
Web-enabled CIS's: An Indispensable Tool for today's Public Libraries

Wasim Akram

Dept. of library and information science
University of Kalyani, Nadia
West Bengal, India.
E-mail: wasimgreat2016@gmail.com

Abstract

Web technologies have directly influenced the public libraries, by which the public libraries has no longer become an exclusive source of information whether it is decreased door counts or increased use of virtual resources. With the increasing use of the Internet an increasing number of people went to web to seek their everyday life information through this channel. Due to that single reason, the user of public libraries are decreasing day by day. If no efforts are effectuated, public libraries will obviously loose their position as leading community information providers in the near future. The concept discussed in this paper is the creation of a web-enabled CIS for the dissimination of community information through public library. It also presents in short the theoretical aspect of CIS. The paper gives an introduction to the basics in web-enabled CIS , on which this author has provided an analytical overview of the existing literature within the last few years. In this article ,a model for development of web-based CIS were provided , which focus on the users' need for use of information to solve 'daily life' problems and for participation in democratic processes in the society

Keywords

Public libraries, Community information services, Web-based CIS, Library Services, Information poverty

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1. INTRODUCTION

Today public libraries of India are facing a great challenge in the age of the Web. The Web now does very well many of the things that libraries once did alone. How do library professionals justify that millions of people have turned to the Web for information which they once obtained from library only? We, library professional think that what can we do that the Web can't do? Now it's become a platitude that librarian should apply technology and develop new services. Special and academic libraries, generally, have easier paths to their futures. They may have stronger funding. They often have access to technology support within their organizations. They have relatively homogeneous customer groups, for whom it's easier to target new services. But what about the public libraries? Many of the principal subjects for which people have long turned to them like medicine and health, personal finance and investing, news and current events, consumer guidance, travel, personal betterment, and hobbies are now found in greater depth on the Web. Most of the public libraries of India are small, without funds for expensive technology infrastructures and information purchases. Their resources are dispersed among an array of programs for their diverse clientele. How do we, librarians redefine themselves?

The survival of today's public libraries are only depends in the applying of the modern Information and Community Technology that have made tremendous changes in the life of human. Public libraries need not to change their objectives but to change the way of dissemination of information services to the community. Information is a very vital instrument for maintaining a healthy society and sustaining steady development in all facets of life. Without information, people will not know what to do or where to go in a given situation. Therefore, persons who are well informed and conscious of using the information at their disposal, are those who will make the right change and not suffer any avoidable predicament. Community Information services through WWW platforms is considered as a quick problem-solving tool which helps the people to take right decision at the right time. The community information services concentrate on the needs of those who do not have ready access to other sources of assistance and on the most important problems that people have to face, problems to do with their homes, their jobs, and their rights. In a nutshell, it can be said that community Information Services are the survival

information which are necessary for the day-to-day living of every human beings. Now a day's Public Library should take full advantage of modern day technologies in procuring storing, organizing and dissemination all kinds of information required by the people it serves

2. OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

1. To identify the information needs of the community.
2. To determine the extent to which the community-based information serviceproviders meet the needs of the community through web.
3. To examine the challenges of WEB based – community information services through public libraries of India.
4. To study the core concepts of CommunityInformation Services in current scenario.
5. To investigate the application of CIS in public libraries of India.
6. To explore opportunities to implement web based -Community Information Services in public libraries and suggest methods of providing web based- Community Information Services.
7. The prime objective of this paper is to suggest a mechanism for web integrated community information services through the application of global standards Community Information Format like MARC 21 or CCF/F.
8. To propose Community Information Services through public libraries as a solution to get rid of information poverty.

3. COMMUNITY INFORMATION SERVICE (CIS) – WHAT?

Before discussing about Community information services, it's better to know what "community information" is? According to **Susan Fleetwood** "Community Information is considered to be that information required by members of the public (or these acting on their behalf) to make effective use of the resources potentially available to them in the communities in which they live. Such information may be needed to help solve problems in the fields of housing, disability, household finance, marriage, employment and so on". The first use of the expression Community Information Services (CIS) was in the United States where it was coined to describe the services set up in response to the Kahn report on British Citizens Advice Bureaux (Kahn, 1966). Arising out of the American war on Poverty

Programme of the 1960s a number of libraries set up information and referral services. These were seen as having two main aims:

- ❖ To link the client with a problem to the appropriate agency that could answer his or her needs.
- ❖ To supply the service providers with feedback from users.

