



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Importance of the Internet in the Libraries and Information Professionals

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ABSTRACT

The literature on the Internet and library and information services has emerged since 1990 and is rich in both variety and quantity. Yet little effort has been made to organize this literature. This work reviews and analyzes the literature and provides a comprehensive annotated bibliography containing 446 items on the Internet and library and information services. The selected items are classified into various topical categories. The author observes that the literature is descriptive and argues that more analytical research needs to be done in the future. It also emphasizes the challenging role of librarians and information professionals in the present internet era. Today the internet has revolutionized the traditional library activities viz document acquisition, technical processing, reference service, resource sharing, document delivery, etc. The paper also emphasizes the crucial role of librarians and information professionals in designing and maintaining libraries' web page website leading to increase in library efficiency.

Key words : Internet, professional, traditional

INTRODUCTION

Introduction Information and communication technology (ICT) has become an indispensable tool in reducing world poverty. ICT provides developing nations with an unprecedented opportunity to meet vital development goals, such as poverty reduction, basic healthcare, education and research, far more effectively than before. The unequal access to technology between groups due to differences in demography, economic status, and locations, has been suggested to affect worldwide globalization through Internet connectivity (Kamssu, 2004; UNDP, 2000). It has become a challenge for librarians to prove the importance of libraries in the age of easy access to the Internet. To meet this challenge, libraries take the initiative to use the Internet in their public services and internal operations, and make the Internet an integral part of library's infrastructure.

One of the most significant achievements in the information and communication sector is the introduction of advanced communication network i.e., the Internet, the technology connecting a computer with millions of computers in the network. The internet today has become one of the most important modes of communication and its services are being exploited by people in every walk of life such as business, education, defence, medicine, etc. In the field of library and information science, the Internet has become one of the most popular

and talked about subject. In fact the library profession is one that has been most intensity affected by the challenges of internet and the World Wide Web (WWW). The shift from collection management to information management, from ownership to access, and the change in nature, boundaries and structure of information all call for a change in mind set of library professionals.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Melchionda (2007) stated that the development of the Internet cast a profound impact on the field of library and information science. It has involved processes, functions, services, media and other information resources of the library as a whole.

Islam (2009) opined that the application of information technology (IT) in libraries is not a sudden movement, but rather a product of continual development of telecommunications and computer technologies. The exact date of IT applications in libraries is not only unclear but also hard to trace, since no authentic source on the subject is available in LIS literature. It can be said that the use of the Internet in libraries began in the 1970's. However, the use of the Internet to support library functions was initially confined to online searching of databases in large systems such as OCLC and RLIN for reference and interlibrary loan services.

Hundie (2012) stated that as information providers, libraries of all types, and documentation and information centers should be the main beneficiaries of the enormous amount of Internet resources that can be used to noticeably enhance the quality of their services and at the same time to save time and money.

SERVICES

Libraries are using the Internet to support their fundamental functions and services: acquisition, circulation, reference, classification, cataloguing and providing access to the Internet as an independent service. Bertot, McClure and Jaeger (2008) examined the ways in which public libraries' Internet access seemed to have direct impacts on their communities. These areas include technology training and assistance, e-government service delivery, education resources, services for job seekers, and disaster/emergency roles and services, among others.

Jones (2005) observed that reference services in academic libraries traditionally included professional assistance with general reference questions, information-gathering, development of research strategies, resource selection, and mediated database searching. However, the distance reference services, rather than in a face-to-face transaction, called for more "innovative approaches" with focus on the Internet services.

Marry (2012) believed that electronic reference services have rapidly replaced the traditional face-to-face or telephone reference service. Libraries and librarians were perceived to embody in connection with Internet services: lifelong learning, free access to information, literacy, intellectual freedom, privacy, and services to underserved groups. They were also seen as binding society together, providing a public space and protecting children. These values were viewed as rooted in the past functions of libraries and attitude of librarians, as well as being applicable in the age of the Internet (Luyt, 2007).

