

## Themes of the Library Conferences Revolved Around User Needs

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### **Abstract:**

Conferences are physical gatherings to share the ideas, experiences and facilitate professional networking. They are often organized to reflect the latest state of research in a specific subject and provide a forum for discussion between attendees. Conferences are a valuable platform for the motivation and development to any professional including Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals.

From the beginning, libraries are institutions designed to house knowledge and associated with learning. Librarianship is associated to satisfying user's information needs. Library conferences are organized with various themes throughout. Technological innovations had transformed the library services and user's information needs impacting the librarianship. Themes of the library conferences revolved around the possibilities, directions, new methods and services to improve the information needs of the users experimenting with emerging information and communication technologies. Conferences are indeed an important method of professional development that affords LIS professionals with creative outcomes.

**Keywords:** Conferences; Library conferences; Themes of LIS conferences; User needs; Relevance of the themes of LIS conferences.

**Purpose:** Many conference events are held annually by organizations in and related to the Library and Information Science (LIS) field. This article examines whether conferences themes have any relevance to the library services and more specifically to user needs.

**Methodology:** An exploratory study is done to relate the theme or topic of the conference with its relevance to that period. This study aims to investigate the conferences as professional development tool available to librarians and to determine the degree to which the themes or topics of these conferences are relevant to the demands of the library users.

**Findings:** The conferences are instrumental in achieving valuable outcomes of practical issues, problems and challenges faced at individual libraries. The conferences aim to promote themes of interest to LIS services to encourage focus of topical issues in the profession.

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Conferences are the important channels of communication and interaction within the chosen field. Participation in conferences will immensely benefit the researchers and scholars to interact with the seniors and experts in the field to exchange ideas, update their knowledge, be acquainted with current trends and best practices in the field. Conferences are often organized for exchange of thoughts to the issues and problems; possibilities and directions and will come up with new innovative ideas. Conferences are the places where novel ideas are first proposed and begin their development. That is the reason, every year, worldwide gatherings of the professionals in all the disciplines will be organized in the forms of Conferences, Symposia, Seminars, workshops and conventions to share and present the ideas and way path to shape the future of research in the specific discipline. Conferences are a valuable platform for the motivation and development to any professional including Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals.

According to Phil Rabinowitz (2010), a conference is a gathering of people with a common interest or background, with the purposes of allowing them to meet one another and to learn about and discuss issues, ideas and work that focus on a topic of mutual concern.

The Latin roots of the word "conference" mean, literally, "Bring together." A conference brings together people and ideas. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines "conference" as a formal meeting in which many people gather in order to talk about ideas or problems related to a particular topic usually for several days for discussing matters of common concern.

Organizing a conference is arduous in respect to planning the finances, man power, and time. It requires intensive planning of identifying the suitable location, propagation to the audience and fixing the schedule to attract more people to attend the conference. A particular theme or topic or issue will be picked for

every conference. Theme of the conference will be focused on the latest developments, conceptual advances, Innovative ideas, techniques, technologies, methods, new discoveries in the subject concerned. Attendees of the conference exchange the new information and obtain the direct feedback from the delegates representing people who share common interests. Thus facilitate to enlighten on the topic, enhance new skills and competencies as well as opportunity for meeting people.

Conference is a gathering of eminent personalities in the related field along with participants from various places and organizations. It is an inventive place for networking, collaboration and building relationships with others in the field. The location of the conference can be other than the attendees' local region, nation or country. Thus attending conference facilitates learning outside the routine place, apart from prospects for promotion in the career and fun.

The development of movable type printing presses caused a revolution in the transmission of written knowledge and in the growth of libraries. The nineteenth century proved to be the birth of modern libraries and librarianship. From the beginning, libraries are institutions designed to house knowledge and associated with learning. The main function of libraries is collection, organization, preservation and dissemination of information. Librarianship is associated to satisfying user's information needs.

LIS professionals have been working to re-tool library services in order to make them more useful for users to find, organize, and interact with information in a way that has infinite potential for user customization. These new types of services are a shift from "isolated information silos" to "interlinked computing platforms."

