

# **Use and Nonuse of Public Libraries: An Analytical Study in Presidency Division of West Bengal**

A Synopsis Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
for the Award Leading to the Degree of  
*Doctor of Philosophy (Arts)*

at

Jadavpur University

by

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2023

Public libraries are the very symbol of democratic educational institutions to serve the people of the community. The basic objective of a public library is to provide information to the public to satisfy their informative, educational and recreational needs. The Presidency Division under West Bengal, India is replete with a great legacy of public library movement. Numerous voluntary groups, philanthropists, social workers, freedom fighters and revolutionaries created the assured atmosphere of establishment of hundreds of public libraries since nineteenth century. These libraries attracted the public in manifold ways and become places of education, trust and culture. This Division is the land of the National Library, State Central Library, District libraries, town libraries and numerous primary unit libraries. A vast number of people from different sections have been benefitted from these libraries. These libraries opened the gateway to an unrestricted scope to information, education and recreation. Thus, the urge to establish and promote public libraries is the driving force by which the Government started to enact public libraries act to define, design and develop public library resources, facilities and infrastructure on a clear goal to serve the public and the role of librarian was defined as to persuade people to benefit by the knowledge treasured up in information resources.

Public libraries are open to all and often termed as 'Peoples' university'. However, it has been observed that the use of public libraries is decreasing day by day. In spite of its openness, certain nonuse of public libraries has been a pertinent issue. Despite the existence of numerous user studies, we possess limited knowledge regarding the genuine information requirements of diverse communities, which is a crucial prerequisite for the design of information services that cater to their needs. It is

perhaps necessary to abandon user studies and focus instead on a more productive area of research, that of nonusers and nonusers of information services.<sup>1</sup>

A comprehensive investigation of the information requirements of both users and non-users of public libraries in order to effectively meet the societal demands is therefore crucial.

In view of this, it was intended to conduct a systematic assessment of the users as well as nonusers of the public libraries in the Presidency Division, West Bengal.

Existing literary output, available in various indexing and abstracting databases like LISA, ILSA, Indian Dissertation Abstracts, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, University News, JSTOR, Taylor and Francis Database, and IASLIC Newsletter show little evidence of research on the questions raised. Therefore, a notable knowledge gap has been marked in this regard.

## **2 Statement of the problem and research questions**

The problem of the research may be stated as-

### **Assessment of use and nonuse of public libraries in Presidency Division of West Bengal**

The problem mentioned above along with few necessary and relevant research questions emerging therefrom warrants to be worked out in course of the study.

- i) What is the attitude of the community members towards public libraries in the Presidency Division of West Bengal?
- ii) What is the pattern of information behaviour of users and nonusers of public libraries?
- iii) What is the usage pattern of public libraries?

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<sup>1</sup> Lancaster, F.W. (1968). Information retrieval systems, etc. New York: John Wiley.

- iv) What are the reasons behind nonuse of public libraries?

### **3 Objective of the study**

The purpose of this study was to assess the use and non-use of public libraries in the Presidency Division of West Bengal.

To achieve the object, the following tasks had been adhered:

- i) to understand the attitude of the community people about public libraries;
- ii) to comprehend the information behaviour of users as well as non-users of public libraries;
- iii) to learn about the usage pattern of public libraries; and
- iv) to find out the reasons behind the non-use of public libraries.

### **4 Scope**

To mention the scope of the study, the users and nonusers of the public libraries across the five districts – 24 Pgs. (South), 24 Pgs. (North), Nadia, Howrah and Kolkata, under the Presidency Division, West Bengal distributed under numerous categories and strata should come under the purview of this study as public libraries are ideally open to all. But it is impossible and inconvenient to cover such huge heterogeneous population for the study. The current research work is based on and limited to the opinion of the representative sample of a total four hundred ten of five districts under the Presidency Division of West Bengal, India covering their attitude towards public libraries, information behavior, usage pattern of public libraries, and reasons behind nonuse of public libraries. It is worth mentioning that out of five administrative division (Burdwan Division, Presidency Division, Medinipur Division, Malda

Division and Jalpaiguri Division) of West Bengal, only one division, that is, the Presidency Division which covers five districts - 24 Pgs. (South), 24 Pgs. (North), Nadia, Kolkata and Howrah were covered under the study. The reason behind it is that this division is very much diverse and rich in socio-cultural and economic ground and represents the population. Kolkata, the urban and metropolitan city in one hand, rural areas of other districts are there within this population area. The public library system also is very much diverse within this area as the National Library of India, State Central Library, District Libraries, Town libraries and primary unit libraries are within the study area.

