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Information Requirements of Pakistani Media Practitioners: A Comparative Study

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Introduction

Individuals play different roles in their lives i.e professionals, parents, citizens etc and their each role require information to fulfill his duties in a better way. Information requirement or Information need is an inner apprehension which appears in the mind of user when he feels that there are gaps in his knowledge and he has to solve any problem.

According to Wilson (1981) "Information need is a subjective experience which occurs only in the mind of the person in need and consequently is not directly accessible to an observer".

Information need depends on different factors; according to Choudhary (1999) Information needs vary from job to job and organization to organization. Crawford (1978) describes information need depends on Work activity and hierarchical position of individuals. Paisley (1968) identifies professional orientation effect on information need. Devadason and Lingam (1997) characterize nature of work as a factor of information need. All authors emphasized information need highly depends on work activity or kind of job. Some jobs are information dependent for example journalistic writing needs dependable information.

Media practitioners are the professionals who are different in the sense that they are users of information as communicators. Their requirement of information is very vast and diversified. They are very time conscious. For satisfaction of their needs they interact with many types of information system and personal sources.

Identification of information need is a base for designing of information system and services. Information providers can not provide information unless he knows the needs of the user.

Problem Statement

The study is compared the information requirements of media practitioners according to their nature of work. The nature of work of media practitioners is different from other professions. Some work is carried out in the office and some undertaken outdoors. All the participants were grouped according to nature of their

work. Those participants who work in the offices were named as desk practitioners (DPs); those who work outside the office to fulfill their responsibilities were named as field practitioners (FPs) and those practitioners who work in both are named as desk/field (D/FPs) practitioners

Scope of the Study

This study covers three mass media organizations. These are radio, television, and newspapers. Participants are selected from these organizations. Geographically it covers only Karachi city, which is a large and cosmopolitan city of Pakistan. Media organizations which are selected reside in Karachi.

Literature Review

The research on information need has been conducted on various groups, but the subject with respect to media professionals has not been much studied. However few studies are being review.

Joseph (1993) investigated use of libraries among Indian journalists of Kerala, a Indian state. Results show that journalists in Kerala used library for background information on stories, while editors use it for verification or editing of these stories. 61% respondents use library more than once a week. Time constraint is discussed in details because journalists work on deadlines. It is an important factor in their work.

Edem (1993) studied the use of library and archival resources and major information sources among Nigerian journalists. Findings show they need information for official duties (95%) i.e., writing articles, preparing news talks, news reporting. Their areas of major information needs are political activities (27.1%) government affairs (21.4%), social activities (16.4%), and economic activities (14.2%).

More than three-quarters of Nigerian journalists preferred to using the informal sources,and 24% use formal sources, which are library and archival centers and they need a well-equipped library with professional librarians. Chinn (2001) studied the information needs of journalists by observing three journalists. Journalists need information for fact checking and current awareness. Internet, e-mail, and cell phones are their channels for obtaining information. The sports reporter requires deep background knowledge and statistical information while education reporters need descriptive knowledge.

Anwar, Al-Ansari, and Abdullah (2004) report that for Kuwaiti journalists, information is most important for fact checking and verification. Their information needs arise mainly for writing news items and feature article. They used both formal and informal sources; however, they regarded colleagues as most important source of information among informal sources.

Anwar and Asghar (2009) found that Pakistani journalists use a variety of formal and informal information sources. Among formal sources their personal collections and daily news diary are the most used sources. They regarded colleagues as the most important source of information among informal sources. Journalists give high importance to other informal sources and conversation. Pakistani journalists need information for fact checking and for ideas for future articles and for background information.

Purpose

The purpose of the study is to compare the information requirements of media practitioners working in the field, on the desk, and both. These practitioners belong

to mass media organizations.

Methodology

Survey method was applied for the study. Participants were chosen from three media departments in radio, television, and newspaper/news agencies. These participants are engaged in professional journalism. Media departments include both private and government-owned, and the newspapers have language diversity. English and Urdu newspapers are included in the study.

Data was collected through questionnaire by 185 media practitioners. There were 120 from newspaper/news agencies, 43 from television, and 22 from radio. These participants include editor, subeditor, reporter, page editor, radio and tv producer, researchers, etc. Participants were grouped according to the nature of their work. Three groups were constructed: desk practitioners, field practitioners, and desk/field practitioners. The distribution of participants is indicated in table 1.

Table 1 Distribution of participants

Desk	Field	Desk and field	Total
105	48	32	185

A questionnaire was developed as an instrument for data collection. This questionnaire consists of two parts. First part consists of demographic question such as designation, name of media department, and nature of job. Second part consists of questions relevant to the assessment of information requirements.

Data Analysis

The data is analyzed according to nature of work of media practitioners. These participants are desk practitioners (DPs); field practitioners (FPs) and practitioners who work in both (D/FPs). Total number of DPs in thesample is 105, FPs are 48 and D/FPs 32.

Nature of required information

Table 2 frequencies of nature of information

	Desk N=105	%	Field N=48	%	Desk and field N=32	%
Factual information	92	87.62	46	95.83	30	93.75
Point of view	65	61.90	31	64.58	27	84.38
Technical information	45	42.86	26	54.17	22	68.75
Statistical information	66	62.86	31	64.58	23	71.88
News	74	70.48	29	60.42	14	43.75

Responses show that the information needs of D/FPs are lower than those of other sampled participants. Factual information was most often looked for by all the participants, but FPs had a slightly greater need for facts. (See table 2)

Presentation of required Information

Table 2 frequencies of nature of information

	Desk n=105	%	Field N=48	%	Desk and Field (both) N=32	%
Real documents	62	59.05	18	37.5	23	71.88
Report	85	80.95	36	75	24	75.00
Tabulated information	41	39.05	18	37.5	10	31.25
Graphic information	33	31.43	15	31.25	7	21.88

As indicated in table 6.34 FPs had a low rating comparatively for all forms of information except reports (75%). Graphs are least preferred by all participants.