Because these services were neighborhood based and because they were fulfilling a signposting function to both charities and services within the state welfare system the term community information service was coined to describe them.

According to **Allen Bunch**, CIS has the following two aspects;

1. one is concerned with the nature of the information provided, that is, information in the community to help people with daily problem solving or in raising the quality of their lives;
2. the other is concerned with the nature of the clientele served, namely those who belong to the lower socio-economic groups or are disadvantaged through an inability to obtain, understand, or act on information that effects their lives [2].

On the basis of Allen Bunch statement, we can categories **CIS** into two types. i.e.

- A. General community information services (GCIS)
- B. Specific community information services(SCIS)

S. NO	General community information services (GCIS)	Specific community information services (SCIS)
1	It is anticipatory in nature	It is responsive in nature
2	GCIS provides information common to all and help people to solve their day-to-day problems	SCIS is concerned with specific target groups, such as those belonging to the lower socio-economic groups, the disadvantaged, or person with information on a specific problem
3	It will help to increase the quality of lives i.e.	This service improves the lives of mainly disadvantaged group.

	increase standard of living to all.	
4	It will help to change society from traditional to information society and then information to knowledge society.	This will help to solve the problem of Information poverty in society.
5	Services of GCIS includes information on health, education, transport, employment, consumer problems, entertainment, housing, banking system, governmental agencies, legal information etc.	Services of SCIS includes want information on a specific problem of agriculture, or on animal husbandry or on establishment of a small scale industry or utilization of available local resources, or a particular governmental / non-governmental agency and its activities etc.

According to the **Library Association** definition: Community Information Services can, therefore, be defined as services which Assist individuals and groups with daily problem-solving and with participation in the democratic process. The service concentrates on the needs of those who donot have ready access to other sources of assistance and on the most important Problems that people have to face, problems to do with their homes, their jobs and their rights ... This would mean a positive decision to concentrate on enabling People, particularly those in lower socio-economic groups to act either individually or collectively on their problems in the fields of housing, employment, Family and personal matters, consumer affairs, household finance, education, Welfare rights and civil rights" [8].

So Community Information Service is considered to be that information service required by members of the public (or those acting on their behalf) to make effective use of the resources potentially available to them in the communities in which they live. Such information may be needed in the fields of housing, In a simple way we can say that CIS is the process of collecting, organizing, storing and disseminating the community information either offline or online on day to day living matter of people such as health, housing, education, employment, agriculture, village industries, daily necessities, consumer services, economy, transportation, government welfare

schemes and so on with motive of helping people to solve problems in their lives.

4. Community Information Service (CIS) – Why?

It is part of the human condition that people everywhere have problems, the solution to which almost inevitably involves information. In many developing countries like India these problems might be more pressing, people still need information on how to obtain essentials available through certain public services. Furthermore, information seekers everywhere are faced with a paradox. Despite increased professionalism, despite information technology and freedom of information campaigns at both national and international levels, the task of finding relevant information in an acceptable time scale becomes increasingly onerous. As **Barret Reid (1977)** remarks, "Everyman is looking for simple tracks in an information forest growing more and more dense and strange".

It is a paradox that despite the era of information explosion, certain groups comprising rural people, illiterate persons, women, physically challenged people, linguistic and religious minorities, children and aged peoples still suffer gross deprivation of access to information and experience helplessness in bridging the gap. These groups depend on the good will of some other persons to get informed about their lives, immediate environment and society at large. In order for these vulnerable groups to get some awareness and access the information they need, public libraries must embrace a paradigm shift and be contribution driven as much as innovative in their services. That this is an excellent reason for the library to promote itself wherever it can. The following point can be considered for providing CIS through public libraries.