## **5 Methodology**

In order to achieve the objective of the study, a survey was carried out to determine the attitudes of users as well as non-users of the public libraries in Presidency Division of West Bengal. However, it was not possible to cover such a huge and heterogeneous population for data collection. Therefore, for convenience, a representative sample of the population was selected for data collection by using stratified random sampling technique.

### **Sample Size Selection**

The investigation was conducted in each of the five districts, namely 24 Pgs.-South, 24 Pgs.-North, Nadia, Kolkata, and Howrah, which are all under the purview of the Presidency Division of West Bengal. From each district, two blocks were selected for

the purpose. However, from Kolkata district, two Wards of Kolkata Municipal Corporation were chosen. Then, for convenience, a primary unit library was selected from each block/ward, and from their adjunct areas, forty-one respondents were surveyed based on their availability. The sample details have been given in the table below.

Table - Area-wise selection of Samples

<b>Presidency Division</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Block/Ward</b>	<b>[Primary Unit Library]</b>	<b>Sample Size</b>
	Kolkata	Paikpara (Ward 4)	[Agrani Pathagar]	41
		Bagbazar (Ward 8)	[Bagbazar Reading Library]	41
	24 Pgs. (North)	Barasat II	[Bamungachi Bandhab pathagar]	41
		Habra II	[Dogachheya Mukul Sangha Pathagar]	41
	24 Pgs. (South)	Baruipur	[Madarat Bandhab Pathagar]	41
		Kulpi	[Durganagar Sabuj Sangha Library]	41
	Howrah	Bally- Jagacha	[Brati sangha Granthagar]	41
		Uluberia I	[Sukanta Smriti Pathagar]	41
	Nadia	Chakdah	[Nabankur Sadharan Pathagar]	41
Nakashipara		[Golepara Public Library]	41	
<b>Total - 5</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>[10]</b>	<b>410</b>	

## **Tools and techniques used for Data Collection and Organization**

The following tools and techniques had been used for data collection and organization.

- A structured questionnaire was designed for the purpose of gathering data from the selected sample.
- Interview method had been combined with the questionnaire for data collection.
- Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 22.0, had been employed for tabulation, data analysis and management.

## **6 Chapters**

**Chapter - 1** (Introduction) gives introduction to the work. Includes the statement of the problem, objective of the study, and the methodology adopted.

**Chapter - 2** (Overview of Literature) includes a comprehensive overview of available literature in relation to the problem of this research.

**Chapter – 3** (Community Attitude towards Public Libraries) deals with community attitude towards Public Libraries.

**Chapter -4** (Information Behaviour of Public Library Users and Nonusers) focuses on information behaviour of public library users and nonusers.