The development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and its application in LIS centres has changed the nature of collections; the needs of users; the library environment and the roles of LIS professionals. The old concept of Book-centred librarianship is changed to the User-centred librarianship. The ICT technologies have paved path to new roles to LIS professionals. Thus the LIS professionals are forced to change the way they are functioning in providing the information needs of their users. These new roles require different personalities for librarians as well as different skills and knowledge. To establish such shift, conferences play an important role to support, learn and develop new knowledge, skills, and competencies for LIS professionals to sustain the professionalism.

While continuing to provide traditional library services, LIS professionals are acquiring new skills and assuming new roles that are necessary to support user's demands. Conferences act as continuing professional development platforms for preparing for new roles to LIS professionals.

From 1876 onwards library related conferences are organized in various parts of the world. A large amount of time and resources is spent every year in the LIS sector across the world to organize, fund and attend conferences. Organizers of the LIS conferences picked up the themes much prior to the assigned conference tracking the societal industrial, technological and information developments, anticipating their impact and opportunity on connecting people with required information. The ultimate motto of the LIS profession is to serve specific needs of users effectively and efficiently with great speed.

Library conferences are organized with various themes throughout. The early libraries were attached to the monasteries to protect, preserve and defend culture. The first phase of librarianship started as custodianship. Before to the invention of printing press the number of manuscript books were meager. So safeguarding the culture, keeping the books intact was the purpose of librarianship. The themes of the early library conferences were focused on *Importance of founding libraries; how to build libraries; and How to popularize the library.*

After the invention of printing, due to enormous volume of documents the library custodian has to grow in to become a knowledge organizer and information transmitter. The press had a decisive contribution to book availability, which resulted in a larger number of libraries with a wide variety of activities. The library professional was meant to put the library collection into use. In order to utilize the existing knowledge to create and improve the society, various library procedures and techniques were experimented. In this process, various library classifications and cataloguing schemes emerged. Library and Information science being universal subject, international, national and regional conferences are organized to discuss methods of assisting the users in locating the documents and information. It was also realized that there is a need for a forum for discussing and adopting standards at local, national and international levels. Conferences led to rise of a number of national library associations. The evolution of Public libraries in United Kingdom and United States of America as the local community centers of information, making all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users. Grasping the importance of public libraries from a social, cultural and economic point of view in preparing all age groups of the society as the intellectual citizens, leaders and engaging them in using their minds, various conferences are organized on these topics. Conferences became the centre points to deliver and spread of these technical processes to library professionals in order to provide personal assistance to users in providing relevant information. So, the themes of the LIS conferences of this time revolved around *Publishing and book production; vitalizing of library services; Library administration; Need and importance of Library Classification and Cataloguing; Reference service and reference material; Acquisition of documents and other*

*reading materials; Development of Public Library services; Role of libraries in education; Role of libraries in social education; Bibliographic control in special libraries; Establishing a library association.*

Technological innovations had transformed the library services and user's information needs impacting the librarianship in the second half of the twentieth century. The emergence of new technologies such as microfilm and microfiche, tapes and sound recordings, electronic card catalogs, storage devices like CD-ROM influenced all the libraries functions and services. LIS professionals brainstormed actively to exploit the collection and services to satisfy the information needs of library users. Accordingly the themes of the conferences in the field of LIS are organized by academic institutions and professional associations to allow the LIS Community to expose, share, collaborate and improve their knowledge and skills. All the themes of the conferences are focused around the user's services.

Therefore, the themes of the library conferences after 1980's were focused on *Mechanization of library services and Documentation problems; Interlibrary loan of materials; special schemes of classification; Subject Headings; Information Retrieval and Translation; Translation service; Experiments with computerized classification, Current Awareness Services; Selective Dissemination of Information; Bibliographic Databases and Networks; and Reprographic Services etc.*

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, due to globalization and impact of information communication technology, information explosion and growth of internet technology the information was available in e-formats; e-books which changed the role of LIS professional. The digital information in electronic format was required by the user to cater to their needs. The libraries and the librarians have to face new challenges in dissemination of global information.

New skills and competencies were required to shift from traditional to digital era.

Constantly library professionals aim to provide new services with limited budgets. They are always in search for creative, innovative, and collaborative approaches to meet the demands of their users and to enhance library services. They shared experiences, challenges, and lessons learned in conferences, seminars, meetings, and other forums to exchange information.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, due to globalization and impact of information communication technology, information exploded in electronic formats which changed the role of LIS professional. The user demands have increased for global information from multiple information sources. Technological tools and digital information resources became part of library's collection to provide remote access to users.

