
USE OF VARIOUS MAILING LISTS BY LIBRARY PROFESSIONALS IN INDIA: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Aims to examine the use of various mailing lists by the library professionals of India. An on-line questionnaire was prepared to collect data from the users of mailing lists. The responses were received from 122 users. The study investigated various mailing lists being used by library professionals, mostly used mailing lists, purpose of using mailing lists, and frequency of use of mailing lists. The study also examines users' opinion about helpfulness of support and importance of mailing lists to the library community. The benefits of mailing lists and suggestions for the improvement of the mailing are also given)

KEYWORDS: Electronics Mailings List, Survey, Library Professionals.

Introduction

The proper communication and collaboration among professionals of any field is vital to the development in that field. Communications and collaboration among professionals, create new ideas, remove confusions and provide guidance to each others. Traditional communication systems such as telephone, postal mail and so on have been designed for one-to-one human communication. Information and communication technologies have made it possible for members of any profession to contact other professionals or communicate on a group level that was not possible in the past. It has become possible because of the availability of ICT-based social networking software known as mailing groups, mailing lists, internet discussion groups or listserv (Siddique and Mahmood, 2009).

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The mailing lists, which are the by-products of internet, serve as an important tools for collaborating research and professionals activities among faculty, scientists, researcher, students etc. These provide means for a group of users to establish an E-mail forum on any topic of common interest. Mailing lists enable members to exchange information or make queries about specific topic with all the other members of group. These mailing lists are becoming popular among library professionals too for similar above discussed activities (Pujar, Manjunath and Juttiyavar, 2003). The mailing list is also commonly referred to as listserv, discussion forums, electronic discussions lists and mailing group. The NMLIS, LIS-Forum, Libtech, Diglib_India, IATLIS, India-LIS, Corporate Librarians and Medlib are some example of mailing lists running in India related to library professionals.

Mailing List

Webopedia defined that mailing is a list of E-mail addresses identified by a single name, such as *mail-list@sandybay.com*. When an e-mail message is sent to the mailing list name, it is automatically forwarded to all the addresses in the list. Most e-mail clients support mailing lists, which enables you to broadcast e-mail messages to groups that you define. In addition, there are *mailing list servers* that manage centralized mailing lists for groups of users. According to On-line Dictionary for Library and Information Science, mailing list is an E-mail discussion forum that allows individuals to subscribe and automatically receive messages posted to the list by other subscribers. Participants may also post their own messages and replies for distribution to the other subscribers to the list. A mailing list may be *moderated* or *may not be moderated*.

Literature Review

Pujar, Manjunath and Juttiyavar (2003) highlighted the usefulness of mailing lists with a special reference to librarians, issues related to the mailing lists and also annotated the popular mailing lists in the field of Library and Information Science.

Kovacs, Robinson, and Dixon (1995) examined the impact of electronic mail discussion lists on the information seeking and sharing behaviour of Library and Information Science

scholars. They found that librarians were using the lists as a source of professional and research information for personal use as well as an information source to assist library patrons and that the E-mail lists can enhance but cannot replace other sources of professional information.

Roselle (2001) studied the effects of electronic communication on US academic document librarians' relationships and found that such communication generated both efficiency effects, such as enhanced communication, and social effects, such as strengthened relationships.

Peek (1997) examined the nine electronic mailing lists with a focus in the social sciences, the humanities, or an interdisciplinary orientation in either discipline using a qualitative research design. Content analysis was conducted on the electronic mail messages generated by nine electronic mailing lists over a six-month period. The major findings of this study revealed that each electronic mailing lists evolved differing forms of management practices, cultural norms, and types of content exchange. Respondents reported varying types of social relationships formed with other participants on electronic mailing lists. These differences in experiences and expectations appeared to be related to the degree to which an individual felt in some way isolated from others, preferred communication styles, professional rank, and time constraints. The study also considers the implications for higher education and the extent to which electronic mailing lists may change scholarly behaviors.

Siddique and Mahmood(2009) conducted a study on the role of mailing groups in the development of the library professions in Pakistan. The content analysis of 5216 e-mail messages posted on plagpk till December 2008 was conducted for the study and messages were classified into 12 categories named professional news, social issues, professional help, jobs, training, professional associations, library profession, library education, junk mails, LIS research, professionals groups and others. The highest messages (1227) were related to professional news. They also found that the overall impact of plagpk mailing group is very positive. It is very useful forum for library professionals to raise the quality of library services and the image of librarianship in Pakistan. It provides a useful forum to

professionals to share their experience and solve their problems. It is helping in the placement of fresh graduates by posting jobs.

