STATUS OF LIBRARIES IN THE INTERNET AGE

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ABSTRACT

Present paper deals with the status of libraries as information sources, its diminishing visits and possible constraints which generates such situations. Literature search method has been applied to derive some common conclusions and variations. It is found that libraries are important till yet for the users of primary information. Its visits are found significantly decreasing except academic libraries. Libraries are less used than homes and working places for accessing the information. Search engines are found constricting the use of libraries. The study is purely based on literature search and tries to generalize the findings of studies in different prospects and therefore, it is important for sketching common trends in library use.


INTRODUCTION

Libraries are the preserver of knowledge sources and are older than printing technologies. People visited libraries to access the information. Role of libraries changed after the introduction of online resources which relieves users to be present physically in the library. Visits to the libraries and its importance came under scanners of studies due to alarming experiences of the librarians and other library science professionals on the issues of library visits and its role as information sources. The present study is an attempt to sketch some trends to generalize the findings and observing its variations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Atlas et al. pointed out that an increase in the use of electronics has minimized the number and variety of mechanical barriers to retrieve the information-minimizing the frequency of library visits. Nagy explored that not only library use was on the decrease, but lending books from the library were also on decrease with time. Reading printed books has also been decreased, Xiao refers to the data obtained through China Internet Network Information Centre (2009) that the number of Internet users in China increased to 298 million by the end of 2008, which is 480 times that in 1997. Most library users preferred locating information using search engines (469/1866), rather than the library OPAC (266/1819) in China. Library users were found on the decline. According to statistics gathered at Peking University Library, the number of books checked out in the peak year topped 1.07 million in 2007, while in 2008, it topped to 0.83 million only showing a significant decrease within a year. De Groote et al. found that Google was used more frequently than the MEDLINE database by professors of medicine, pharmacy, nursing, dentistry, public health and applied health sciences. Use of catalogues was found shrinking in a study by Vicente et al. in Glasgow Caledonian University. Hence it seems that use of libraries is being decreased with time.

Some other studies that study on the status of libraries as a place of information access - prove libraries to be less used than homes, offices and other such places. In a study in Thapar University, Punjab (India), libraries were found less used than hostels and computer centers by students for electronic information access. Punchihewa & Jayasuriya also found that only 21% of users accessed the Internet in the University of Moratuwa Library where 46%, 40% and 39% of them use it from university computer center, home and office respectively. Dongardive found most (89.74%) of faculty members in the College of Dry Land Agriculture and Natural Resources, Mekelle University, Ethiopia make searches from
their departments. Monopoli et al. observed that the workplace was the prime location to use the journals by faculty members in Patras University. Vondracek found that students conduct the majority of their research online from home. Health science faculty in medicine, nursing and pharmacy were found using the electronic resources from their offices than the libraries. Most of them did not take advantage of the training sessions offered by librarians.

Fewer visits to the libraries are not a new problem of the modern digital age. Studies take place in the pre-internet era to disclose both types of results i.e. satisfactory and unsatisfactory visits to the libraries by its patrons. Nkereuwen observed that petroleum scientists and engineers visit the libraries rarely in Nigeria in 1980s. Strother et al. had found that dentists rely rarely on libraries to get the information in Lousiana State University (School of Dentistry) Library. Al-Shanbari & Meadows reported that one-third of the scientists and engineers seldom visited their library in Saudi universities. Folster reported that “libraries and librarians are not viewed as a primary, or in some cases even an important source of information”.

Contrary to it, Spath & Butler found that nurses in two suburban hospitals in Ohio visit the library on a regular basis but at a limited rate, to obtain the information of their concerns related to care to the patients.

Some libraries were visited less in earlier times of pre-internet era and some libraries are being visited well at present Internet era too. Murray & Tschemnitz in Australia declare that reference inquiries in public and state library did not decline due to greater internet access and its use. In a study by Kasim on the use of the library by the law faculty in Malaysia showed that about 59% of the respondents were visiting the library at least once a week. Healthy library visits were observed by several researchers in academic libraries in India. Fatima, Ahmad & Ahmad did a study on the library portal in Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh. They found that the majority of the students use library portals. Devi discloses that average students in University of Swaziland visit the library weekly. Library visits were found positive in other several studies. Yusuf & Iwu found that students visit academic libraries more frequently than faculty members.