**Chapter – 5** (Public Library Usage Pattern) shows public libraries' usage pattern.

**Chapter – 6** (Reasons behind Nonuse of Public Libraries) deals with the reasons behind non-use of public libraries.

**Chapter - 7** (Summary of Findings and Conclusion) provides the summary of findings and conclusion.

## **7 Summary of findings**

The findings obtained from the research work may be summarised below

- It is found from table 3.3.1 that 5.6 per cent nonusers of public libraries are unaware and 94.3 per cent nonusers are aware about the existence of the public libraries in their locality.
- From table 3.3.2, it is evident that 92.5 per cent nonusers are familiar with the public library premises in their locality and 7.5 per cent nonusers do not know about the library premises in their areas.
- Table 3.3.3 discloses that 40.8 per cent public library users reside within the area of one kilo meter of the library. 14 per cent comes from within two kilo meter of distance and 45.2 per cent users comes from more than two kilo meter distance to use the public libraries.
- From table 3.3.3 the result shows that, 45.6 per cent nonusers reside within the distance of one kilo meter from a public library. 15.4 per cent nonusers reside within the distance of two kilo meter and 30.9 per cent nonusers reside with a distance of more than two kilo meter.
- Majority of the users reach their libraries within 30 minutes. 31.2 per cent users spend up to 45 minutes to reach the public libraries and 14 per cent users spend up to one hour to reach their public libraries as evident from table 3.3.4.
- In chapter 3, table 3.3.4 shows that, 42.5 per cent nonusers can reach their nearest public libraries within 30 minutes, 36.2 per cent nonusers may reach within 45 minutes and 21.2 per cent nonusers may reach a public library by spending up to one hour.



- From table 3.3.5 in chapter 3, it is evident that 63.7 per cent nonusers are aware about the available resources and services, and 36.2 per cent nonusers are unaware about free facilities provided by public libraries.
- Table 3.3.6 shows that majority (52.5 %) of nonusers are unaware about different programmes organised by public libraries.
- Majority of users are naturally aware about the programmes organised by public libraries, but 11.2 per cent users are still unaware about various programmes organised by public libraries.
- Among the users, 40.8 per cent have been appealed, but majority (59.2 per cent) of the users have not been appealed to use public libraries by any library authority.
- Among the nonusers, 85.6 per cent nonusers are not appealed by any library authority to use the public libraries.
- From the analysis it is evident that 76.8 per cent users have no negative idea about public libraries, but among the users 23.2 per cent have negative idea about public libraries.
- Majority (78.8 %) of the nonusers are with negative idea about public libraries' services and resources.
- The study shows that 64 per cent users' family member are nonusers of public libraries as evident in table 3.3.9 of chapter 3.
- It is evident from the analysis that 71.3 per cent nonusers' family members have never used public libraries.
- From the analysis in table 3.3.10, it is found that 64.4 per cent nonusers think public libraries are essential for community.

- From table 4.3.1 it is evident that 95.2 per cent public library users have specific need for information, while among the nonusers 50 per cent feel strong need for specific information and other 50 per cent are not sure in articulating their information need specifically,
- It is inferred from table 4.3.1 that 4.8 per cent library users remains unanswered regarding their specific information need.
- Most of the users seek information in the areas of livelihood and financial (37.2 per cent) and socio-cultural information (22 per cent) as disclosed in table 4.3.2.
- From table 4.3.2, it is found that majority (33.1 per cent) of nonusers' areas of information need is financial and livelihood, other leading areas of information need are socio-cultural (18.7 per cent), health (16.8 per cent).
- Table 4.3.3 discloses that 36 per cent users and 50 per cent nonusers feel that their information need is fulfilled while 37.2 per cent users and 43.1 per cent nonusers opine that their information need is unfulfilled. Interestingly, 26.8 per cent users remain unanswered whether their information need is fulfilled or not.
- Majority of the users have multiple types of information facilities at their home or workplace, as found in table 4.3.4.

- The table 4.3.4 shows further that 41.2 per cent among the total users possess the facilities of all three types of media – print, broadcast and digital. These users are well acquainted with information media.
- From table 4.3.5, it is found that majority (54 per cent) of users prefer both print and digital media, while majority of the nonusers (42.5 per cent) nonusers prefer audio-visual media.
- Among the nonusers, availability and access to broadcast media and internet is higher (29.3 per cent).
- It is found from analysis that 57.6 per cent users of public libraries possess a collection of books at home while 42.4 per cent library users do not possess book collection personally.
- From the data of table 4.3.6, it is found that, 56.9 per cent nonusers have their book collection at home and 43.1 per cent do not have any book collection.
- Public library users have modern ICT gadget for accessing digital information. A minor portion do not have ICT gadget.
- Majority of nonusers of public libraries have gadgets for accessing digital information.
- Among the users, 90.4 per cent users read on internet, and 63.7 per cent of the nonusers, access reading material from internet, as found from table 4.3.8.
- From table 4.3.9, it is found that 81.2 per cent public library users have social media account, and 64.4 per cent public library nonusers have social media account.
- The analysis discloses that 50.7 per cent library users spend up to two hours in using social media and up to three hours are spent by 38.4 per cent users on accessing social media.

