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The Awareness and Understanding of Sustainability by the Academic Library Administrators: A Micro Level Investigation in Kolkata, India

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Abstract:

The study tried to investigate the awareness and understanding of sustainability by the academic library administrators in Kolkata, India. For that, the study followed descriptive research design using survey method. A study population of sixteen library administrators across five universities of Kolkata participated in this study. A structured questionnaire was designed as a survey instrument consisting of mainly five sections; viz. 1. Awareness on overall Sustainability and its library related issues. 2. Information sources available on Sustainability and its library related issues. 3. Perception on ideal activities of a Sustainable Library. 4. Perceptions on potential impediments for transforming into a sustainable library. 5. Perceptions on the Ideal outcomes of a Sustainable library. Finally the responses were tabulated for analysis, results were discussed and conclusions were drawn.

Keywords: Awareness, Understanding, Sustainability, Academic Library Administrators, University Library, Kolkata, India

Introduction:

The word “sustainability”, has now become a catchphrase. Its popularity, use and importance have increased drastically since last couple of decades or so, which has been witnessed by every sector of modern human civilization. United States Environmental Protection Agency defines sustainability as: *“Sustainability is based on a simple principle: Everything that we need for our survival and well-being depends, either directly or indirectly, on our natural environment. To pursue sustainability is to create and maintain the conditions under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony to support present and future generations.”* (EPA, n.d.). In September 2015 the United Nations (UN) General Assembly passed a resolution identifying

17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 associated targets comprising of several economic, environmental and social developments to achieve the overall sustainability of the world by the year 2030. Presently, all over the globe several measures are being undertaken, at the international, national and institutional or corporate levels to achieve and foster sustainability through the SDGs. Consequently, the awareness and understanding of sustainability has become very crucial for the librarians of the higher academic institutions as they play a pivotal role in training of our next generation leaders by providing them the authoritative information, which enables these future leaders to be more effective sustainability educators, advocates, activists, agitators and most importantly to be agents of change (Charney, 2014). In this context, this study attempts to investigate the awareness and understandings of sustainability by the academic library administrators in Kolkata metropolitan area of India.

Literature review:

Antonelli (2008) traced down the history of library literature on sustainability and showed the gradual and rapid growth of the literature since the early 1990s. These increasing popularity of the topic is also reflected in the approach and activities of the top most internationally famous library associations like the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions' (IFLA) Special Interest Group on the Environment, Sustainability and Libraries (ENSULIB, n.d.), and the American Library Association's (ALA) Task Force on the Environment (TFOE, n.d.) etc. After establishment in 1989 by ALA, The Task Force on the Environment was one of the initiators to work with "Green" or "Sustainability" concepts in the library field. TFOE arranged environmentally focused events to educate librarians as well as the commons. Since then a number of literature published all over the world covering a large variety of sustainability and library related issues. Antonelli and McCullough (2012) in their edited book titled "Greening Libraries," thoroughly depicted the recent movements towards green library buildings, collections, services, operations, and outreach programmes. Jankowska and Marcum (2010) discussed the multidimensional issues of sustainability in academic libraries and identified needs for designing an integrated framework for sustainable strategies in academic libraries. Stark (2011) stated, "A cornerstone of academic librarianship, information literacy should be included in discussions about sustainability and academic libraries." Further, Jankowska, Smith & Buehler (2014) conducted an exploratory study to determine the position and engagements of academic libraries and information science schools in their contributions to scholarly sustainability activities and curricular initiatives, which revealed a number of engagements by library professionals in the areas of sustainability, such as increasing open access to research, building sustainability-related collections and research guides, and incorporating sustainability content into information literacy. Similarly, Jankowska (2014) offered sustainability-related best practices, case studies, and activities in academic libraries such as collection development,

information literacy, sustainability scholarship, and new directions such as organizing library green teams, creating seed libraries and the greening of library buildings. The sustainability movement is therefore a natural fit for the academic librarians who tend to excel at gathering synthesizing and disseminating information as well as communicating across disciplines (Charney, 2014).

