


Subject: Library and Information Science

Production of Courseware

-Content for Post Graduate Courses



Paper No: 04 Information Sources, Systems and Services

Module : 08 Biographical Sources: Use and Evaluation (Including LinkedIn, Facebook)



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Module 8: Biographical Sources: Use and Evaluation

I. Objectives

After studying this module, the learner will be able to:

- define Biographical Sources;
- identify types of biographical sources, both in print and online form;
- describe their utility; and
- Evaluate these sources.

II. Learning Outcome

After reading this module, you will be able to:

- Understand the meaning of biographical sources,
- Know about uses of biographical sources,
- Describe the references process for providing biographical information,
- Learn about various categories of biographical sources,
- Evaluate different types of biographical resources,
- Know how to evaluate sources of biographical information,
- Comprehend the process of Collection development and maintenance and,
- Explain the important of Facebook and LinkedIn as source of biographical information.

III. Module Structure

1. Introduction
2. Biographical Sources: Definition
3. Uses of Biographical Sources
4. Reference Process
5. Categories of Biographical Sources
 - 5.1. Biographical Dictionaries
 - 5.2. Encyclopaedia
 - 5.3. Almanacs
 - 5.4. Directories
 - 5.5. Yearbooks
 - 5.6. Handbooks and Manuals
 - 5.7. Periodical and Newspaper Indexes
6. Types of Biographical Sources
 - 6.1. Grouping by Period
 - 6.2. Grouping by Geographical Area
 - 6.3. Grouping by Subject
 - 6.4. Grouping by Gender

6.5. Sources for Biographies of Contemporary People

7. Evaluation of Biographical Sources
8. Collection Development and Maintenance
9. Facebook
10. LinkedIn
11. Summary
12. References

1. Introduction

In modern times, there has been phenomenal growth of literature in all fields of knowledge. Literature not only makes the foundation of a subject but it also records its achievements. According to McGraw- Hill Encyclopaedia of Science and Technology: “The literature is world-wide in origin, international in language, diverse in subject content, complex in form, uneven in quality and tremendous in amount”. Literature serves the information needs of various user segments. But the tremendous growth of literature does not allow them to have easy access to the required information. Thus, there crops up the need for some type of essential sources which would help in information retrieval. These sources of information, in various types and formats, help the librarians as well as the users, in search of information in response to an enquiry. These reference and information sources are categorized into (i) Documentary sources, and (ii) Non-Documentary sources. Documentary sources include the Primary, Secondary and Tertiary sources of information. The secondary sources, inter alia, include Biographical sources of information which describe about the lives of important persons.

2. Biographical Sources: Definition

Biography is “a study sharply defined by two definite events, birth and death”, said Edmund Gosse, an English poet and an author. But Stanley Olson, another writer, remarked that biography “will always remain an imprecise form: by means of some peculiar alchemy a jumble of facts and impressions is transformed into life, resurrecting the dead”. However, the Oxford English Dictionary defines a biography as the history of the lives of individual men.

According to Sir Sydney Lee, the editor of the Dictionary of National Biography (UK), “The aim of biography is the truthful transmission of personality”. Another simple definition of biography is that it is “the written life of a person”. But as Barrie MacDonald said, “the ideal biography should not be merely a narrative of the facts but should also give the flavour of personality, as well as the person’s achievements in relation to the time in which they lived and events in which they participated”. Biography, therefore, should be accurate, balanced and as objective as possible.

It is so much important that the life of a nation is told by the lives of its people.

There has always been demand from public, university and college students, and others for information about the lives of persons, living or dead, but prominent in one or the other fields of human activity, such as sports, arts, literature, history, politics, etc. Librarians receive enquiries about the biographical information of such personalities quite frequently as people want to know

the basic bio data of such celebrities. Such enquiries have resulted in the publication of a good number of sources of biographical information.