- Among the nonusers 44.7 per cent spend up to two hours and 33 per cent spend up to three hours daily on social media.
- Social media attracts the respondents a lot, as because they spend few hours daily from their leisure as evident from table 4.3.10.
- Table 4.3.11 discloses that most of the library users prefer internet for their required information and most of the nonusers ask people as their first attempt for information.
- Nonusers also rely majorly (40 per cent) on internet for their preferred source for information.
- Broadcast media is the preferred source for information to 25.1 per cent of the participants.
- The study shows that 46.8 per cent users of public libraries become satisfied by information from internet or digital media as evident in table 4.3.12.
- Broadcast media also is satisfactory media to 21.2 per cent users.
- Nonusers of public libraries, 39.3 per cent become satisfied with internet and 28.7 per cent with broadcast media.
- The study shows that 58.8 per cent users think cost of information is a barrier.
- The analysis of data discloses that to 43.1 per cent nonusers, cost of information is a barrier and 41.7 per cent of total 410 respondents, remains unanswered whether cost of information is a barrier or not.
- The study shows that 56.9 per cent nonusers will refuse to wait for long to access information and majority of the users and nonusers need information instantly and they do not want to wait for much time as evident from the table 4.3.13.

- Table 4.3.14 shows that, majority of the users will verify the information while facing any doubtful information, while 50 per cent nonusers will ask people in face of doubtful information.
- The study discloses that 28.4 per cent library users avoid doubtful information.
- Majority of nonusers (71.3%) feel they lack skill for information handling at present time, and most of the users also think that they lack skill for information handling, as found in table 4.3.15.
- It is evident from the analysis that to 50 per cent library users there is abundance of information, while 35.2 per cent do not feel so, as found in table 4.3.16.
- Most of the library users and nonusers feel that there is abundance of information.
- From table 5.3.1, it is found that majority (50%) of the public library users visits public libraries once in a month.
- Majority of the users (48 per cent) have been using public libraries for more than two years. New users who are using with the duration of less than one year, are 11.6 per cent.
- Library users generally come with cycle or motorbike majorly (45.6 per cent).
- Users also visit the libraries on foot 27.2 per cent.
- Majority of users take 30 minutes to reach the library from their residence.
- To borrow a book or other resource is the major (59.6%) purpose of visiting a public library, as found from table 5.3.5.
- The analysis of data shows that 41.2 per cent users visit their library to attend library extension programme.

- From table 5.3.6, it is found that 45.2 per cent users visit library for some specific information need, 68.4 per cent for book lending service and 43.2 per cent comes to access reading room.
- Literature is the highest accessed subject (30.8 per cent), followed by generalities subjects (22.4 per cent).
- From the analysis of table 5.3.8, it is inferred that 34.8 per cent users spend up to one hour in the library each time they visit and 31.6 per cent spend up to two hours per visit. Only 14.4 per cent users spend more than two hours in the library during their each visit.
- Mostly printed media is used by the users of the public libraries from these libraries. (table 5.3.9)
- It is found from table 5.3.10 that, 54.4 per cent users view that access to various collection of public libraries' is the major function, while 40.8 per cent users think operation of service, and 32.4 per cent users think as community space is the prior function of public library.
- Majority (58%) of users are with the opinion that library staff are not biased, but remaining users (32.4 %) are unanswered whether the library staff are biased or not, as evident in table 5.3.11.
- Majority of the library users (72.4%) are satisfied with the existing resources and services rendered by the public libraries, while 27.6 per cent users are not satisfied with the current resources and services as evident in table 5.3.12.
- Level of satisfaction of the users majorly is associated with resources.