However, in India, library literature on sustainability is scarce, and the topic is largely unexplored. Most of the study followed theoretical explanations focused on “library Greening” issues (Meher and Parabhoi, 2017). Achieving sustainability for Indian libraries through multidisciplinary green principles has been suggested by Chaudhuri (2016). A few studies also focused on Sustainability action plans or working agendas for Indian libraries (Datta & Chaudhuri, 2018 ; Datta & Chaudhuri, 2019). The absence of substantial amount of Indian library literature on the topic formed the basis of the present study.

Problem statement

From the literature review it is evident that the studies on Sustainability issues in higher academic institution libraries are increasing rapidly in different parts of the world. Unfortunately, India encountered with a very low amount of research and development in this area. The authors assumed that the lack of awareness and understanding level on the topic among the library administrators might be one of the major reasons behind it. Therefore, this study intends to carry out a survey on the awareness and understanding of sustainability by the academic library administrators of Kolkata, India.

Objectives:

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Understand the level of awareness on Sustainability and its library related issues among the academic library administrators.
2. Identify the sources of information available to the academic library administrators on Sustainability.
3. Understand the perceptions of academic library administrators on potential impediments for transforming into a sustainable library
4. Understand the perceptions of academic library administrators on ideal activities of a Sustainable Library
5. Understand the perceptions of academic library administrators on ideal outcomes of a sustainable library.

Scope and coverage:

The study was conducted on the library administrators of five state government funded Universities of Kolkata, which was founded on or before 2010. The study considered Universities which are established on or before 2010 because the newly founded government universities have not yet recruited adequate number of library administrators. The study also excluded Private sector universities of the area because they follow separate library administration hierarchy than the government universities which might bring heterogeneity to the study. Total eighteen officers are currently employed on those five universities, of which sixteen officers have participated in this study. The total distribution of the study population along with their respective universities is represented in table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of the study population

Sl. no.	Name of the university	Total No. of administrators (available)	No of respondents (administrators)
1.	University of Calcutta	8	6
2.	Jadavpur University	2	2
3.	Presidency University	4	4
4.	Rabindra Bharati University	2	2
5.	Aliah University	2	2
Total		18	16

Methodology:

The study follows the descriptive research design using the survey method. A structured close ended questionnaire was designed as a survey instrument. The questionnaire was consisted of mainly five sections; viz. **1. Awareness on overall Sustainability and its library related issues. 2. Information sources available on Sustainability and its library related issues. 3. Perception on ideal activities of a Sustainable Library. 4. Perceptions on potential impediments for transforming into a sustainable library. 5. Perceptions on the Ideal outcomes of a Sustainable library.** At first the questions for each section were selected after conducting an in-depth literature review on the topic. Then a brainstorming session was organized by the researchers with the other 5 research colleagues of the same department to ensure the validity, appropriateness, and reliability of the questions to be included into the questionnaire. The questionnaires were distributed to the study population consisting of eighteen library

administrators (holding the posts of Assistant University Librarian or above) of the five selected universities (as described in scope and coverage section). Lastly, the individual responses as well as suggestions were received from the sixteen administrators. All the responses were represented in tabular form and simple percentage analysis was employed to conduct data analysis.