Some enquiries have been straight forward to be answered from some biographical dictionaries. Louis Shores has defined biographical dictionary as “essentially a directory of notable persons, usually arranged alphabetically by surnames, with biographical identifications that range from brief outline to extended narrative”.

In Harrods’ Glossary of Library and Information Science, a biographical dictionary is defined simply as “a collection of lives of people arranged in alphabetical order”.

3. Uses of Biographical Sources

In reference service, the primary uses of biographical sources, according to Katz, are as follows:

1. To locate information on a person, living or deceased.
2. To locate people who are famous in a given occupation, career or profession.
3. To locate supporting material about an individual.
4. To locate a possible name for the baby.

To these, Cassell and Hiremath add one more use of biographical sources as:

5. To determine that the user has the correct person if there is more than one person with the same or a similar name.

The information sought by the enquirer may be as brief as finding out the correct name of a person, or address, or date of birth, or date of death, or person’s nationality, etc. On the other hand, some enquirers may be interested in knowing the details of an individual’s life, career, and achievements.

3.1 Questions Assessment by Biographical Sources

Sources of Biographical information can answer the following questions asked by users:

- a. Full Names, pseudonym, etc. of an eminent person
- b. Date of Birth and Death
- c. Education and other Qualification
- d. Institutions served, period of service, Position held, etc.
- e. Achievement, invention, etc.
- f. Awards received, year, etc.
- g. Publication (books, Papers, etc.)
- h. Professional Affiliation
- i. Present Address, Telephone Numbers, e-mail, etc.
- j. Family members (wife/husband, sons, Daughter), etc.

4. Reference Process

The biographical reference process begins with the query and its type. There may be some simple factual type queries with minimum information, while others may be lengthy and require more extensive information. The reference librarian must possess sound knowledge of

biographical reference sources both in print and electronic versions. He must also have knowledge about various bibliographical guides to biography so as to reach at the right source. His knowledge and skills acquired over a period of time along with experience will help him in providing appropriate information or the right source to the enquirer.

The reference librarian must check the reliability and accuracy of any reference source before providing the information to the user. Although all these things he/she is likely to learn out of experience but should know about some of the typical characteristics of biographical sources, particularly of the biographical dictionaries. Some of these are mentioned as follows:

- i. The librarian is cautioned that despite being an international biographical dictionary, it may still be biased in including more names and/or providing more detailed biographical information of persons of the country of its origin.
- ii. A person may get more space in a national biographical dictionary than in an international source though his/her name appears in both the sources.
- iii. A subject biographical dictionary will, however, provide more information about the biographer than any other source.
- iv. Current biographical sources frequently brought out by the publisher will provide more detailed information about a person.
- v. For deceased persons more appropriate sources are encyclopaedias and national biographical dictionaries.

The librarian may take some initiative and compile biographical information of local persons famous in different fields. This can be done by developing a newspaper clipping collection which will serve as a handy source. He should also develop such information about those persons directly or indirectly related to the parent institution.

These points will help the librarian greatly in the biographical reference process.

5. Categories of Biographical Sources

The facts and other information about great persons' lives can be had from variety of sources as mentioned below:

These include almanacs, biographical dictionaries, directories, encyclopedia, literary handbooks, manuals, obituary columns, periodicals and periodical indexes, newspaper indexes, and the like. The biographical information can further be supplemented by full length biographies about an individual, history books also are a good source of information, and there are books of essays or criticism on a group of individuals.

Some important categories of biographical sources are mentioned below.

5.1 Biographical Dictionaries

Biographical dictionaries are considered as the most important and comprehensive source of biographical information that can answer possibly all questions about the lives of the great personalities. A biographical dictionary is solely devoted to biographical information considered significant about the people included in it. The advantage for the users of such source is that it is arranged in alphabetical order by the names of individuals.

5.2 Encyclopaedia

Besides general, subject encyclopaedia as well as useful sources of biographical information of notable persons who have contributed significantly in some area of knowledge. Encyclopaedia is also regarded as important source for the deceased persons.