NEED OF LIBRARY PROFESSIONALS IN THE INTERNET ERA

Librarians acting as custodians of information have gone through a dramatic change and from providing document to their clientele have switched to be information providers. The role of librarian as information organizer and a navigator has gained importance in the internet era. The library professionals need to focus and seize new opportunities and demonstrate how the tools of internet can be gainfully harnessed for improving library services. internet can be viewed as the biggest library in the world in which information is not properly structured and organized, there are no standardized rules of classification or access. Recent/current literature shows that the best search engines on the internet allows access to only approximately 30% of the information corresponding to sea& This underlines the inadequate methods used to access information despite the best available search engines.' Moreover, there is no guarantee that same query expressed in the same language using various search engines will give same results. The information on the internet is stored in an unstructured way with innumerable databases, each having its own searching interface, also the volatile nature of .sites, lack of information on these sites will come in the way of accessing the Internet.' Taking into account the current and foreseeable increase in the number of documents or the web sites on the Internet, these issues will become the crucial problems in access to information It is therefore,

important to seek a definition of catalogue, indexes and thesauri and help of library professional which would provide homogenous access to information and data. Internet has many other drawbacks like lack of comprehensiveness, coverage, the inability to distinguish between popular material and research work, lack of controlled vocabulary and also a casual approach of the web page designer often makes the web databases more difficult to search. In addition to this, according to a latest report, a search engine covers only 15% of the total database available on the internet,' Librarians can play a greater role in identification, listing, and classifying information sources and providing systematic approach to accessing the required information. This way they can take rightful place as human agent along side the search engine in searching the Internet. In the due course of time the librarians will have to develop new indexing methods and evaluation techniques to tap information from the internet and also establish the classification modes in a open way to allow for those addition of near categories of document that may differ from original priorities. Hence, the uncertainties raised by some people that internet may be a threat to library and library science profession is no longer true.

WHAT IS INTERNET

The term internet has been coined from a concept inter-networking trite denotes interaction between networking of computers. It is an umbrella under which different networks, small and big, freely exchange information across the globe. Internet, thus, can broadly be defined as world wide network of computers communicating via an agreed upon protocol (rules for exchange of information). It provides access to the most diversified source of information hosted by individuals and various organization world wide on a vast network of servers. Internet gives on to the world web, the interconnections to thousands of servers created by various organizations, commercial establishments, industrial units, academic establishments, various groups, individuals. The web pages loaded on various servers provide variety of information in the form of text, graphics, animation, multimedia, etc. either free of cost or for a modest fee. The main characteristic of Internet and the WWW are: (a) Users across the world can connect or access information irrespective of time and space factor. (b) Point to point communication, rather than one to many broadcast communication. (c) Provides access to large number of databases. (d) The facility of hyper linking from one server to another by clicking on a highlighted word which enables the user to directly switch to another data source, on the other side of the world. (e) Instant and interactive community creation on a global base. The internet therefore, is a vast electronic library made up of millions of pages of information stored in hundreds of thousands of linked computers a the globe. The Web has brought to the desk top, not only metadata sources like bibliographic databases and table of contents, but also full text of journals, preprints, technical reports, patents, courseware, etc.

IMPORTANCE OF INTERNET TO LIBRARIES

Internet has become a part of library environment today. It has added a great value to the library and information services. According to Gryez, "with the expansion of internet a new class of electronic document has emerged, it was at once promising and attractive for its obvious advantage of speed and transmissibility and profoundly elusive and confounding to the library community because of its intangibility and malleability. Within the last ten years, the Internet has become global and ubiquitous. It reaches in hundreds of countries of all continents and is featured daily in the business sections of all major news papers.