Data analysis and discussion of results:

Table 2: Awareness on overall Sustainability and its library related issues

Awareness assessing Questions	Responses		
	Yes, I Know it well	Yes, but I Know it very little	No, I Don't know
1. Do you know about sustainability and its dimensions?	10 (62.5%)	6 (37.5%)	0
2. Do you know about the sustainable development?	6 (37.5%)	9 (56.25%)	1 (6.25%)
3. Do you agree that the sustainable development is very pertinent; moreover they are the need of the hour for the library?	4 (25%)	11 (68.75%)	1 (6.25%)
4. Do you know about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) enunciated by the UN?	2 (12.5%)	9 (56.25%)	5 (31.25%)
5. Do you agree that the SDGs are equally important and applicable to the library?	7 (43.75%)	3 (18.75%)	5 (31.25%)
6. Do you have any ideas on how to achieve SDGs by the libraries?	0	0	16 (100%)
7. Do you know about sustainable library, green library and eco friendly library, and their functionality?	11 (68.75%)	4 (25%)	1 (6.25%)
8. Do you think that establishing a sustainable library may directly or indirectly satisfy some of the SDGs on behalf of the libraries?	2 (12.5%)	5 (31.25%)	9 (56.25%)

9. Do you agree that achieving and fostering sustainable library functions can secure the future of Academic libraries?	13 (81.25%)	1 (6.25%)	1 (6.25%)
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From Table 2 it is evident that none of the respondents are unaware of the sustainability and its dimensions, whereas majority of them (56.25%) know very little about the sustainable development. 68.75% of respondents admitted that sustainable development is very pertinent and they are the need of the hour for the libraries, but they know very little about it. 31.25% of respondents are still unaware about the sustainable development goals enunciated by the United Nations, but the majority of them either highly (43.75%) or moderately admit (18.75%) that the SDGs are equally important and applicable to the library. Unfortunately none of the respondent possesses any ideas on how to achieve SDGs by the libraries. Meanwhile 68.75% respondents are well acquainted, and another 25% have at least some basic ideas on Green library, Eco-friendly library or Sustainable library. However, majority of the respondents (56.25%) are not sure about the fact that establishing a Sustainable library may directly or indirectly satisfy some of the SDGs on behalf of the libraries. Lastly most of them (81.25%) agreed that achieving and fostering sustainable library functions can secure the future of Academic libraries.

Table 3: Information sources available on Sustainability and its library related issues

Sl. No	Information sources	It is highly helpful	It is quite helpful	It is not helpful
1	News paper & magazine Articles	11(68.75%)	5(31.25%)	0
2	Books	4(25%)	10(62.5%)	2(12.5%)
3	Research Articles	16(100%)	0	0
4	Exemplary performances by others	0	0	16(100%)
5	Related standards ,guidelines & directives	0	5(31.25%)	11(68.75%)
6	Related Government circulars & orders	0	0	16(100%)
7	Activities of professional organizations	0	3(18.75)%	13(81.25%)
8	Discussions with colleagues/ forums	5(31.25%)	10(62.5%)	1(6.25%)
9	Knowledge from Seminars/workshops/conferences/webinars/MOOCs/ short term courses etc.	2(12.5%)	0	14(87.5%)

10	Social Media	12(75%)	4(25%)	0
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Table 3 depicts that 68.75% respondents pointed out Newspaper & Magazine articles are highly helpful and rest of 31.25% marked it as quite helpful. Majority of respondents (62.5%) put books under quite helpful category, whereas only 4% marked it as a highly helpful information source. The survey reveals that all of the respondents (100%) identified research articles are the most helpful and on a contrary exemplary performances by others is not at all a helpful information source available to them. Similarly the respondents indentified the related standards, guidelines & directives (68.75%), Related Government circulars & orders (100%), Knowledge from Seminars/workshops/conferences/webinars/MOOCs/ short term courses etc. (87.5%) and Activities of professional organizations (81.25%) plays insignificant roles in their information gathering process on the related topic. A discussion with colleagues or in forums is quite helpful for the respondents as 62.5% respondents admit it. Meanwhile Social media has emerged one of the significant information sources as 75% of respondents marked it as highly helpful.