5.3 Almanacs

Another important source of biographical information is the almanac, as many of them include biographical information sufficient to identify a person of importance.

5.4 Directories

Similarly, some directories such as based on occupation, or about institutions and their personnel, also provide brief biographical information which carries name, address, etc. of each individual covered in such a directory.

5.5 Yearbooks

In addition to providing current information, a yearbook also covers about some personalities famous in their respective fields.

5.6 Handbooks and Manuals

Not all but literary handbooks and manuals are a useful source of biographical information particularly for those persons who have been engaged in some writing work.

5.7 Periodical and Newspaper Indexes

Periodical and newspaper indexes also sometimes serve as useful source of biographical information. A careful search of these indexes may lead to current profiles of some personalities or even obituary columns about some people. There may be some indexes which cover more than one newspaper published in a region, or state, or nation.

The choice of any source of biographical information depends upon the type of questions asked by the users. They may ask data-type questions, or the detailed account of an individual.

6. Types of Biographical Sources

The various sources of biographical information may be grouped differently by using different characteristics as given below.

6.1 Grouping by Period

By using period as a characteristic, these sources can be grouped into the following major types:

- i. Current biographical information sources, and
- ii. Retrospective biographical information sources.

6.2 Grouping by Geographical Area

By using the geographical area covered in the sources, they may be grouped as follows:

- i. International or universal sources of biographical information,
- ii. National sources of biographical information,
- iii. Regional sources of biographical information, and
- iv. Local sources of biographical information.

6.3 Grouping by Subject

By using subject as characteristic, the biographical sources may be grouped as follows:

- i. Persons in sciences,
- ii. Persons in social sciences,
- iii. Persons in humanities, etc.

6.4 Grouping by Gender

By using gender as a characteristic, these sources may be grouped as follows:

- i. Those covering men in their respective fields of achievements, and
- ii. Those covering women in their respective fields of achievements.

It may, however, be stated that these biographical sources, particularly the biographical dictionaries, as available in libraries, invariably possess more than one characteristics. For example, international biographical sources may be current as well as retrospective. Similarly, they may be specialized in some subject, or may be only general ones, and so on.

Therefore, grouping of biographical sources of information broadly into Current or Contemporary, and Retrospective sources is more convenient.

6.5 Sources for Biographies of Contemporary People

These sources are also known as current biographical information sources. For brief biographical information about the famous contemporary people, the user can look into the “Who’s Who” series of publications.

6.5.1 International Sources

Some of these include the following sources:

1. International Who’ Who. London: Europe Publications, from 2000 by Rutledge an imprint of the UK publishing group Taylor and Francis, 1935 to date. Annual.

It includes brief biographical information on more than 25,000 noteworthy men and women from all professions across the globe. It is recognized as an authoritative source in its own right. A typical entry includes the person’s name, nationality, profession, date and place of birth, family

information, education, career summary, awards, publications, hobbies, address, phones, fax and e-mail address. An online version is also available which the user can search by name, nationality, profession, etc. It includes biographies of people who have died recently.

2. Current Biography. New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1940 to date. Monthly (except December).

It provides biographical information on people in the news, and is, according to Katz, “the single most popular essay-length” biographical source. Each issue provides profiles of 18 to 20 people from art, politics, literature, sports, film, and television, as well as obituaries of people previously profiled. The well-written biographical accounts in around 2,000 to 3,500 words in length, are useful not only for students but for adults as well. Each essay includes a photograph of the person and a bibliography of additional sources of information. Compiling the monthly issues, an annual volume of Current Biography is also published. Its online version is published as Current Biography Illustrated. The users can search the entire database from 1940 to the present by name, profession, place of origin, birth or death date, gender, etc.(http://www.hwwilsoninprint.com/bio_mag.php)

3. Current Biography International Yearbook. 2002 to date. Annual.

It has recently started as annual in 2002 focusing on people outside the United States making international news and history. This yearbook includes profiles of about 200 people from a wide range of professions. Each article includes the opinion of the person covered and observations of journalists and colleagues about him/her. Also includes photographs and a bibliography.