Internet is playing an important role in transforming the library system and the way in which we view the library resources and the library services. With the help of web based library services in developed countries, users are attended round the clock. Internet provides links to various library sites, specializing in almost every topic and they can be accessed directly from any part of the world. As the libraries are going web based more and more libraries' are becoming accessible via libraries' web pages. With an internet connection, a student in any university of India can browse through the documents in computers of US National libraries or else where in the globe. The Net therefore, provides instant access to billions of information sources which include books, reports, journals, video films, sound recording and wide variety of other sources. The library and information professionals have a vital role to play in organizing the information and bridging the information gap. Internet has created some of the following new and different service operations: (a) By designing clearly organized, easily accessible and well published library web sites librarians can extend the traditional librarianship to the use of information technology and seize a leadership role in both fields. (b) The libraries

can initiate Bulletin Board Service which gives complete information regarding services, products, and various events organized by them.

Ready reference service can be provided with greater speed and in much shorter time. (d) Books and journals can be ordered online, technical processing of the documents too can be done without much effort. (e) E-mail services can be used for delivering information to the users and communicating with the fellow information professionals. (f) E- SDI services can be used for delivering information to the users. (g) Access to various databases and OPAC of other libraries located in remote areas can be provided.

ROLE OF INTERNET IN DISCHARGING LIBRARY FUNCTIONS

Internet is playing an important role in discharging the functions of libraries. It is changing the ways, the librarians organize, manage and disseminate information. With more and more documents getting punished electronically and Internet resources growing at 18% a month, libraries of 21st century will have to shift towards electronic means of acquiring, processing and disseminating information. Today all sorts of library services from membership registration to document delivery can be offered through the Internet. The trend is quite evident from the web sites of American Business School Libraries that are quite advanced in library and information services arena

DESIGNING AND MAINTAINING LIBRARY WEB SITE

Libraries can play an important role in disseminating information by creating their web site. Through their sites they can inform about various services, products, events, and courses offered by them. For academic librarians the most important users includes the faculty, students and other librarians. However, depending on the type of library the primary audience may vary. The most important point for libraries in designing a web site is to consider primary audience and provide information relevant to their needs not readily available elsewhere. Since most information is generally available in other sites, the librarians role get emphasized in organizing the information in their web pages by providing links utility as they save time over the print volume and money over the online databases. In essence, combining information or links to other information in ways not previously done can add value to the information and consequently to the library web site. To provide easy access to the libraries' websites the librarians need to heed on some of the following basic rules.

INTERACTIVE SITES

Librarians should also provide mechanisms for communicating with their users and moving them between their web pages, generally when individuals read books they often have question such as when it was written how to contact the authors, whether new editions are forthcoming or where other similar books are located. This can be done by providing the hypertext links. The librarians can also monitor the usage of their server and particular files by placing a Counter software in the home page. Counter software monitors traffic on the server, and provides periodic statistical reports summarizing which file are being accessed most and redefine their web page to meet the readers needs and strategically place administrative links on highly used pages. Similarly the audience response and statistical feedback enable the librarians to create new titles and include statements like date of modifications and like 'What's New' and date of last modified hypertext links. Date last modified gives credibility to the web files. To keep the audience aware of new material, librarians may include links to those materials at the top of the home page and other heavily used pages. This provides greater access to new materials and allow promotion of continued growth of web sites. Once the links are placed, the library professionals should also consider the aesthetic appearance of the web pages since the color, text, hypertext links and background, etc. generally influence the use of the web site. Finally the library professionals need to effectively publicize their web site through forums to which the users pay particular attention. Newsletter and electronic discussion groups may be used for this purpose. For publicizing the web site to diverse audience users, librarians can register their web sites URL with major search engines like Yahoo, Lycos, etc. and providing brief descriptions of their contents.

CONCLUSION

The internet has thus integrated nearly all aspects of the library activities, the librarians can now use the Internet for exploiting the catalogue of the other institutions, ordering books and journals online, participate in ILL, use e-mail, and discuss through list serves, support reference service through remote databases and most important of all establish library/home pages to project their collection and services on the site. The scope is only limited to the imagination of library professionals. All that is required by the today's professionals is a through understanding of change in concept of librarianship and psychological willingness to look upon the internet and the WWW as an opportunity and respond to the challenges of information resource management and information infrastructure development for harnessing the benefit of the much talked about internet technology in context of the libraries.

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