Use and Contents of Catalogs and Other Databases, 1996–1997

There are many potential topics for research in this area. In addition to directions for research found in articles, many considerations were raised by papers presented at the 1997 International Conference on the Principles and Future of AACR in Toronto.

In their introduction to the special *Journal of the American Society of Information Science* issue devoted to current research in OPACs (July 1996), Beaulieu and Borgman say that it is time to reassess research in online public access systems in light of new developments in graphical user interfaces, client/server environments, network services, and digital libraries. The nature of the catalog is changing. The catalog is no longer a self-contained entity. It has records for and can provide links to sources not necessarily held within the library. What are the implications of this? What role should the catalog play?

More research is needed to determine the optimal interface for OPACS. What are the pros and cons of different interfaces? How can existing interfaces be improved? What is the state of the art in Web catalogs? Comparative studies, such as Wool’s 1996 study of bibliographic displays, are needed for Web catalogs, taking into account both design and effectiveness. In addition to comparative studies between Web catalogs, it might be worthwhile to compare the merits of non-Web and Web catalogs. Are we losing anything, especially in terms or searching, by moving to Web catalogs?

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There has been much discussion about bibliographic relationships. How can these best be represented in the catalog? Is MARC still the optimal way and if not, what is? Green says, "the relationality inherent in bibliographic data needs better and more widespread treatment than it now receives. Investigation into bibliographic database design should continue with special attention being given to the possible development of object-oriented bibliographic databases (1996)."

People are thinking about new ways to present bibliographic information to users. In his Toronto Conference paper on AACR2 and catalog production technology Fattahi (1997) says there is a need for a formulation of relevant principles for bibliographic display. One new idea for bibliographic display is presented by Carlyle (1997). She presents a summary display which combines filing rules with bibliographic relationships. This merits further explorations, as well as discussion of how the idea could be implemented, which she only touches on.

Another aspect of presenting information to users is the question of multiple versions, on which little has been written of late. In providing access to electronic serials, catalogers now have the option of mentioning the existence of an electronic serial on the record for its print counterpart rather than creating or using a separate record for the electronic serial. The implications of this for users could be studied, perhaps lending more insight into the benefits or drawbacks of one record or several for different formats of a work.

Use

Though user studies continue to be undertaken and written about, the literature about OPACs still calls for studies in user and searching behavior and in the human/computer interaction. How do people ask questions? Why does a user employ a particular search strategy? What types of relationships are important to them? Which is the best type of user study to get this information? In her paper on bibliographic relationships, presented at the Toronto conference, Vellucci (1997) identifies some problems with user studies, prompting the reader to think about how an effective study could be developed.
There are many new things to study from a user’s perspective. Accessing OPACs remotely, the value of having bibliographic records for electronic resources in the catalog, and more research on the occurrence and nature of multiple search sessions are just a few possibilities. In their literature review, Lundgren and Simpson (1997) discovered that little work into the user input regarding elements of the cataloging record has been done. In addition to new possibilities for user studies, several authors mention that within technical services, cataloging has very little replication research.

The IFLA Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR) model raises questions. What would be the effects on users of adopting it? Is it hopelessly complex or does it help people become aware of and make choices? Does it reflect the complexity of bibliographic searching (i.e., people working at different levels)?

Another question is how can the results of these user studies best be put to use? A large amount of valuable information has been gathered, but it is not being used by system designers. Borgman (1996) says that OPAC design does not incorporate sufficient understanding of searching behavior. Perhaps more could be written on the implications of these studies on system design.

Works Cited


Carlyle, Allyson. Fulfilling the Second Objective in the Online Catalog: Schemes for Organizing Author and Work Records into Usable Displays. *Library Resources & Technical Services* 41, no. 2 (Apr.): 79–100.


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