6.5.2 National Sources

1. India Who’s Who. New Delhi: INFA Publications, 1970 to date. Annual.

An important general biographical source from India covers about 5,000 living persons “prominent in all walks of life, including government, politics, civil service, business and finance, art, education, entertainment and sports, law, trade unions” (Preface). A typical entry provides information about name, present position, date of birth, family information, education, career, publications, address, telephone number, etc. Entries not confirmed for three consecutive years are dropped from the source. It includes an alphabetical index at the end.

2. Who’s Who in America. Chicago: Marquis, 1899 to date. Annual. 3 volumes.

A reliable source of long standing, it includes about 1, 28,000 names of prominent American men and women as well as a few foreigners with some influence in the United States. The user can search the printed volumes by name/s, which is arranged alphabetically. The third volume allows searching by geographical area and professional interests. Its online version has about 800,000 entries. (<http://www.marquiswhoswho.com/>)

- 3 Who’s who? London: A&C Black, 1849 to date. Annual.

One of the earliest British source of biographical information, it lists about 30,000 people of prominence, mostly British but a few American as well. A typical entry includes the name,

present position, date of birth, family details, education, career, publications, and address. It also includes an obituary section. It is updated through a questionnaire to the people listed in it.

4. Canadian Who's who. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1910 to date. Annual since 1980.

It is regarded as a reliable source that includes about 14,000 personalities from all walks of life, including business people, authors, performers, and teachers. It is updated annually by sending questionnaire to all those listed names. A typical entry includes the name, date and place of birth, address, family details, education, career information, membership, awards, or other achievements.

6.6 Retrospective Biographical Sources

6.6.1 International Sources

1. Chambers Biographical Dictionary. 6th ed. London: Chambers, 1997. 2008 p.

The sixth edition of this biographical dictionary marks its 100th birthday. As a standard biographical source, it is available in most English language libraries around the world. It includes 17,500 entries for both living and dead “people who have shaped, and continue to shape, the world in which we live” (Preface). The alphabetically arranged listing includes the nationality, occupation, year of birth/ death, brief career data, etc.

2. Webster's Biographical Dictionary. Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1995. 1170 p.

It is a compact one-volume biographical dictionary listing concise biographical information about 30,000 deceased persons from the beginning of history to the early 1990s. It includes the individual's primary contribution, nationality, birth and death dates, and pronunciation of name. In view of the breadth of coverage, it is the first choice of librarians as well as users.

6.6.2 National Sources

1. Dictionary of National Biography. Edited by S. P. Sen. Calcutta: Institute of Historical Studies, 1972-1974. 4 volumes, Three supplements.

This biographical work from India covers about 1,400 biographies of “people from all walks of life-politics, religions, and social reforms, education, journalism, literature, science, law, business and industry, etc.” With the help of 350 contributors and 32 research fellows, the main set provides information, ranging from 600 words to 2,400 words, about the tangible contribution made by these people to national life from the beginning of the 19th century to the achievement of independence.

It has been planned to bring out a supplement to each of the four volumes, but the Institute has so far published only three supplements edited by N. R. Ray and C. Palit. In this new format, it is called as Supplementary Dictionary of National Biography (SPND). In the SPND those living personalities were included who made significant contribution to any walk of Indian life.

2. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. London: Oxford University Press, 2004.