4.1 To fulfill the objective of library establishment

According to **IFLA – UNESCO**, Public Library Manifesto; 1994, "the public library is the local gateway to knowledge". The primary purpose of the public library are to provide resources and services in a variety of media to meet the needs of individuals and groups for education, information and personal development including recreation and leisure. (IFLA/UNESCO guidelines, 2001). To fulfill the theses objective as prescribed by IFLA, Public library provides a range of services, both within the library and in the community. And Community information services is one of them. [11]

4.2 To solve the problem of information poverty

Despite the fact that ICT developments have made many positive impacts on the society, they also created some undesirable impacts on the society, mainly the gap between the information haves and information have not's or otherwise called information rich and information poor. The information poor are the victims of insufficient resources, updated information, and lack of basic training in retrieving the information. Public library through CIS can bridge the gap between the information rich and the information poor by providing access to right information at the right time to all people. So ultimately providing Community Information Services (CIS) in Public libraries can be an efficient method to fight against the information poverty.[7]

4.3 To provide organized information to the community

Today's society have experienced explosion of information everywhere. Government of any kind is also the largest producer of information. But these are highly scattered information sources and difficult to acquire through normal publication channels. Even research scholars are troubling to find the right information from the huge information ocean. The access of information to common man is still a challenge. So CIS must be developed to collect, organize and disseminate these information for the target groups.

4.4 To help disadvantaged groups in the society

There are great inequalities remain in society. These inequalities are again increases for the people who are unable to take full advantage of services and facilities in general, including library services due to various factors like social & economic position, physical or mental condition, level of educational achievement, poverty, unemployment, poor housing, limited access to social services and lack of fluency in a language that is used by the dominant culture. The tremendous development of ICT has also divided the society into two groups i.e. 'information have' and 'have not'. The 'have not' group has led to the formation of a section called 'disadvantaged' and the people under this group are not in a position to help themselves. In this context, there is high need for community information service to help these people.

4.5 To make awareness about social changes and improve standing of living

Proper utilization of information can improve the quality of life of citizen. Society changes rapidly with time to time but lack of CIS affects this changing process and creates social imbalance. In this context Bundy has rightly described that "Assess to information does not in itself give people power over their lives but lack of access to information can render a person powerless in the sense of being unable to exercise intelligent life options". Therefore CIS is very much needed to make the people of a community informed about the changes around themselves and to improve their standard of living in all respect.

4.6 To help over all development of a nation

Information accelerates the pace of development of society as well as the development of nation. The day to day development of a country solely depends on its informed citizens. If people are to make informed early and accurately at the time of their needs then it can help them to take right decision at right time. Information is indispensable in the development process. CIS may help people to take part in the development process of the country by organizing a maze of information sources. In contrast to it, lack of access to governmental information leads to low participation in governmental processes, which hampers the developmental process of a community and nation.

5. Community Information Service (CIS) – How?

The CIS, in public libraries can be provided in both offline and online modes. In offline mode, the public library authorities generally prepare a "Community Information Handbook" in English as well as local languages. The CIS Handbook can be updated regularly at least once in a year. The printed form of CIS Hand book can be made available in all public libraries. But online mode is slightly differ from traditional way of providing CISs in public libraries. In online mode, public library develops an online Community Information Services database and the portal is updated regularly and made accessible in the public domain through internet. This is called WEB-enabled CIS through public libraries. [12]

5.1 Web-enabled community information services

Web-enabled community information services is a socio-technical concept. It is a community information services over the web. With the advent of web technologies in 1990s, public libraries are now

offering databases over the Web to serve community member. Web-enabled community information services include the provision of an array of digital tools to help community communication and interaction. It provide a single window one-stop access to local and global community information resources through an easy to use GUI based interface accessible through Internet and Intranet. Such system are generally based on partnership with other libraries, community networks and local service providers. Software solution of such systems and services are based on backed RDBMS, scripting language and CGI (Common Gateway Interface) technique and it also supports multilingual information resources.