Quantity of Information

Table 3 frequencies of magnitude of information

	Desk n=105	%	Field N=48	%	Desk and field N=32	%
Comprehensive	43	40.95	26	54.17	22	68.75
Selective	78	74.29	29	60.42	26	81.25
Only current	47	44.76	23	47.92	12	37.5
Limited by specific time period	38	36.19	8	16.67	12	37.5

Selective information tops the list among the sampled participants. D/FPs seek comprehensive information more often (68.75%) than DPs (40.95%) and FPs (54.12%). Information limited by specific time period has the lowest demand amongst all.

Time for requirement of information

Table 4 frequencies of required time for information

	Desk n=105	%	Field n=48	%	Field and Desk (both) n=32	%
Every Day	74	70.48	42	87.50	24	75.00
Every Week	33	31.43	11	22.92	15	46.88
Every Month	9	8.57	7	14.58	8	25.00
Frequently require	32	30.48	9	18.75	12	37.50

FPs who require daily information account 87.50%. D/FPs had a rather higher demand for weekly information (46.88%). Monthly information has lowest percentage among all with a frequency of 25.00% for D/FPs, 14.58% for FPs and only 8.57% for DPs. had quite high demand for information on weekly basis.

Form of required information

Table 5 frequencies of form of information

	Desk n=105	%	Field N=48	%	Field and desk (both) N=32	%
Print	92	87.62	46	95.83	28	87.50
Audio	24	22.86	6	12.50	17	53.13
Video	46	43.81	11	22.92	21	65.63

As indicated in table 5, information is most often required in print form. The least required medium is audio, but a significant difference can be noted here, as the F/DPs had a relatively higher preference for audio form.

Priority of information requirement

Table 6 frequencies of priority of required information

	Desk n=105	%	Field n=48	%	Field and desk (both) n=32	%
Very high	61	58.10	36	75	23	71.88
High	59	56.19	26	54.17	21	65.63
Low	5	4.76	3	6.25	3	9.38

A remarkable distinction can be noted in the priorities of information required. Even the highest frequency for low priority information is less than 10%. (See table 6)

Sources of information

Table 7 frequencies of required information sources

	Desk n=105	%	Field n=48	%	Field and desk (both) n=32	%
Journal	53	50.48	19	39.58	15	46.88
Conf proceeding	31	29.52	17	35.42	13	40.63
Dissertation	8	7.62	3	6.25	3	9.38
Theses	12	11.43	5	10.42	4	12.50
Bib literature	13	12.38	3	6.25	7	21.88
Dictionaries	52	49.52	16	33.33	15	46.88
Directories	27	25.71	14	29.17	13	40.63
Year book	33	31.43	10	20.83	11	34.38
Hand book	22	20.95	3	6.25	3	9.38
Reviews	33	31.43	6	12.50	4	12.50
Encyclopedia	58	55.24	12	25.00	19	59.38
Almanac	17	16.19	2	4.17	3	9.38
Research report	56	53.33	21	43.75	19	59.38
Annual report	43	40.95	26	54.17	17	53.13
On line databases	44	41.90	16	33.33	13	40.63
Manual	10	9.52	3	6.25	0	0

Table 7 notes that DPs use encyclopedias most (55.24 %), followed by research reports (53.3 %). The least preferred sources include dissertation (7.62 %) and manual (9.52 %). Annual reports top the list of FPs (54.7 %), while almanac (4.17

%), handbooks (,6.25 %) and manual (6.25 %) are used by few . D/FPs favor encyclopedia and research report most often.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study indicates that factual information is used most often by all the participants whether they are FPs, DPs, or F/DPs. The reason seems to be that factual information makes news, features, and research-based programs accurate and authentic.

Most participants use organizational and business reports, as they are available easily and provide current information. These are also an important source of background information.

Real documents are used most by both (F/DPs) and least by field (FPs). Reports are used mostly by desk practitioners (DPs) and secondly by FPs or F/DPs because the main work of majority of the D.Ps is subbing and editing so they have to check facts.

The responses of the participants about the coverage detail vs. summary of information shows that all participants require selective information with high frequency. Exhaustive and only recent information can be ranked as second and third respectively. This is due to time constraints. Time is a very important factor in gathering and searching information. This is the reason selective information, which is precise and concise, is sought in large amounts.

According to Nicholas (2000) shortage of time is a common obstacle that prevents MPs from full satisfaction of meeting their information needs. Practitioners related to all the media groups require information daily because everyday they have to inform the masses about the important events occurring in the world.

Field practitioners (FPs) need daily information. Reporters are the most distinct segment of this group. They are the most regular and quite habitual users of current information. Information on daily basis, weekly, monthly, and frequently require information is need most of all by both (F/D Ps), as their needs are higher than others.

All participants prefer print sources because print source is a documentary proof, so it provides authentic and reliable information. Nicholas and Martin (1997) describe "unpublished documents and oral sources of information pose special problems to journalists in terms of their authenticity or accuracy."

Most commonly used source of information was found to be encyclopedias and reports. All participants read encyclopedias quite often because these are ready reference sources it provide general information about any topic.

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Note: This article is based on the unpublished doctoral dissertation:

Nasreen, Munira. (2006). ***Information needs and information seeking behavior of media practitioners in Karachi***. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Department of Library and Information Science, University of Karachi.