This new biographical dictionary is a major revision of the earlier Dictionary of National Biography which was compiled more than 100 years ago. The revision started in 1992 under the editorship of Oxford historian Collins Matthew, but after his death, another Oxford historian Brian Harrison took the job from 2000, and was replaced by yet another historian Lawrence Goldman as editor from October 2004. It is available both in print and online versions, it includes 55,000 new biographies and rewritten or revised biographies of the people included in the original set of DNB and its supplements. The new edition includes Britons from all walks of life that have made significant contribution to history and culture of the country. The online version is updated thrice in a year, and can be searched by name, place, dates and field of interest. (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/>)

3. American National Biography. Edited by John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. 24 Volumes.

This new source is a recent work published after a ten year long labour under the auspices of American Council of Learned Societies. It is regarded as a companion to the already well established Dictionary of American Biography. It is a completely new work that, according to Eric Bryant “resulted in the more expansive understanding of who is a notable American”. This biographical source contains about 17,500 lengthy biographies of deceased persons, and according to Cassell and Hiremath, includes more women, minorities, and people from other countries who have lived in the United States and made contributions to it than the original DAB. Its online version, updated quarterly, is available by subscription only. It can be searched by name, occupation, gender, birth and death dates, birth place, and ethnic heritage. In a way it is a successor to the DAB which for many decades has been the premier source of American biography. The DAB was published in 21 volumes with 10 supplements to the basic set and included about 19,000 biographies of people from different walks of American life. (<https://www.anb.org/>)

4 Dictionary of Canadian Biography. Edited by George Williams Brown. Toronto: Toronto University Press, volume 1-15, 1966-2005.

The project to compile Dictionary of Canadian Biography was initiated in 1959 with collaboration between University of Toronto and University Laval. In the introduction it states that those omitted are those “who have not set forth in what is now Canada, or at least approached its shores”. The 15 volumes published so far, arranged chronologically, include more than 8,400 biographies of individuals who died or whose last known activity fell between the years 1,000 and 1,930. Its volume 1 covers the years 1,000 to 1,700, with each biographical entry ranging between 400-1,200 words. The 15th volume is published in 2005, and they are preparing 16th volume for the years 1941-1980. With this the set will have more than 10,000 biographical sketches. The DCB is also available in French. The entire print version is made available online which also incorporates some entries for the period 1931-2000 including every Prime Minister who died within that period. (<http://www.biographi.ca/en/index.php>)

7. Evaluation of Biographical Sources

Increasing demand for biographical information of persons in different fields, who have achievements to their credit, has made various compilers, biographers and publishers to publish such information sources regularly. These information sources are therefore available in plenty

in the market. On the other hand, the shrinking library budgets are compelling librarians to cut on the purchase of reference sources. It is also important for the librarian to develop a thorough understanding of biographical sources to know about their accuracy and reliability. The following points are some of the criteria for evaluating the biographical reference works to be purchased in a library:

7.1 Authority

The development of authoritative biography is relatively a recent phenomenon, as in earlier times it used to be only a praise of famous persons. But now the biographical write-ups are more near to truth and are not painted in rosy colours only.

The authority of a biographical source, therefore, must be examined carefully. An important indication of authority is the reputation of the publisher, editors/compilers and sponsoring body of a biographical source. The reputation and qualifications of authors, subject experts, or contributors of various write-ups speak of the authority of the reference source. The publications by learned bodies, such as universities, etc. and societies are considered accurate, reliable and reputable. Similarly, there are some commercial publishers like the Gale Group, the H.W. Wilson Company, St. Martin's Press, etc. who publish authoritative biographical sources of information. Thus the possibility of biases creeping into the entries is brought to the minimum. But not all biographical sources are published by major publishing houses. And, even today there are publishers who for an entry in the so called "famous" biographical source ask for the purchase of a copy of such publication. Librarians need to beware of such publishers.

The librarian can also check the authority of a source whether it is listed in a standard guide to reference sources, such as that compiled by Balay, or Welford, or the current reviewing services available in literature.

7.2 Purpose and Scope

In biographical sources, scope of the work is particularly important. The purpose and scope of a biographical reference source is generally indicated in the title and preface. The librarian can make out whether the work is intended to be general, international, national or specialized in coverage and scope. It may also be determined whether the work is contemporary, describing the lives of people who are alive today, or retrospective, describing the lives of well-known persons of the past, or comprehensive including the people from many parts of the world, or selective in coverage listing people only from a region or a country.