Chiemeke, Longe, Umar et al. states that the researchers in Nigeria observed users feel comfortable using the library rather than a cyber café due to its serene environment. Libraries in the country had slowly adopted computers for their operations. Israel found that the maximum number (42.1%) of faculty members visit the Covenant University Library (Nigeria) monthly or twice a month (31.8%), 43.0% of them visit to borrow the books and 31.0% visits to use the multimedia facility. The larger number (43.0%) of them read books than using electronic resources. Conclusively it is clear that academic library visits are healthy in the present digital era also.

Scientists, faculty members and research scholars show more positive attitudes towards libraries. Scientists in research institutes were found more using the libraries than other staffs. Haneefa found that academic libraries subscriptions were used more than personal subscriptions by a scientist of any subject group (astronomy, chemistry, mathematics and physics) in University of Oklahoma in the last year of the millennium when online resources were in their infant stages. Personal subscriptions were made by only 23-55% of the scientists. King observed the similar after some years, that library subscriptions were being increased with time for getting articles where own subscriptions are being decreased in the digital era in case of academic and non-academic scientists. Subscriptions of other persons (e.g. colleagues, friends, etc.) were found constant. Ranjan Singh derives similar in case of biomedical faculty members and research scholars in India that faculty members and research scholars in India make more use of library subscriptions as compared to subscriptions by own or through friends. Libraries were found much important to them despite fewer visits to the libraries.

Reasons behind Fewer Visits to Libraries

Search engines were found used prominently in some Indian universities. McClure disclosed that access to networked information resources is preferred rather than physical access to the library from the past ten years. Search engines are preferred by 43.99% of students in various business schools in Dubai. Availability for 24/7/12, easy search, current information is due benefits of search engines. Easy access to information anywhere and anytime is important to researchers. The huge number of results for a search term is the reason for its large use at the place of its simplicity to use.

Bouazza & Al-Mufarraj found school libraries less equipped and therefore less used in Oman. The survey was taken among 24 school libraries. Farahi & Gandhi conferred that medical libraries in India and Iran strive to achieve excellence in IT services despite the availability of hardware, software and communication facilities to some extent. Some of the libraries need to maximize their service quality as Shivalingaiah & Gowda in a study envisaged that large numbers of research scholars were not aware of important library services like interlibrary loan, document delivery system in university libraries in Karnataka. Allen found that unawareness to the proper decisions lessens the importance of library. Abosed & Ibikunle explored that closing hours and the location do not affect the library use by polytechnic students in Malaysia. The however positive effect of the library staff increases its use. Shanmugam reported the frequency of library use in proportion to ease in accessing the library. He found that computers were largely used for typing by people, rather than for searching and processing information. Ashraath indicates that preservation, that was carried out in print format would be carried out in digital format.

Need for Training and Information Literacy Programmes

Pujar & Sangam found many of the resources, especially electronic resources and services being used to a lesser extent due to lack of awareness and training. The survey was conducted among the persons holding the positions of directors, assistant professors, etc. in the field of economics. Haneefa finds the necessity of workshop/orientation programs on ICT based resources and services by most of the users. The results of a survey carried out by Tammari underlines that users commonly do not know how to use the libraries and all the services offered by the same. Adams & Bank reported that the most common hindrance to using of electronic information for faculty was lack of knowledge about resources. Naushad Ali & Hasan showed that majority of the users are unaware of various electronic services available in the IIT Library, Delhi and also observed that use of electronic services is unsophisticated centring on email and chatting. Ibrahim found that libraries are underutilized due to lack of awareness to e-resources imparted by the library and inefficient channel of communication within the campus. The need of training programs was felt by Searna & Pillai and Biradar & Kumar. Nikam & Prabodhini observed that librarians help was required to make the best use of electronic resources. Library mediated services provide better results as a study by Barnett, Cmor & Morgan suggests.
CONCLUSION

Importance of libraries as a place of information seeking is a matter of concern to the librarians and information professionals. The studies take place in this respect confirm decreasing visits to the libraries except for academic libraries. Not only the availability of search engines and online sources of information are responsible for it, but sometimes failure of library systems are also reason for it. Scientists, faculty members and other researchers are found more positive towards libraries despite fewer visits to the same.

REFERENCES


