PARLIAMENTARY INFORMATION SOURCES, SYSTEMS AND SERVICES IN SOUTH AFRICA AND THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARY LIBRARIES IN INFORMATION PROVISION

By

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Submitted in fulfilment of the academic requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Library and Information Science, Faculty of Arts, University of Zululand, South Africa.
DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the content of this thesis unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, is my original work. It has not been submitted to any other university for a similar or any other degree.

Signed:………………………………

Promoter: Professor Dennis. N. Ocholla( PhD)

Signed:
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my husband Jako, and children Petri and Jako for their unwavering support during the time it took to complete the study. Also to my parents, Peter and Ena Bolink for their example and support throughout the years.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- God Almighty who gave me the strength to cope with this project
- My supervisor, Prof. D.N. Ocholla for his support, dedication, encouragement and good advice. Without him this would not have been possible
- My husband and children who were always supportive. Thank you also for your support with the data analysis
- My parents and in-laws who always encouraged me
- Sue Butler for the editing.

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My sincerest thanks to my assistant Miss Alvina Khubeka who was always willing to try again and again to gain access to the Parliamentarians. Without her, the study done at the Library of Parliament would not have been possible.
ABSTRACT

Modern legislative functions demand that legislator’s access, exploit and use information for effective decision making on a regular basis. It is increasingly assumed that legislative functions in a democratic country are becoming more complex as the electorate’s political consciousness and knowledge of their rights and responsibilities is dramatically changing and transforming. During parliamentary sessions information is used for a variety of purposes. These include: preparation for speeches, participation in parliamentary debates, maintenance of formal and informal conversation with colleagues and constituents about matters of mutual concern, and to be able to contribute towards the legislative processes. It is also noted that during recess periods information is needed to communicate with constituents on a variety of issues.

Parliamentary libraries are formal institutions whose specific functions are to provide information services to parliamentarians. Currently they provide a variety of services to parliamentarians such as searching and retrieval of information on request, pro-active information packages on specific topics, research assistance and photo-copying services. In some parliamentary libraries searching facilities to conduct electronic searches are part of the services rendered. Based on their close proximity to the parliament environment, it could be assumed that the libraries would be heavily utilised by the parliamentarians. Unfortunately, this is not always the case.

The aim of the study was to determine the extent to which various information sources, services and systems are used by parliamentarians to access information. The role of parliamentary libraries within the parliamentary information provision sector was also investigated. Similarly, the efficiency of these services in satisfying the information needs of their clientele was also to be established. Specific attention was given to the utilization of electronic information sources, especially the Internet. It was assumed that
unsatisfactory educational background of the majority of the current parliamentarians impedes their ability to access information sources.

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods that involved largely surveys by use of questionnaires were used. Informal interviews and observation were also used to collect data for the study. Data was collected from the parliamentarians, both on a national and a provincial level, as well as from the parliamentary librarians. Two questionnaires were designed, one for the parliamentarians and a separate one for the librarians. Informal interviews with staff from the Library of Parliament, Cape Town were held to supplement information gained from the questionnaire. An observation schedule was used to capture information relating to the conditions at the Library of Parliament, Cape Town.

The questionnaire for the parliamentarians was distributed to all parliamentarians on address lists provided by the parliaments, or those available on the Internet. Seven hundred and sixty questionnaires were mailed to parliamentarians and 167 were returned, giving a return rate of 23%. It was recognized that a low response rate is common on related studies reported in the literature. The low response rate, in our view, did not obscure the validity of the results obtained from the study. The questionnaire for the Parliamentary Libraries was mailed to all ten of the parliamentary libraries and a 100% response rate was obtained.

The major findings of the study were that South African parliamentarians indeed had the same incessant need for information as their counterparts in other countries. A variety of information needs were expressed, many of which could be directly related to the portfolio or committee to which the parliamentarian was attached. Three major information needs however emerged i.e. the need for information on governance, politics and provincial issues, as well as safety and security. It was found that the respondents used various information sources, services and systems to satisfy their information needs. The strongest preferences were expressed for printed materials; however utilization of electronic sources were strongly supported. In respect of using electronic sources a
number of problems were highlighted by the respondents. Both formal and informal information services and systems were utilized a lot less than anticipated. However, a close relationship was found between the level of education of the parliamentarian and the variety of sources used. For example, the higher the educational levels attained the wider the variety of sources used. It was interesting to note that only a small discrepancy was found between the preference to receive information in a printed or an electronic format. The oral medium, which is a prevalent medium within the African continent, was the least preferred.

The respondents notably preferred to look for the information themselves, but a large group also used an intermediary close to them, i.e. their Personal Assistants to do their information searches for them. Information sources utilized were mainly sources personally available to the parliamentarian. A large group also used their computers to search for information. Parliamentary libraries, even though they provide a variety of traditional and pro-active information services were not utilized optimally. This trend was reiterated by some of the librarians who mentioned that they were severely under-utilized even during parliamentary sessions.