7.3 Selection Policy

The criteria used for selection of biographies are important with current biographical sources. This is often explained in the preface or introduction to the biographical source. The process of selection of entries varies with publisher or with the editor/s, depending upon the scope of the source. All the editors of reputable sources and/or publishers establish some objective guidelines for inclusion of a name. Some include people purely on merit, while some include arbitrarily on account of official position such as a member of legislature, such as state assembly or parliament of a country, a governor, a head of state, a head of government, an army general, a Nobel Prize

winner, etc. However, there are some self-important publishers who make selection of persons even for payment, thereby compromising with the quality of the work.

Some biographical sources include only the dead persons, that too only a few. In subject biographical sources, some editors and/or publishers include all the members of a profession, while others cover persons with some distinction.

7.4 Audience/Readership

Most of the biographical sources are meant for adults, further divided by their areas of interests, level of education, etc. Some works may also be for the use of students only. But no watertight compartmentalization is possible because it depends upon the purpose and scope of the work.

7.5 Length of Entry/Treatment

The purpose and scope of a biographical source decide about the length of entry on a person. It depends upon the purpose if the information has to be factual or evaluative. If it is only who's who data, it occupies relatively less space, but if it's presented in essay form, it makes the entry long. The style of presentation of information is also equally important which makes the treatment discursive or scholarly. Therefore, the libraries must have resources with short as well as long biographies.

7.6 Method of Compilation

Publishers and editors of biographical sources use different methods of compilation. The use of questionnaire method of collecting data from persons to be included is quite common. The biographies themselves complete the questionnaire data and later correct their own entries. This method results in generally more accurate and comprehensive information. Another method of compilation followed is where the publishers and/or editors themselves research the material from published and unpublished sources. However, MacDonald observed that both methods have advantages and disadvantages.

7.7 Frequency of Publication

For contemporary or current sources an important consideration is their frequency of publication. It is, therefore, important to determine how up-to-date the information is in the biographical source. Accordingly, the librarian must know whether a current biographical source is annual, biennial or irregular. Many biographical sources are updated on annual basis. In case the source is irregular, and claims to be a new edition, the librarian must check the new edition against the previous edition. Similarly, if the source is retrospective it needs to be checked whether it has regular supplements to update it. However, if the source is online, it is expected to be updated more regularly.

7.8 Arrangement

Is the arrangement logical?

The usual approach followed in biographical dictionaries is to arrange entries alphabetically by surname. However, as an alternative, some sources may be arranged according to subject approach, depending upon the areas of interest, while some others by chronological order determined by birth dates, periods, etc. However, the usefulness of the arrangement, and its ease of use by the users may be checked by the librarian.

7.9 Format

The presentation of entries in a biographical source should be clear and in an easy-to-use format. The style of presentation, though, may vary from the quick reference sketches as in a “Who’s Who”, or outline biographies in a source, or to the lengthy scholarly essays, as in a national biographical dictionary, like Dictionary of National Biography (India). In view of the heavy use of biographical sources, the quality of paper, printing as well as binding is also equally important.

7.10 Online Version

It is important for the librarian to know whether an online version or CD-ROM version of the source under consideration is available or not. The powerful search engine in online version helps quickly to find out the needed biographical information. It is also easy to update the material speedily.

7.11 Indexes

The librarian needs to check whether the biographical work is adequately indexed and furnished with sufficient cross references. Cross references are important for variant forms of names as well as when finding information about persons connected with famous figures.

Although, biographical dictionaries in alphabetical sequence are self –indexing they may be equipped with classified indexes. On the other hand, classified or chronologically arranged works must have alphabetical indexes.

7.12 Special Features

The librarian should find out if the biographical source has some distinctive features because these make it a unique source. Some special features such as bibliographies, portraits, photographs, etc. will certainly enhance the value of the source. It is believed that biographical sources with photographs are extremely useful since many users are interested in knowing what the person looks or looked like. Further efforts may be made to find out any other features special to the biographical source. Inclusion of a bibliography of other sources of information about the persons included in a biographical source will help the user in further research on a person.

