able to pre-determine his/her requirements.

How This Theoretical Framework Can Operate in Pragmatic Situation?

We would like to fulfil certain pre-requisites before we proceed to operate the theoretical framework in pragmatic situation.

Development of IRCs

Most important of these is the recognition of or establishment of Information Requiring Communities, in brief

What are these 'interests'? These interests may embrace anything which will be beneficial to achieve a common goal of the people in the community. The concept 'Information' is to be seen in the light of the 'interests' of the Community. When we talk of community information, we mean those information that are useful in the pursuance of a common goal.

So, we have a community, and the information requirements of this community have to be organised and delivered.

Let us take a group of scientists on one hand, and a group of textile weaver on the other. Both have information to disseminate, and both require information to pursue their profession or trade for some declared common goals. Because of the problematic referred to above, an IRC Organiser can act as a clearing centre for access to Internet information.

Conclusion

De-individualisation: Since Internet and globalisation of information along with the idea of information superhighway have been firmly established among the educated communities of the world, the whole thing has been prone to individual exercise. In the beginning of this year, Department of Heritage in Great Britain which is responsible for public libraries in UK issued a report entitled IT for All. It stressed that IT should be used in the public libraries to regain

constraints or any newer kind of constraints exist in this age of Internet.

Let me chalk out some basic problems of using information via Internet:

- a. The language problem;
- b. Commercialism of most ISPs;
- c. Lack of directory;
- d. Hypertext preparation requiring special skills;
- e. Poor telephone service in rural areas;
- f. Lack of common format for data and information input;
- g. Computers-Internet combination is taken too seriously and often with awe for common, daily and regular application.

The suggested remedies include a government action plan, but now I don't think it would work towards solving the problems. Development of IRCs with an IRC Organiser seems to be a better and more workable proposition. An IRC Organiser can take care of the language problem, just like an information specialist does in conventional situation. He can maintain up-to-date directory, employ hypertext preparation staff, organise alternatives to telephone services for remote areas, liaise with other organisations for developing common communication format, and it's popularise the use of global information network.

Conclusion

De-individualisation:

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the serious character of the British public libraries. But the report frankly admitted that the Department did not know how it would be possible. This confirms my view that instead of letting the information handling to be carried on by individuals in their private studies or on dining tables, institutionalisation is a better proposition. At this moment cyber cafes are already working in certain public library system at £5.00 an hour in UK (which is for individual use), the proposition of further use of IT for serious business means that institutionalisation is being deliberated by the British public library authorities.

My conclusion is that if we wish an access to the globally available information for serious and meaningful purposes, particularly for Research and Development (R&D), we have to start by institutionalising and at the same time campaign for de-individualising the technological access.

A Point of Sociological Interest:

As we, the librarians are busy with the upcoming 'informational society' from the perspective of access to information, sociologists are also becoming restless to study the impact of the information technology on the society. Manuel Castells (The Information Age, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) has studied the role of IT in transforming the whole economic, social and cultural environment of our times. Krishan Kumar (From Post-Industrial to Post-Modern Society, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) deals with the idea of an 'information society' and post-industrialism, moving on to post-Fordism and post-modernism forecasting a possibility of transition to a new society the shape of which may be uncomfortable to many.

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Arsenic Contamination: Foreign Media Reports and Expatriates' Concern

Drinking Deadly in Bangladesh

by Uli Schmetzer

"It's no use looking for culprits. What we need is quick and coordinated action to identify all the poisoned wells and find ways to sanitise the water by filters or additives."

HATKOPA Village, Bangladesh — By the time painted the nozzle of his well red, as a warning not to drink the water, Abdul Jabbar already was suffering excruciating pain from stomach cancer caused by arsenic poisoning. Jabbar will die as sure as the annual monsoon rains flood the wetlands every year. Millions more will share his fate over the next decade unless rural Bangladeshis and neighbouring Indians are saved from well water contaminated by a poison that causes a slow and painful death.

"When we brought up the problem three years ago we were told, 'Don't create a panic. Keep quiet,'" said Dr. Mahmudur Rahman, a physician and head of Dhaka's National Medical College. "Even the World Health Organization had a negative attitude and their consultant rejected our report." By 1997, local bureaucrats, politicians and international skeptics finally accepted the magnitude of the problem. By then it was too late for many rural inhabitants.

"Now we have 9-year-olds with the disease, and we need quick action," Rahman said. "Arsenic is cancer-producing. It's slow. You may get cancer only after 20 years. According to a (University of California at Berkeley) study, we now have 30,000 to 40,000 cancer cases a year as the result of arsenic poisoning. But many more are never reported because doctors here don't know how to diagnose it. They just call it a skin disease. The only remedy to reverse the disease is to drink safe water." The only antidote for the first two stages of arsenic poisoning is arsenic-free water. For the third stage there is no cure.

A survey financed by the World Bank covered about 10 per cent of the 4 million Bangladeshi wells. It found 40 per cent of the surveyed wells were contaminated with arsenic. After years of dallying, skepticism and bureaucratic inertia, the race is on now to save between 18 million and 24 million people who Kabir said face death by arsenic poisoning. Another 6 million potential victims are estimated to be in India's West Bengal state. Progress has been slow. The arsenic alarm was first sounded in 1988 by a Calcutta gadfly named Dipankar Chakraborti.

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1971 have caused diarrhea and cholera epidemics that killed millions in the past. The current tragedy has its roots in a Good Samaritan act by the international community. Beginning in the late 1970s, United Nations agencies such as UNICEF began to wean rural people away from polluted ponds and canals by providing them with 1 million wells that draw water from what hydrologists then considered pure aquifer water deposits 65 feet or more below the surface.

UNICEF officials admit no one tested the new wells; the campaign was hailed as a resounding success. In fact, 97 per cent of the rural population now drink from deep-bore aquifer wells. Villagers dug 3 million more wells at their own expense, and they used the additional water for irrigation, which has now raised fears of food-chain poisoning. The wells had been drilled into a subterranean layer of arsenic that had washed down from the Himalayas by the Ganges and Bramaputra Rivers over eons and seeped to the bottom of the silt that makes this region so fertile. As irrigation and more thirsty throats lowered the water table, people inadvertently pumped the arsenic to the surface. According to studies submitted to the World Bank, as many as 200,000 people a year now die of arsenic poisoning in Bangladesh.

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