

INFORMATION SOURCES IN SOCIAL SCIENCE

DESCRIPTION OF THE MODULE

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| Subject Name | Library and Information Science |
| Paper Name | Social Science Information Systems |
| Module Name /Title | Information Sources in Social Science |
| Module ID | 2 |
| Pre-requisites | Information sources, Information services, Reference Sources |
| Objectives | To study the different sources, services, products and centres in Social Sciences |
| Keywords | Information sources, Information services, Information centres- Social Sciences, Information systems, Reference Sources |

1. INTRODUCTION

Information sources comprise documents, organizations and human beings. To obtain timely, relevant and quality information for your study or research work, you need to know the various sources of information. This module is expected to deepen your knowledge of sources of information in print, non-print and electronic formats. It presents the definition, originators/producers, types, formats and categories of information sources. The module also shows where information sources could be found e.g. archives, libraries and the Internet.

2. DEFINING THE INFORMATION SOURCES

Information is processed data. An information source can be a book or a Website. Information sources are the various means by which information is recorded for use by an individual or an organization. It is the means by which a person is informed about something or knowledge is availed to someone, a group of people or an organization. Information sources can be observations, people, speeches, documents, pictures, organizations, etc. Information sources can be in print, non-print, electronic media format, etc.

3. TYPES OF INFORMATION SOURCES

Information can come from virtually anywhere: personal experiences, books, articles, expert opinions, encyclopedias, the web, etc. The type of information needed changes depending on its application. Individuals generate information on a daily basis as they go about their work. In academic institutions, staff and students consult various sources of information. The choice of the source to consult is usually determined by the type of information sought. The three types of information sources are given below, however some of the sources may fall in more than one categories:

- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary

3.1 Primary source

Primary sources are original materials on which other research studies are based. Primary sources report a discovery or share new information; they present first-hand accounts and information relevant to an event. They present information in its original form, not interpreted or condensed or evaluated by other writers. They are usually evidence or accounts of the events, practices, or conditions being researched and created by a person who directly experienced that event. Primary sources are the first formal appearance of results in print or electronic formats. Examples of primary sources are: articles published in scholarly journals, eyewitness accounts, journalistic reports, financial reports, government documents, archeological and biological evidence, court records, ephemerals (posters, handbills), literary manuscript and minutes of meetings, etc. The definition of a primary source may vary depending upon the discipline or context. A diary would be a primary source because it is written directly by the individual writing in the diary. Interviews are primary sources because the individual talks about the topic directly from what he/she knows about it. Other examples may be; grey literature which is also important primary source material not available through the usual systems of publication (e.g. books or periodicals) and distribution. Examples are: committee/commission reports, notifications issued by government, court orders, conference proceedings, data exchange, environmental impact statements, oral presentations, market research reports, online documents, working papers, etc.

3.2 Secondary Sources

A secondary source of information is one that is created by someone who did not have firsthand experience or did not participate in the events or conditions being researched. Secondary sources describe, analyze, interpret, evaluate, comment on and discuss the evidence provided by primary sources. Secondary sources are works that are one step removed from the original event or experience that provide criticism, interpretation or evaluation of primary sources. Secondary sources are not evidence, but rather commentary on and discussion of evidence. Examples of Secondary sources are; text books, news digest, monographs, user's manuals, etc.

3.3 Tertiary sources

Tertiary sources consist of information which is a distillation and collection of primary and secondary sources. Generally, tertiary sources are not considered to be acceptable material on which to base academic research. Tertiary sources are usually not credited to a particular author. They are intended only to provide an overview of what the topic includes, its basic terminology, and often references for further reading. Some reference materials and textbooks are considered tertiary sources when their chief purpose is to list, summarize or simply repackage ideas or other information. Examples of tertiary sources include dictionaries and encyclopedias, Indexing and Abstracting Services, Annual Reviews, Directories, Guide to Literature, Wikipedia and similar user-contributed online 'encyclopedias' and reference materials, as well as various digests and schoolbooks. In a nutshell, tertiary sources are:

- Works which lists primary and secondary resources in a specific subject area.

- Works which index, organize and compile citations to, and show secondary (and sometimes primary) sources.
- Materials in which the information from secondary sources has been "digested" - reformatted and condensed, to put it into a convenient, easy-to-read form.
- Sources which are once removed in time from secondary sources.