7.13 Comparison with Similar Sources

The librarian, after evaluating a biographical source by the above mentioned criteria, can make comparison with similar sources for authority, accuracy, duplication of material, ease of use, etc. in order to assess the relative value of the comparable sources.

7.14 Conclusion

The conclusion should include the overall judgement about the biographical source under evaluation. Indication should be made whether the source is suitable for a library or not. If the answer is in affirmative, indicate the kind of library which will greatly benefit from such a source.

8. Collection Development and Maintenance

The librarian has to prepare thoroughly for various biographical enquiries, as observed by MacDonald, by considering book selection, by updating and correction of reference books, by compilation of user guides, and general good management and maintenance of the collection. He believes that all these things are as essential as research skills. Ranganathan also believed strongly in preparation and assimilation of the content of the answers and other ideas used in providing answers to the users.

As biographical reference sources are available in both in print and electronic versions, an important part of source selection and management is considering the relative merits of print copy with online, CD-ROM, etc.

Librarian needs to ensure prompt acquisition of the latest editions of current works, through standing orders and direct contact with the publishers.

From time to time the reviewing journals also review various types of reference materials including the biographical sources of information. The librarian needs to keep in touch, continuously scan them and find out new biographical resources reviewed in such journals as Library Journal, Booklist, Choice, and American Reference Book Annual. Standard biographical sources are discussed in Guide to Reference Books, edited by Robert Balay and in Guide to Reference Materials, by A. J. Welford. The ARBA Guide to Biographical Resources 1986-1997 makes a listing of the recent biographical resources including the international sources arranged by country, and sources of biographies in professional fields organized by profession for the convenience of the users.

9. Facebook

In the present times of Internet environment, a popular and new word has come into our vocabulary in the first decade of the 21st century. This word is "Facebook". This is the most popular and free social networking website on the Internet.

9.1 Background

It was launched in February 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg and his computer science classmate friends. It started with Harvard University students extending the social networking site to many more colleges and universities within three months. Once it was registered in August 2005, the network opened up, and within months anyone with a valid institutional email address from all

over 30,000 organizations across the world were eligible for membership, including high school students, government employees and the corporate community.

Facebook was expanded once again in September 2006, and anyone with a valid email address could sign up and populate their profile with their statistics, etc. Despite being a closed network, it had an astonishing growth rate. But it was further opened up and Zuckerberg announced that Facebook was to become the “social operating system for the Internet”, allowing the users to integrate all of their activities into their single Facebook profile.

The most popular networking component of Facebook is the “Wall” which is essentially a virtual bulletin board. Messages left on a member’s “Wall” can be text, video or photos.

9.2 Membership

It is estimated that there are close to getting one billion people on Facebook, and as it is free, anyone, above 13 years with a valid email address, can sign up for it. Facebook has now been made available through mobile phones, PDAs, iPods and other mp3 devices. It is available in 37 languages in about 200 countries and geographical areas.

Facebook as a social network does benefit common people. Students, while writing their assignments on computer can seek advice from their friends and expert groups online. It is useful to business people as Facebook affords a good platform for marketing the product globally immediately. So there are prime prospects for business-to-business companies.

9.3 Features

Facebook allows users to create profiles, upload photos and videos, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues. Some of its features include the following:

1. **Groups:** It allows members who have common interests to find each other and interact.
2. **Events:** It allows members to publicize an event, invite guests, and track who plans to attend.
3. **Market place:** It allows members to post, read and respond to classified ads.
4. **Pages:** It allows members to create and promote a public page built around a specific topic.
5. **Presence Technology:** It allows members to see which contacts are online and chat.

9.4 Biographical Source

Although is a social networking site, with so many features, Facebook also serves as a useful source of biographical information. People can create their profile and update profile’s information from time to time. Others can come to learn about them from this information.