Advantages of Mailing Lists

According to Web Search Guide (<http://www.websearchguide.ca/discuss/mailbene.htm>), the mailing list is probably the easiest way to stay abreast of new developments in a field. By being a member you can:

- Follow the discussions of people who have expertise in the field. Learn their E-mail addresses.
- Network with people in your field of interest. Useful for developing contacts.
- Keep abreast of the latest issues. Debate leading-edge issues.
- Learn of references to other sources of related information.
- Pick up tips on how to solve problems.
- Receive announcements of conferences, meetings, seminars.
- Have an opportunity to contribute your knowledge.
- Ask questions. Solicit suggestions from others about a problem.
- Ask assistance for software/hardware problems.
- Receive information about vacancies advertised.
- Requests for factual information.
- Requests for opinions/experiences of other list members on particular topic.
- Receive Informative posts about useful information sources, new websites,
- Software, publications etc

Objectives of the Research

The objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the use of various mailing lists by library professionals.
2. To identify the most commonly used mailing lists by library professionals.
3. To find out different purpose for which mailing lists being used by library professionals.
4. To find out the frequency of use of mailing lists by the library professionals.
5. To find out the place where the mailing lists are used by library professionals.
6. To find out the experience of the library professionals in using mailing lists.
7. To know the designation-wise utilization of the mailing lists.
8. To know the state-wise utilization of the mailing lists.
9. To know the library category-wise utilization of the mailing lists.
10. To find out the opinions of library professionals on importance of mailing lists to the library community.
11. To make the suggestions for improving the services and working of mailing lists.

Methodology of the Study

An online questionnaire method was used to conduct this study as sample was distributed around India. On-line survey is an effective way to gather information quickly when sample is widely distributed. With the help of Kwiksurveys.com, a structured On-line questionnaire was designed to collect data from the library professionals keeping in mind the basic objective of the study. The link of online questionnaire was posted to various mailing lists such as NMLIS, LIS-Forum, Diglib-India, Corporate Librarians and selected completely filled in 122 responses were analyzed and tabulated as under.

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Analysis of Responses

Table 1 : Designation-Wise Distribution of Respondents

Designation	No. of Respondents	Percentages
Librarian	62	50.82
Assistant Librarian	19	15.57
Professional Assistant	8	6.56
Research Scholar	6	4.92
Sr. Librarian	5	4.10
Library Assistant	4	3.28
Deputy Librarian	4	3.28
Assistant Professor	3	2.46
Others	3	2.46
Library Trainee	2	1.64
Documentation Officer	2	1.64
Professor	2	1.64
Lecturer	1	0.82
Student	1	0.82
Total	122	100.00

Respondents were asked to indicate their designations. The distribution of respondents by their designation can be seen in Table 1. It was found that 50.82% of the respondents (62) were librarians, 15.57% were assistant librarians and 6.56% were professional assistants. It can be seen from table 1 that almost all of types of library professionals were using mailing lists but librarians were in majority.

Table 2 : Library Category-Wise Distribution of Respondents

Type of Library	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Private College Library	46	37.70
University Library	41	33.61
Government Department Library	10	8.20
Government College Library	9	7.38
Corporate Library	8	6.56
Department of Library Science	6	4.92
Public Library	1	0.82
Research Library	1	0.82
Total	122	100.00

The 122 respondents were categorized according to nature of library, where they are presently working and it was found that majority of respondents (37.70%) were working in private college libraries followed by university library (33.61%) and government departmental library (8.20%). The results show that library professionals working in private institutions are more active in use of mailing lists.

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Table 3 : State-Wise Distribution of Respondents

Sr. No.	State of Professionals	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Karnataka	26	21.31
2	Andhra Pradesh	20	16.39
3	Maharashtra	17	13.93
4	Tamil Nadu	10	8.20
5	Uttar Pradesh	10	8.20
6	Gujarat	7	5.74
7	New Delhi	7	5.74
8	Orissa	4	3.28
9	Kerala	3	2.46
10	Madhya Pradesh	3	2.46
11	West Bengal	2	1.64
12	Goa	2	1.64
13	Haryana	2	1.64
14	Jharkhand	2	1.64
15	Punjab	2	1.64
16	Assam	1	0.82
17	Himachal Pradesh	1	0.82
18	Rajasthan	1	0.82
19	Sikkim	1	0.82
20	J & K	1	0.82
	Total	122	100

Table 3 shows the state-wise distribution of the respondents and reveals that 21.31% of the total respondents were from Karnataka followed by Andhra Pradesh (16.39%) and Maharashtra (13.93). It was found that library professionals working in Karnataka are more active in use of mailing lists than other states.