Primary vs. Secondary vs. Tertiary Sources of Information

| Primary sources | Secondary sources | Tertiary sources |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autobiographies • Correspondence: email, letters • Descriptions of travel • Diaries • Eyewitnesses • Oral histories • Literary works • Interviews • Personal narratives • First-hand newspaper and magazine accounts of events • Legal cases, treaties • Statistics, surveys, opinion polls, • Scientific data, transcripts • Journal articles • Records of organizations and government agencies • Original works of literature, art or music • Cartoons, postcards, posters, maps, paintings, photographs, films, etc. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biographies, encyclopedias, dictionaries, handbooks • Textbooks & monographs on a topic • Literary criticism & interpretation • History & historical criticism • Political analyses • Reviews of law and legislation • Essays on morals and ethics • Analyses of social policy • Study and teaching material • Articles, such as literature reviews • Commentaries, research articles in all subject disciplines • Criticism of works of literature, art and music, etc. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chronologies • Classifications • Dictionaries • Encyclopedias • Directories • Guidebooks and manuals • Population register statistics • Fact books • Abstracts • Indexes • Bibliographies • Manuals/Guide books, etc. |

4. VARIETY OF INFORMATION SOURCES

| Print | Electronic | Others |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Speeches - Patents - Photographs - Newspaper articles - Journal articles - Theses and dissertations - Survey Research (e.g., market surveys, public opinion polls) - Proceedings of meetings, conferences and symposia - Original Documents (i.e. birth certificates, wills, marriage licenses, trial transcripts) - Records of organizations, government agencies (e.g. annual reports, treaties, constitutions, government documents), etc. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Internet -E-mail communication -Interviews -Video recordings (e.g. television programs) -Audio recordings (e.g. radio programs) -Websites -Communications through social networking applications (e.g. Facebook, blogs, RSS, Youtube), etc. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Diaries - Letters Artifacts (e.g. coins, inscriptions, rock art, wall decorations, manuscripts, etc. -Works of architecture, literature, and music (e.g., paintings, sculptures, musical scores, buildings), etc. |

4.1 Important General/Traditional Information Sources

This portion explains some of the important information sources which are used by the librarians and others in all types of libraries and information centres.

Almanac is usually a one-volume work with statistics and a compilation of specific facts (e.g. *World Almanac and Book of Facts*, and *Information Please Almanac*).

Atlas is a book of maps and geographical information (e.g. *Atlas of American History*).

Bibliography is a compilation of sources of information which provides literature on a specific subject or by a specific author (e.g. *Books in Print* and *Bibliography of African Literatures*).

Biographical Dictionary is a source of information about the lives of people; short entries (e.g. *Current Biography* and *Who's Who in America*).

Concordance is an alphabetical listing of keywords or phrases found in the work of an author or work in a collection of writings (e.g. *Topical Bible Concordance*).

Dictionary defines words and terms; confirms spelling, definition, and pronunciation; used to find out how words are used; helps to locate synonyms and antonyms and to trace the origin of words (e.g. *Webster's Dictionary*).

Directory lists names and addresses of individuals, companies, organizations and institutions (e.g. *Encyclopedia of Associations*).

Encyclopedia covers knowledge or branches of knowledge in a comprehensive manner and provides a broad survey of a topics; written by specialists (e.g. *World Book Encyclopedia*).

Gazetteer is a dictionary of geographical places (no maps) (e.g. *Webster's New Geographical Dictionary*).

Guidebook provides detailed descriptions of places; intended primarily for the traveler; geographical facts plus maps (e.g. *Great Lakes Guidebook*).

Handbook treats one broad subject in brief, or gives a brief survey of a subject (e.g. *Handbook of American Popular Culture*).

Indexes and Abstracts supplement the library catalog and lists citations to periodical articles, book, and proceedings, and tells where they can be found (e.g. *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* and *New York Times Index*).

Manual is a specific work that tells how to do something, such as how something operates; descriptions of the inner workings of an organization (e.g. *MLA Handbook*, and *Broadcast News Manual of Style*).

Statistics and Government documents available free of copyright and certain publishers compile and index them for use by libraries and other researchers. In addition to laws, regulations and agency documents, the governments produces a lot of statistics for public release.

Yearbook covers the trends and events of the previous year; may be general in coverage, limited to one subject, or restricted to one geographical area (e.g. *Britannica Book of the Year*, *The Statesman's Year Book*).

4.2 Internet Search Engines

Though Internet search engines like Google, Yahoo, Bing, MSN, etc. are not direct sources of information but these sites provided links to the actual and full text sources of information in general.

5. INFORMATION SOURCES IN SOCIAL SCIENCE

The definition of social science information may be provided in different ways; i.e. (a) literature or topics that are of interest to the social scientists (b) literature used by the social scientists or (c) literature written by the social scientists

The areas of interest to social scientists include various issues which generate public or social discussion. This first interpretation of social science widens the scope of information sources as it suggests to include many general books and periodicals written for laymen as 'information handbooks' or for the purpose of generating discussion or controversies. As a matter of fact, social scientists use a large variety of information sources in the form of written records like newspapers, annual reports, government records, personal letters and diaries, manifestos of political parties, etc. One can interpret that literature used by the social scientists is wider in scope than literature written by the social scientists. Also social science information can be identified as works written by social scientists, addressed to other social scientists and dealing with matters related to mutual interest. In fact there is a definitional problem when we try to identify social science information.