The web environment, advancement in technology, options of sources and formats of information, and flow of information has great impact on the role of Libraries and the role of LIS professionals. To ensure the competencies needed conferences became the first platform for the researchers to debate about their findings or observations, discussions, and interactive experiences. Team of organizers of the conferences began to track the issues, relevant themes and topics to be identified for the upcoming conference well in advance.

After graduating with a library degree, even without any science or technology qualifications, most of the LIS professionals are expanding their knowledge, skills and competencies by attending conferences, seminars and workshops. Certainly conferences play an important role in continuous professional development of LIS professionals.

In order to prepare, guide and direct the library profession to face and address the new challenges, library conferences covered such themes for process improvement and organizational change, collaboration, future vision, partnerships, information literacy, new services and their impact on organizations, human resources, and other global issues. The library conference themes of this period were covering topics like *Access to electronic resources and document delivery services; Consortia; Review trends in libraries and library services; Shift in publishing and its impact on libraries and library services; Application of ICT in libraries and library services; Modern library management; Paradigm shift happening in libraries and information centres; Human Resource Management skills; e-resources; e-journals; Serials Standards; e-books; Resource discovery; Portals; Standardization and New competencies for LIS professionals etc.*

Apart from conferences, training programs on *Computer Networking, configuration and trouble shooting for LIS professionals, Web page designing, Designing and hosting of websites, Web search engines and e-collection building* were conducted to equip the professionals with practical knowledge. These conferences and training programs helped the library professionals to accommodate many information resources and technologies to incorporate in their library services to perform in the digital age.

As new technologies come along, Library and Information professionals experiment and try to find ways to employ the new tools in their Libraries. A driving force in their decision making about what tools to use will always be their users and whether the tools can help them do a better job of delivering services. The main focus of any Library and Information professional is primarily connecting users with their information needs. From 2005 onwards, Web 2.0 emerged as the next manifestation of the World Wide Web, where digital tools allowed users to create, change, and publish energetic content of all kinds. Library 2.0 is a new way of providing

library service through new Internet technologies, with emphasis on “user-centered” change and interaction. According to Stephens (2006), librarian 2.0 plans for users; embraces Web 2.0 tools and gets content. Web 2.0 applications had the potential to promote participatory networking where both library professionals and users communicate, collaborate and co-create content of their interests. The change in information environment had great impact on Library and Information environment.

The development of the collection tools, techniques and approaches in the web 2.0 environment by the librarian 2.0 are discussed in the conferences. The topics of this period revolved around *Web 2.0 and Library 2.0; Web based library services resources; Social Media and libraries; Networking, Resource Sharing and Information Literacy; Automation, Library Software, Open source; Digital Library initiatives; Digital Rights management; Digital Preservation; IPR issues; Copyright; Freedom of Information, and the Role of Librarians in the future* themes. The library conference themes are inclined to focus on LIS professional development and equipping them with the skills and competencies they need to become creative community hubs and places of participation and creation and learning.

In spite of attending a conference being expensive, especially when travel, leave, time and accommodation are factored LIS professionals are utilizing conference as a source for molding themselves with the developments in the society. Thus, the LIS profession is sustaining revolving around user centric services.

### **Conclusion**

Conferences are platform for social, emotional and intellectual activity. The conferences aim to promote themes of interest to LIS services to encourage focus of topical issues in the profession, to facilitate improved communication, information exchange and co-operative outcomes. Academic and Professional Association conferences are organized on the contemporary themes. The conferences provide an overview on the theme of the specific subject with the presentations, discussions and deliberations held among the professionals to recommend, suggest and guide the future developments in order to satisfy the user needs. The young professionals can learn best practices from the seniors and experts in the field. The conferences are instrumental in achieving valuable outcomes of practical issues, problems and challenges faced at individual libraries.

The conclusion is reached that conferences are indeed an important method of professional development that affords LIS professionals with creative outcomes. Conference or workshop attendance by librarians is a necessity, especially in this era of information technology application and use in libraries and information centers (Idiegbeyan-Ose and others, 2015). The evaluation of past LIS conferences themes were certainly relevant to the time they are organized to reinvent professional roles, update skills and competencies, share wealth of experiences, discuss and interact new ideas with professional seniors and colleagues.

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