- Dissatisfaction with in certain areas of public library resources and services is there as found in table 5.3.13.
- The study finds that overall ambience of the libraries is somewhat satisfactory to 49.2 users.
- Library extension activities are also important functions provided by the public libraries for the users. Public libraries function as community space and part of cultural life to many users.
- Almost three-fourth of total users are satisfied with existing public library services while more than a quarter of users are still dissatisfied with library services.
- The study shows that regarding range of library services rendered by public libraries, users are somewhat satisfied.
- The study finds that more than 38 per cent nonusers agree that library is not opened regularly.
- Table 6.3.1 reveals that, short duration of library service hour is a reason behind nonuse of public libraries.
- From the analysis, it is inferred that 29.3 per cent nonusers do not use public libraries because library service hour is not suitable for them while more than 78 per cent nonusers disagree that range of services are not suitable.
- Lack of interesting events on the part of public libraries does not attract a certain portion of nonusers.
- From table 6.3.2, it is found that absence of library staff to run the public libraries fuels nonuse of these libraries, and 38 per cent nonusers feel public library buildings are unattractive.

- The study shows that to one-fourth of nonusers, location of the library at a noisy place is the cause of their nonuse.
- Poor lighting and ventilation cause nonuse of libraries, at the same time location of public libraries at far off places is also a cause of nonuse.
- From the table 6.3.3, it is evident that 39 per cent nonusers do not use the public libraries, because of the old and torn books in these libraries.
- The analysis finds that unavailability of audio-visual resources in the public libraries also causes nonuse.
- Unavailability of internet facility in the public libraries is also a reason behind nonuse of public libraries.
- From table 6.3.4, it is evident that public library is unable to satisfy the need of a large section of nonusers.
- It is also found that lack of free time and exhaustion after work fuel to the nonuse of public libraries.
- After the end of formal education, public library is of no use to 51.6 per cent respondents among the nonusers.
- From table 6.3.5, it is evident that majority of the nonusers (61.8 per cent) do not like reading. Apathy towards reading is a cause of not using public libraries.
- Poor health condition of the nonusers is also a reason of nonuse of public libraries, while inability to read a document fluently also causes nonuse of library.



- From the analysis of data, it is found that to a large number of nonusers, public library is of no use, and inability to decode the script is a reason behind nonuse of public libraries.

## **8 Scope of further research**

The present study has paved the way for further research in the following areas.

1. An in-depth study may be conducted to assess the users' nonuse of public library resources and services.
2. A study may be conducted to determine the benefits lost due to users' non-use of public library resources and services.
3. Research may be carried out to discover the socio-economic factors that influence the use and nonuse of public libraries.
4. Research may be conducted to discover the impact of physical abilities on the use and nonuse of public libraries.
5. Research may be carried out to discover the gender impact on the use and nonuse of public libraries.
6. A study may be conducted to determine the perception of the illiterates towards the public libraries.
7. Research may be conducted to assess the impact of individual differences in information behaviour on the use and nonuse of public libraries.

## 9 Conclusion

Following conclusion is drawn based on the generalization of the findings of this study:

- Majority of the users uses printed media, although some users access digital media from library; access information on literature, textbooks and career-guidance related literature;
- Many users treat libraries as community space and cultural centre.
- Distance from library; time to reach library; behaviour of library staff and time spent to provide information influence library use.
- Although most of the users are satisfied with the existing resource and services, some of them are not satisfied.
- Non-users generally have difficulty in articulating their information needs clearly, and they rely more on human sources for their required information.
- Socio-economic status, psychological make up including ability/skill of an individual and access to information influence use and nonuse of public libraries.
- Poor reading habits and illiteracy are also the reasons for non-use of public libraries.
- Public libraries' infrastructure including resources, services, staff strength and lack of user-friendliness also lead to non-use of public libraries.
- Many users having multiple information facilities at home and/or workplace, do not bother to get services from public libraries.

It may be claimed that the objective of this research work has been met against the findings of this study.