With the exception of the Library of Parliament, Cape Town, parliamentary libraries at provincial level are new developments, and as thus still busy establishing themselves as role-players in the information provision sector. The success of their activities varies from library to library, from being well-utilized units, to being severely-underutilized. Problems identified in this regard are the marketing of services and products and user-education. The majority of the libraries are moving progressively towards the utilization and the provision of electronic information sources for parliamentarians.

Recommendations included an aggressive and effective marketing strategy to keep parliamentarians informed on the latest available products and services. In this respect, the electronic medium should be used optimally, either through the Intranet or the Internet. Innovative ways and means of user education should also be investigated.
It is also recommended that the parliamentary Libraries develop a niche area for themselves in respect of the provision of electronic information services. Parliamentarians do not have the time, nor the expertise, to spend on doing fruitless searches. Particular attention should be given to the role of the Personal Assistant in the information seeking. Similarly, parliamentarians need to be educated about the advantages of using a skilled information-seeking intermediary instead of an unskilled person. Attention should be given to educating parliamentarians about the various information sources available to them, both within the parliamentary libraries, as well as in the country. Once again the parliamentary libraries could see this as a niche area for service delivery.
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<tr>
<td>ANC</td>
<td>African National Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>AUSAID</td>
<td>Australian Government overseas aid programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>CD-ROM</td>
<td>Compact Disc Read Only Memory</td>
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<td>COSATU</td>
<td>Congress of South African Trade Unions</td>
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<td>CPA</td>
<td>Certified Public Accountants</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSIR</td>
<td>Council for Science and Industrial Research</td>
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<td>DA</td>
<td>Democratic Alliance</td>
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<tr>
<td>DOC</td>
<td>Directory of Contacts</td>
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<tr>
<td>DVD/CD</td>
<td>Digital Versatile Disc/Compact Disc</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food Agricultural Organisation</td>
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<td>GBN</td>
<td>Global Business Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>GCIS</td>
<td>Government Communication Information System</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>Human Immune Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome</td>
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<tr>
<td>HRSC</td>
<td>Human Sciences Research Council</td>
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<td>IDASA</td>
<td>Institute for Democracy in South Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>IEC</td>
<td>Independent Electoral Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>IFP</td>
<td>Inkhata Freedom Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>IOL</td>
<td>Independent Newspaper Online</td>
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<tr>
<td>LIS</td>
<td>Library and Information Science</td>
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<tr>
<td>KPMG</td>
<td>Klynveld, Peat, Marwick and Goerdeler</td>
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<tr>
<td>MEC</td>
<td>Member of the Executive Committees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAARS</td>
<td>National Automated Archival Retrieval System</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAMAC</td>
<td>National Coordinating Office for Manufacturing Advisory</td>
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Centres

NASA  National Archives of South Africa
NCOP  The National Council of Provinces
NEDLAC  National Economic Development and Labour Council
NFVSA  National Film, Video and Sound Archive
NGO  Non Governmental Organisation
NISC  National Information Services Corporation
NLSA  National Library of South Africa
NNP  The New National Party
OAU  Organisation of African Unity
PASA  Publishers Association of South Africa
PIT  Public Internet Terminal
PMG  Parliamentary Monitoring Group
SA Media  South African Media
SABINET  South African Bibliographic Information Network
SAGD  South African Government Directory
SAIRR  South African Institute of Race Relations
SAIS  South African Interlending Scheme
SANDC  South African National Defence Council
SWOT  Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
TWAS  Third World Academy of Sciences
UN  United Nations
WTO  World Trade Organisation
GLOSSARY

Library: an organized collection of items of various formats (books, journals, videos, CD-ROMSs, etc.) along with services required to make them available to a given user group or groups (Tennant 1999).

Electronic library: a library consisting of electronic materials and services (Tennant 1999). It includes the full range of optical, magnetic and digital technologies used to disseminate printed information (Demas 1994). An electronic library differs from a digital library in the sense that it contains materials originally typed in on the computer.

Digital library: a library consisting of digital materials, and services (Tennant 1999). Materials are digitised by optically scanning in existing sources. Digital libraries can, but do not have to be, from one geographic domain. It can consist of related sources linked together.

Digital material: items stored, processed and transferred via digital devices and networks (Tennant 1999).

Digital information services: services that are delivered digitally over computer networks (De Kock 1998). Information available in digital form covers a wide range of topics and the services can provide the data as text, still and moving graphics, sound and conversations.

Virtual libraries: a library that does not exist “in real life” (Tennant 1999). It can also be seen as a library depending upon virtual reality for its existence (Barker in Olên 2000) De Kock (1998:32) also describes it as “an international system of electronic networks providing access to all digital networks.” Virtual libraries will allow the user immersion
into the text enabling them to use their sense in the process of utilising the information. To derive maximum benefit from this experience it is possible that the user will have to use specifically designed gear or clothing, for example gloves or helmets.

**Parliament:** The word is derived from two sources, i.e. the Latin word ‘parliamentum’, and the French word ‘parler’ meaning ‘talk’ (Ilbert 1920; Laundy 1989). The basis of a true democracy is to allow every citizen the opportunity to have their voices heard. Since it is not practically possible for everyone to speak their minds personally, they elect representatives who will make their voices heard within the highest echelons of power in a country.