Like minded friends can easily be found out through common interest activities. There are also professional as well as interest groups which people can join and share their activities and interests. The Home page will display important information about people, and to the left, a list of events, messages, photos, and other things that attracts their attention. A list of friends available online is also available to whom one can chat with.

As profiles of people, both ordinary and famous, are updated frequently, the librarian can find out latest information about them and provide to the enquirers.

10. LinkedIn

10.1 Background

LinkedIn was founded by Reid Hoffman in December 2002, and was launched in May 2003. It is a social networking site for people in professional occupations. It was designed specifically for business community.

The goal of this site is to allow registered members to establish and document networks of people they know and trust professionally.

10.2 Membership

Its membership has been increasing at a very fast rate since its inception. As of 2013, LinkedIn has more than 259 million members in over 200 countries and territories. Its membership grows by approximately two new members every two seconds. With 20 million users, India has the fastest growing network of users as of 2013.

10.3 Features

One purpose of the site is to allow registered users to maintain a list of contact details of people with whom they have some level of relationship, called Connections. Unlike other free social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter, LinkedIn requires connections to have a pre-existing relationship. Users can invite anyone to become a connection.

- i. A contact network is built up consisting of their connections, the connections of each of their connections (termed second-degree connections) and also the connections of second-degree connections (termed third-degree connections). This can be used to gain an introduction to someone a person wishes to know through a mutual contact.
- ii. It can be used to find jobs, people and business opportunities recommended by someone in one's contact network.
- iii. Employers can list jobs and search for potential candidates.
- iv. Users can post their own photos and view photos of others to aid in identification.
- v. Users can see who has visited their profile page.

10.4 Applications

LinkedIn enabled an "application platform" that allows other online services to be embedded within a member's profile page. It also allowed, initially, members to display books they are reading. It also allowed businesses to list products and services on company profile pages. A LinkedIn member's profile page emphasizes employment history and education, and has professional network news feeds.

10.5 Groups

LinkedIn supports the formation of interest groups, majority of which are employment related, although a very wide range of topics are covered mainly around professional and career issues, and there are currently many groups for both academic and corporate alumni. Groups support a limited form of discussion area, and keep their member informed through emails with updates to the group, including most talked about discussions within one's circles.

10.6 Biographical Source

LinkedIn can also serve as a useful source of biographical information about people, particularly those associated with business activities. It has been praised for its usefulness in fostering business relationships, and has been advantageous, according to Forbes, to business professionals.

Its feature of supporting interest groups has helped in bringing together people from different walks of life having similar interests. It encourages group discussions regarding academic interests as well. Such information about people helps the librarian to search for the updated profiles regarding their education, employment, and other activities, collect this data, and inform the enquires accordingly. Not only that but through connections feature, librarian as well inquisitive users can go for further research in the lives and interests of people.

Thus, the two powerful social networking sites, viz., Facebook and LinkedIn, are quite useful in knowing fully about the various interests of famous and other people around the world. These, along with some other sites have been monopolizing the buzz in the social media. These are full of potential for the world to see in the times to come.

11. Summary

Biographical sources of information, published and made available in large numbers are regarded as an important segment in reference collection of an active library. These sources have a number of uses such as finding some useful information on a famous person in a given field. These require a constant study on the bases of their categories and types such as their grouping by period, subject, geographical area, gender, general or universal, etc. Describes the reference process the librarian needs to adopt in answering different biographical questions from the enquirer. It briefly describes some of the important current and retrospective sources popular both at the international and national levels. The module further discusses in detail the check points the librarian has to consider while evaluating these sources. Discusses about the new but quite popular social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn and their usefulness as a source of biographical information. These have made their space among the users of all age groups around the globe in recent times and have been useful to them on various counts. The social networking sites, i.e., Facebook and LinkedIn though contain profiles of people, but may or may not be reliable as other standard biographical sources.

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