In the past attempts have been made to study; (a) size and characteristics of social science information (b) literature use pattern by social scientists and (c) use of bibliographical services. Most of these studies have been made in the context of western countries.

Bibliometric method has been applied to evaluate the quality and dimension of use of literature particularly in natural sciences. The work done by the scientists or the literature use in natural science exhibit certain characteristics; i.e.(a) research published primarily in English language journals and, (b) references found are mainly from recent papers published in a set of core journal that are known for their high quality and impact.

However, on the other hand, when one is asked to evaluate scholarly work in the social sciences and humanities, the comfort zone of currently published English language high quality core journal does not exist. In the humanities, book publishing pre-dominates and even today references from books are normally not indexed. In the social sciences, indexed English language journal publication co-exists with (i) books (ii) literature published locally and (iii) non-scholarly literature. Therefore, it has been rightly said that in humanities, referencing pattern in archival and citation accumulate at a geological rate. In the social sciences, the referencing pattern shows a mix of archival and current literature. The referencing practice is quite scattered, therefore lacking focus. A core literature is less clearly identified.

For the purpose of discussion, social science literature or information sources can be broadly divided into four groups (i) Journal articles(ii) Books (iii) National literature and (iv) Non scholarly literature.

5.1 Journal Articles refers to internationally oriented largely English language peer reviewed articles. The Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) indexes these articles and evaluates them applying bibliometric techniques. However, studies have revealed that there are methodological problems arising from the nature of social science literature and a caution has been attached by saying that SSCI based indicators should be interpreted cautiously. It has also been said that a decade long citation window would be needed to capture the slow accumulation of citation in

social science for the purpose of evaluation and such methodological rigour may produce obsolete result.

Periodical or scholarly journals are the main means of communications. Majority of journals use referee or peer review system for articles submitted for publication. This system aims to select best papers and achieve best possible objectivity in selection. In addition, scholarly journals provide a fast and efficient way to spread the latest developments in a field of study. They also serve as a forum for discussion which is essential for advancement of knowledge. Also number of articles published in scholarly journals is an important criterion to assess performance of academic staff.

There has been increase in specialization in many branches of social sciences. As a result, the number of journals is increasing. There is a competition among editors due to launching of new journals. New academic journals have been started as a result of publication congestion in quality journals which have a high rejection rates and a time delay between submission, acceptance and final publication of papers. The main agent behind market performance of a journal is publisher and its reputation, experience and ability to reach out the academic world.

In earlier days, journals were mostly published by learned societies. They were not confined to a particular discipline. The first periodical in India was Asiatic Researcher (1788) published under the aegis of Asiatic Society, Kolkata. According to Ulrich International Periodicals Directory, 2009, more than 300,000 periodicals are published all over the world covering all subjects. Out of this, 22,000 periodicals belong to the category of peer reviewed learned periodicals.

5.2Books - The second category is books which are generally considered multidisciplinary in nature as compared to scholarly journals. Citation studies in the social sciences have revealed that in many cases, books are referred more widely than journal articles and they have a high impact in social sciences. References from journal articles indexed in the SCI and SSCI (1979) have been analyzed and it has been found that share of the cited books was substantial in case of social science subjects. The results are enumerated below:

- 0.9% - high energy physics
- 15% - in psychology
- 25% - in economics
- 39% - in sociology

This shows that books are normally ignored in studies of science but in social sciences, they have a good standing as they account for a substantial proportion of citations in SSCI as much as 40%.

Two different types of scholarships are represented in books and journals. Journal articles are more scientific where as books have humanities type approach. For a scholar, entry in to article publishing is competitive and so more egalitarian than entry in to book publishing which relies more on reputation and past experience of the author. Book authors are located in reputed universities and institutions. Journal article authors are junior than book authors. Also, article authors are more likely base their arguments on quantitative evidence and books on qualitative evidence. Journals show a more scientific type of research and books a more humanities type of scholarship. There is low correlations in citation counts combined with differing highly cited author sets suggests that the journal and book literature form different types of discourses. These

differing author sets may overlap but retain a distinct identify. This has been studied by constructing a dataset of 59000 references comprising 11041 from monographs and 47925 from journals. The result of the analysis showed that compared to journals, monographs referenced proportionality fewer journal articles and more monographs and other and type of literature. This establishes the theory that journal articles and book literature are somewhat self-contained, although they are clearly interdependent and overlapping.