Table 4 : Experience-Wise Distribution of Respondents

Experience in Years	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1-5	46	37.70
6-10	35	28.69
11-15	18	14.75
16-20	15	12.30
20	8	6.56
Total	122	100.00

Regarding the working experience of respondents, Table 4 shows that 46(37.70%) respondents had experience between 1-5 years, 35(28.69%) respondents had experience between 6-10 years, 18(14.75%) respondents had experience between 11-15 years and 15(12.30%) respondents had experience between 16-20 years. Only 8(6.56%) respondents had experience of more than 20 years.

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Table 5 : Mostly Used Mailing Lists

Mailing Lists	No. of Respondents	Percentage
NMLIS	80	65.57
LIS -Forum	103	84.43
Diglib -India	39	31.97
IATLIS	30	24.59
India -LIS	30	24.59
Corporate Librarians	10	8.20
Libtech	15	12.30

Note : Options have multiple choices

The respondents were asked to select various mailing used by them with multiple choices. It is clear from Table 5 that among various mailing lists the majority of respondents 103(84.43%) use LIS-Forum, 80(65.57%) respondents use NMLIS and 39(31.97%) respondents use Diglib-India, The IATLIS and India-LIS both mailing lists used by 24.59% users respectively.

Table 6 : Frequency of Using Mailing Lists

Frequency	No of Responses	Percentages
Daily	93	74.67
Once in a week	2	2.47
2-3 times in a week	18	13.33
Once in a month	0	0
Occasionally	9	9.33
Total	122	100

In order to assess the frequency of using mailing lists, the respondents were asked to indicate any one of five options. It is evident from table 6 that 74.67% of the respondents use mailing list daily, 13.33% respondents use mailing list 2-3 times in week, 9.33% respondents use mailing list occasionally and 2.47% respondents use once in a week. None of the respondents has indicated using mailing lists once in a month.

Table 7 : Place of Using Mailing Lists

Place	No. of Responses	Percentage
Office	57	46.72
Both Place	56	45.90
Home	7	5.74
Home & Cybercafe	2	1.64
Total	122	100.00

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The respondents were asked to indicate the place of using mailing lists and the responses are given in Table-7. The majority of respondents (46.72%) reported that they use mailing lists from the office, while 45.90% respondents use mailing lists from both place (home & office). The 5.74 respondents use mailing lists from home and only two respondents indicated that they use mailing lists from Home and Cybercafé.

Table 8 : Years of Using Mailing Lists

Years	No. of Responses	Percentage
Less than one year	10	8.20
One year	8	6.56
Two years	17	13.93
Three years	15	12.30
Four years	18	14.75
Five years	11	9.02
More than five years	34	27.87
More than ten years	9	7.38
Total	122	100.00

The respondents were requested to indicate the years of experience in using mailing lists. Table 8 shows the majority of the respondents (27.87%) had more than five years experience in using mailing lists, while 14.75% respondents had experience of four years. Only 4% respondents indicated that they have more then ten years experience in using mailing lists.

Table 9 : Purpose of Using Mailing Lists

Purpose	No. of Responses	Percentage
To Keep in touch with other library professionals.	108	88.52
To find technical support.	74	60.66
To gain knowledge current issues.	107	87.70
To search jobs.	68	55.74
To find specific information in the field of interest.	85	69.67
For discussing issues of interest to members of the group	72	59.02
To obtain feedback from members on issues, activities, etc, of the group.	42	34.43
Total		100.00

Note : Options have multiple choices

Mailing lists can be used for many purposes like job search, technical support, keep in touch with library professionals etc. The Table 9, shows the different purposes for which the respondents use mailing lists. Table 9, indicates that 88.52% of the respondents are using mailing lists for “to keep in touch with other library professionals”, 87.70% respondents are using for “to gain current issues” and 69.67% respondents are using for “to find specific information in the field of interest”. About 59.02 % of the respondents are using for “discussing issues of interest to members of the group”.

Table 10 : Do you Like the Messages Posted on Mailing list Which are not Relevant to Library Professions such as Posting of Jokes, Greetings, Congratulations, Invitations etc.? Relevant Mailing List.