Table 4: Perception on ideal activities of a Sustainable Library

Sl. No	Ideal activities of a Sustainable Library	Highly agree	Moderately agree	Neutral/ don't know	Moderately disagree	Highly disagree
1	Sustainability assessment & green accreditation for library	2(12.5%)	11(68.75%)	3(18.75%)	0	0
2	Designing & developing Green library building	14(87.5%)	2(12.5%)	0	0	0
3	Energy efficiency & Considerations on renewable energy usage	15(93.75%)	1(6.25%)	0	0	0
4	Waste management	11(68.75%)	5(31.25%)	0	0	0
5	Water efficiency	13(81.25%)	3(18.75%)	0	0	0
6	Purchase & Use of Green or eco-friendly materials & technologies	9(56.25%)	5(31.25%)	2(12.5%)	0	0
7	Carbon footprint reduction (through less paper use, Rooftop & backyard gardening, library automation, Increased virtual and online services etc.)	12(75%)	4(25%)	0	0	0

8	Ensuring sustainable indoor environment quality (proper lighting, thermal, acoustics, ergonomics etc.)	14(87.5%)	2(12.5%)	0	0	0
9	Ensuring health and hygiene within the library	13(81.25%)	3(18.75%)	0	0	0
10	Sustainable preservation & conservation	11(68.75%)	5(31.25%)	0	0	0
11	Partnerships and interactions with external organizations for sustainability	9(56.25%)	4(25%)	3(18.75%)	0	0
12	Awareness & training campaigns on sustainability issues	16(100%)	0	0	0	0
13	Ensuring access and infrastructure to specially-abled users	13(81.25%)	3(18.75%)	0	0	0
14	Extension services to socio-economically marginalized people	11(68.75%)	5(31.25%)	0	0	0
15	Peace, justice and strong administration inside library	13(81.25%)	3(18.75%)	0	0	0
16	Promotion of local & cultural practices	0	11(68.75%)	5(31.25%)	0	0
17	Sustainable and effective collection development	9(56.25%)	7(43.75%)	0	0	0
18	Proper utilization of budget	16(100%)	0	0	0	0
19	Looking for new avenues of financial allotments	12(75%)	4(25%)	0	0	0
20	Supporting local economy	2(12.5%)	4(25%)	5(31.25%)	4(25%)	1(6.25%)

Table 4 reveals that 68.75% respondents moderately agreed and 12.5% highly agreed on the sustainability assessment and green accreditation for the library. Similarly the activities like designing & developing Green library building (87.5%), energy efficiency and considerations on renewable energy usage (93.75%), waste management (68.75%), water efficiency (81.25%), purchase and use of green or eco-friendly materials and technologies (56.25%), carbon footprint reduction (75%), ensuring sustainable indoor environment quality (87.5%), ensuring

health and hygiene within the library (81.25%), and sustainable preservation and conservation (68.75%) have got the majority of highly agreed respondents as these actions are directly connected with ecological sustainability of the library. Majority of respondents (56.25%) highly agreed on partnerships and interactions with external organizations for sustainability while all of the respondents (100%) highly valued the need for awareness and training campaigns on sustainability issues. To ensure social sustainability access and infrastructure to specially-abled users (81.25%), extension services to socio-economically marginalized people (68.75%) and peace, justice and strong administration inside library (81.25%) are put into highly agreed category by majority of respondents while promotion of local culture and practices (68.75%) is rated as moderately agreed category. Similarly, to become economically sustainable actions like sustainable and effective collection development (56.25%) and looking for new avenues of financial allotments (75%) got high agreeableness among the majority of respondents whereas proper utilization of budget was highly agreed by 100% respondents. But in case of supporting local economy the responses are largely scattered under all of the categories.