Since the early 20th century, the book publishing industry has been characterized by degree of specialization that corresponds in large part to the market for particular kinds of books as well as to channel for distribution. Normally one can find that there are three types of books that are classified under the head, 'social sciences'. They are text books, works written on a particular issue or socio-economic/cultural problem like child labour, good governance or centre-state relations and monographs that are written as results of a particular research project or based on a Ph.D. thesis.

5.3 National Literature is the third category or it is the social science literature that is produced within the country. It has been said that unlike natural sciences, social sciences are more concerned with their social context plainly because 'society' is their major field of study, In fact, social science research programmes are influenced by national trends and by policy concerns of the national government. Bibliometric studies conducted so far also support the theory that both producers and consumers of social sciences are nationally oriented. Researches shows that compared to natural scientists, social scientists both write for and read fewer foreign journals.

In a developing country like India, social science research is considered to be mainly of local relevance and to influence only the surrounding places. There is a larger demand for problem oriented research that is local in nature. National government and donor agencies have become anxious to use research for promoting development efforts. Publication of research results in books and journals that are produced within the country (i.e. national literature) are the main communication outlets. Keeping this in view, it can be said that SSCI is not a good indicator to judge the quantity or quality of research done in India. Except for the USA and UK, national social science literature is largely excluded from the SSCI. Normally SSCI indicators represent internationally oriented research.

In recent years, there is a sign that social sciences are increasingly becoming international in nature. The factors like economic globalization, the Internet, research funding that requires international collaboration are all working towards homogenization at social sciences. There is a feeling among the social scientists that growing presence in the highly visible mainstream journals published in English language is important and it enhances one's chance for career advancement and worldwide recognition.

On the whole, it can be said that national literature comprising books, periodicals, reports, archival material, etc. are heavily used. In India, the size of national literature is quite large. Apart from private publishers, public agencies, i.e. Government Ministries/Departments; autonomous research organizations, public sector undertakings at various levels, i.e. union, state municipal generate large quantities of data and information in the form of books, monographs, etc. that are used by the researchers for their nationally oriented projects.

5.4 Non-Scholarly Literature is the fourth category. They are directed at non-specialists such as general readers and meant for enlightenment and knowledge transfer to non-scholarly public. For instance, sociologists like Andre Beteille may write columns in a newspaper like Times of India where the target audience is general public. Similarly economists and political scientists also write in Mainstream or Sunday Times. The difference between national literature and non-scholarly literature is the fact that national literature develops knowledge in the context of application; where as non-scholarly literature moves knowledge into application. The latter is also less indexed or abstracted and do not earn citations. As a result, they do not qualify as scholarly work.

In general, psychologists, statisticians and geographers do not usually publish in non-scholarly journals. Other fields like economist do publish in non-scholarly works deviating from science like approach. Linguistics, education and sociology have major share in this type of publishing. Unlike scientific literature, the enlightenment literature has no review and citation mechanism. Therefore, it is not possible to judge their quality and extent of use.

6. INTERNATIONAL DATABASES AND DATA SERVICES

International databases and data archives are essential tools for overcoming knowledge divides between different areas of the world, and for opening up the possibilities of international and interdisciplinary research. The collection and the circulation of these data have seen considerable changes since the 1990s. At first, social science data were local or were organized at a national level through censuses and sample surveys of various kinds. The development of international databases and data archives started with economics and political scientists in the 1950s. They developed data on national incomes, the stability of nations and political cultures. The early programmes to create international comparative databases were often supported by international organizations such as the United Nations and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Other examples of such databases were National Election Studies, General Social Survey and the International Social Survey Programme. An International Federation of Data Organizations was created in 1977. The International Association of Social Science Information Service and Technology represents the new professions of data archivist and data librarian.

In the past decades, data with different statistics and technological formats have been made more interoperable. Access has been extended, thanks to the Internet. Technological changes have also enables some researchers to tabulate their data online. The development of global research programmes on the environment and its interactions with demographic, socioeconomic and behavioral changes triggered growth in the number and quality of international social science databases. Data from satellites and geographic information systems have become more widespread and more important for social and natural scientists.

These developments have numerous scientific consequences. Many researchers agree that the recent accumulation and standardization of data are a precondition for developing new and more robust theories in the social sciences in the coming decades. Moreover, globalization requires the development of large-scale and global studies and inquiries. The growth of, and wider access to,

international databases and data archives have raised expectations. However, this growth is not going as fast as it should to deal with many complex topics.

6. CONCLUSION

Thus it can be concluded that there are variety of Information Sources, Services, Products and types of literature in the area of social sciences which have been adequately discussed and their use pattern and relative importance has also been described. They are meeting all the requirement of social scientists, researchers and students. The studies conducted to ascertain information requirements of social scientists have found that the formal information channels satisfy only a part of requirement. Use of books, periodicals, and other published and non published material is supplemented heavily by personal communication both oral and written. The electronic databases in social sciences have been covered in the module 11 separately.

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