Option	No. of Responses	Percentage
Yes	20	16.39
No	102	83.61
Total	122	100.00

The table shows that most of the respondents (83.61%) do not like the messages posted on mailing lists which are not relevant to library professions such as posting of jokes, greetings, congratulations, invitations etc. while 16.39% of the respondents like it.

Table 11 : Helpfulness of Mailing Lists as per Users Opinion

Opinion	No. of Responses	Percentage
Very helpful	53	38.67
Somewhat helpful	55	42.67
Occasionally helpful	13	17.33
Not helpful	1	1.33
Total	122	100.00

From table 11, it is revealed that majority of respondents 42.67 %(55) found the helpfulness of support and reply of their query on mailing list as *somewhat helpful* ,38.67 % respondents rated the *very helpful* and 17.33% respondents rated *occasionally helpful*. Only 1 respondent replied that it was not useful. To make the support very helpful, the expert should answer certain questions and senior professionals have to share their experiences.

Table 12: Importance of Mailing Lists to the Library Community

Importance of Mailing Lists to the Library Community	No. of Responses	Percentage
Extremely important	102	83.61
Somewhat important	18	14.75
Not important	2	1.64
Total	122	100.00

The Table 12, shows the opinion of respondents on importance of mailing lists to the library community. The table 12 revealed that majorities of the respondents, i.e. 102 out of 122(83.81%) stated that the mailing list is extremely important to the library community followed by 18 respondents (14.75%) stated that mailing lists are somewhat important. Surprisingly only 2 respondents stated that it has no importance to the library community.

Comments and Suggestions of Respondents

The respondents were also asked to give their comments and suggestions about mailing lists. The following suggestions and comments of which some were given by the respondents are recommended for the improvement of mailing lists under study:

- Mailing Lists are performing its function very nicely. We just need more active uses of these mailing lists. This mailing list is not meant to receive mails only but actually we also need to mail any relevant information if we have. And certainly activeness of users will definitely increase the importance of Mailing Lists.
- It can be more structured and much well moderated. Members are requested to be more careful while posting messages, both in terms of content as well as context, especially language.

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- The moderators of mailing lists are doing a good job that should be appreciated. Senior professionals and professionals working in technical environment have to involve in mailing lists and share their experiences. Each month one professional issue may be taken up for discussion like 'Issue of the month'. Moderator has to play a vital role in filtering unrelated messages. Repetitive mail should not come. Some mailing lists just forward messages without reading them.
- Mailing lists are a very good means for the Librarian community to help one another. It also helps in the development of the profession by providing a platform for sharing views and solving problems as a team.
- Forums will be more useful when they are used only, hence, awareness can be brought among professionals. Also technical issues need to be published. More light on Open Source Software, Open Resources Sharing/Publishing of Standard instructions -Staff pattern, salary structure, book procurement, regarding loss of books to be discussed.
- It is not possible to attend all the workshops, seminars, conference for everyone. Therefore, library professionals who attend these programs should share their experience and whatever they learn from these programs. This type of practice will be really very helpful for all library professionals.
- Mailing lists are intended to discuss professional, technical, recent trends of the subject etc. It must not be used to post jokes, personal invitations, holiday wishes, marketing or advertising products by companies/organizations etc.
- The respondents were also asked about what types of messages they do not wish to receive on mailing lists. The members responded that the messages related to jokes, congratulations, commercial mails, personal wishes, without address of the sender, very primitive questions such as asking for list of journals for MBA, Engineering, out of LIS field, common greetings on festivals, without making preliminary effort, personal comments and repeated messages should be avoided on mailing lists. These

type messages create irritation and consume time of other members.

- Keeping in view increasing number of different type of library professionals and their different requirement, the new mailing lists should be started separately related to library automation, digital library , open source software and career guidance.

Conclusion

The mailing lists are very useful source for professional development and best way to keep library professionals updated about various activities in their field. Mailing lists are very useful for researchers too. Mailing lists are connectivity of information and persons and very important source of communication and also helpful in updating in the field of Library and Information Science as well as any other field. Definitely it is important to get abreast of issues what's going on outside. From the analyses above, it is found that all almost all the categories of library professionals are using mailing lists. The mailing list used by the majority of respondents was the LIS-Forum. The majority of the respondents were working in private institutions and having experience between 1-5 years. Most of the respondents were using mailing lists to keep in touch with other library professionals.

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