5.1.1 Web-enabled CIS through public libraries

In reality, libraries have been collecting community information for many years. They used to put it on index cards and then used this information to answer reference questions. Now they're publishing it on the Web, and the more exciting thing is that they're giving community members the opportunity to publish their own information also. Through Web-enabled CIS, the libraries have a means both for putting their information on the Web and making it readily available, at any time, throughout the large number of community. In present age of science and technology, more and more, people want resources in their lives to be available 24/7. They want the information when they want it. The library is the virtual aggregator for community information, this is one way to do it."

6. A PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF WEB-ENABLED CIS IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

The design and successful implementation of digital community information services require efficient data structuring. Data structuring on the other hand, largely depends on information organization policies and standards. CIS through public library system requires efficient organization of community information resources for successful dissemination of such information at the time of need. A visionary survival plan for a public library might have several themes. Below is presented a model for development of web-based community information services, which focus on the users' need for use of information to solve 'daily life' problems and for participation in democratic processes in the society.[9]

6.1 Identification of thrust areas

CISs must address the significant problems for the community. Designing and development of CISs should start with the identification and analysis of community information needs. It would identify important and enduring customer needs that neither the Web nor anyone else is meeting. It would understand the distinctive characteristics of its local market. An analysis of existing literature and survey reports on community information demand gives us some basic categories of information need. Information demand varies from community to community. Therefore, a survey of community information demands should be conducted to identify information categories. Studies of users' information seeking behaviour are also the basics for development of comprehensible community information services, which meet the users' demands.

6.2 Community Information format

Community information records describe non-bibliographic resources of various forms and format that fulfil the information demand of a community. Libraries now have computing power to deal with huge amount of Community information records. Like bibliographic database, a database of community information records also require a number of separate but highly compatible format for different organisation and processing activities. A total of four highly relevant domain specific community information formats have been identified by **Mukhopadhyay (2006)**. All these four standards format have provisions for input of non-bibliographic factual data pertaining to programmes, services, events, organisation, agencies, and individuals into machine readable form. They are as follows:

- Common communication Format(CCF/F)
- MARC 21 Community information format
- SeamlessUK Application Profile (version 2.0)
- CASP Application profile (version 1.0)

6.3 Use of Controlled Lists

The model advises use of standard services list and vocabulary control device to achieve standardization. It proposes the use of MARC code list, local Government category List (LGCL) and local Government Services LIST (LGSL) as standard for data entry operation. It also urges the use of integrated public sector Vocabulary (IPSV) as domain specific vocabulary control device on the

basis of a study comparing IPSV with other domain specific standards such as AIRS Taxonomy CISA thesaurus and Seamless UK THESAURUS.

6.4 Functional requirements

A public libraries based CIS should act as an integrated architecture for the library. It should allow a single point user interface to search and browse community information as well as traditional library materials. It should support effective community communication system such as discussion forum and bulletin services. The system must have provision for Unicode compliant regional language based user interface supplemented by searching and browsing the resources through local language. CIS should support direct hyper linking with online community information resources along with link to local and global learning object. The above model for public library based community information services in India has been proposed by Mukhopadhyay in 2006. Application of this model must be combined with an overall mission, and strategy of the service, as well as policies/ standards for the compilation of the web site.

7. CONCLUSION

Web-based information services will become more widespread and sophisticated as the web becomes common place throughout the world, and to be successful players in the e-world. Web technologies have directly influenced the public libraries, by which the public libraries has no longer become an exclusive source of information whether it is decreased door counts or increased use of virtual resources. If no efforts are effectuated, public libraries will obviously lose their position as leading community information providers in the near future. The concept discussed in this paper is the creation of a web-enabled CIS for the dissemination of community information through public library portal. Public libraries have the potential to develop and provide these services from their web sites so they should think beyond the traditional library services and come out to facilitate their users with information what they really want for their day today problem solving. A typical public library ought to provide free and open access to information for all local residents, and this must be reflected in the library Web site through links to community information resources, links to job postings, creating links to other relevant sites and access to government services and welfare schemes etc. Public libraries

should also be proactive and enter into partnerships with public, private and voluntary organisations in order to be the leading community information provider in present times.

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