Table 5: Perceptions on potential impediments for transforming into a sustainable library

Sl. No	impediments	Highly agree	Moderately agree	Neutral/ don't know	Moderately disagree	Highly disagree
1	Financial barrier	0	1(6.25%)	5(31.25%)	8(50%)	2(12.5%)
2	Technological barrier	2(12.5%)	11(68.75%)	3(18.75)%	0	0
3	Institutional rules and norms	0	0	9(56.25%)	5(31.25%)	2(12.5%)
4	Government rules and norms	0	0	13(81.25%)	3(18.75)%	0
5	Inadequate awareness, knowledge & expertise	14(87.5%)	2(12.5%)	0	0	0
6	Unknown consequences	0	11(68.75%)	3(18.75)%	2(12.5%)	0
7	Inadequate support & encouragements	0	4(25%)	12(75%)	6(37.5%)	0
8	Resistance to change from staff	0	0	1(6.25%)	3(18.75)%	12(75%)
9	Resistance to change from user	0	0	0	1(6.25%)	15(93.75%)

10	Difference in Organizational priorities and Orientations	0	0	9(56.25%)	5(31.25%)	2(12.5%)
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Table 5 shows that majority of respondents either disagreed (50%) or highly disagreed (12.5%) to consider financial issue as a potential barrier to transform into a sustainable library. However most of them shown high or moderate agreeableness on issues like Technological barrier (68.75%), inadequate awareness, knowledge & expertise (87.5%) and Unknown consequences (68.75%). Respondents remained largely neutral on issues like Institutional rules and norms (56.25%), Government rules and norms (81.25%), inadequate support and encouragements (75%), Difference in Organizational priorities and Orientations (56.25%). On the other hand most of the respondents moderately or highly opposed in both the issues of Resistance to change from staff and user to consider them as a barrier.

Table 6: Perception on the Ideal outcomes of a Sustainable library

Sl. No	Outcomes	Highly agree	Moderately agree	Neutral/ don't know	Moderately disagree	Highly disagree
1	Green or eco-friendly library	16(100%)	0	0	0	0
2	Increased sustainability awareness	10(62.5%)	5(31.25%)	1(6.25%)	0	0
3	Exemplary library performance	14(87.5%)	2(12.5%)	0	0	0
4	Increased social justice & equity	0	3(18.75%)	10(62.5%)	3(18.75%)	0
5	Increased financial stability for library and community	13(81.25%)	1(6.25%)	2(12.5%)	0	0
6	Healthy library indoor & outdoor environment	11(68.75%)	4(25%)	1(6.25%)	0	0
7	Increased cultivation of local knowledge and culture	9(56.25%)	7(43.75%)	0	0	0
8	Sustainability stewardship for society	1(6.25%)	0	11(68.75%)	4(25%)	0

9	Contributing towards UN 2030 agenda	2(12.5%)	5(31.25%)	9(56.25%)	0	0

Table 6 shows all of the respondents (100%) believed that after establishing and making a fully functional sustainable library will achieve all ecologically sustainable standards and functional capability to be called a Green or eco-friendly library. Most of the respondents (62.5%) highly agreed that sustainable library will definitely increase sustainability awareness. A Large portion of respondents also highly agreed that sustainable library will have increased cultivation of local knowledge and culture (56.25%), healthy library indoor & outdoor environment (68.75%), increased financial stability for library and community (81.25%) and exemplary library performances (87.5%). However the respondents exhibited neutral opinion on sustainable library's outcomes like increased social justice & equity (62.5%), Sustainability stewardship for society and Contributing towards UN 2030 agenda (56.25%).

Conclusions:

The sustainability research in all spheres of the human society is necessary as the future of humanity as well as the world is directly dependent on it. Moreover sustainability research in library domain is also needed to ensure the library's own existence. Being directly attached with the teaching, learning and research process the orientation and role of the library administrators of the higher academic institutions in this direction became crucial. This study tried to reveal the awareness and understanding levels on sustainability by the library administrators in an analogy that the awareness and understandings on a particular topic is directly connected with the resultant actions on that particular topic. Thus better awareness and understanding levels on sustainability might result in taking better decisions on sustainable actions. Similar kind of study may be conducted afterwards in different parts of the country and this particular work intends to act as a starting point in that direction.

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