Can Digital Libraries Replace Traditional Libraries?

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 "When everything is available on the internet, what is the need of traditional library?" This is the most common question of the digital era. Advancements in technology have revolutionized almost everything, and the same is the case with libraries and the ways to obtain information and knowledge. Libraries are also facing some new challenges, demands and expectations. Libraries need to redesign their services to add value and to satisfy the need of library users and information seekers. In this digital age, no information seeker just rely on the printed material, and they do not want that either. To meet the demands of new service seekers of libraries, the traditional library can be shifted to digital libraries due to its proficient operations, and this requires a change in paradigm by which people access that information.

A traditional library consists of the printed material such as published books in hardcopy, published magazines, journals and physical reading material, assembled and managed on shelves. The user needs to go to a physical place to find access to those printed materials. On the other hand the digital library has all the information stored in the digital form as opposed to that of printed material and that information is accessed by the use of technology such as computer, mobile, laptop or another electronic device such as tablets etc. it is like a virtual organization which collect, manage and preserve a vast repository of information and offers the users a specialized access to that information. In such a library all the resources are in a digital form characterised by access points and are often free or fee-based.

The primary purpose of the digital library is not just to provide information and its access but to promote proficient delivery of data at economical rates to all the information seekers. In addition, it aims at enhancing and encouraging the co-operative efforts in research resource and communication networks. A digital library provides numerous functions to its users such as an easy and quick access to a vast repository of information despite the location of user, provide not only text access but also the multimedia access and advanced search and retrieval of information, navigation tools, link to other library sources and most importantly convenience of use.

The era of the digital age is all about access to everything in no time. Gone are the days when people sued to travel and move to get access to something, let it be the grocery or the book to read. The greatest favor technology has given to mankind is access to everything in hand by the use of electronic devices and modern technology. This is what exactly a digital library offers. There is no need to go to the physical location and can gain access to that just using an internet connection or electronic access. This is something which has replaced the traditional library with the digital one due to the easy access for the students, working people and those having no time to move to access one source of information (Bamgbade et al., 2015).

The digital library is preferred due to the easy access, convenience, cost efficiency and it is less energy consumption as well. As there is no need to go to the physical location, the cost efficiency and easy access allow a number of people to get access to information and enhance their knowledge. Speaking of academic assignments, they need extensive research and accurate information. The easy access to library allows all the students to search for their assignments from viable and reliable sources. Not all the online information is credible and hence access to library sources is a plus point for them. One example of this is Google Scholar which provided easy access to scholarly literature within no time and without any hassle. Studies reveal that the online library sources are as credible and reliable as the printed sources (Chin, Kim, & Teck, 2008).

The era of digital age means that majority of the population is connected to the internet which makes it possible to create a single repository of data which most of the people can access any time, twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week. This is the additional benefit for which the modem user go for the digital source is 24/7 availability. In addition, there is nothing different for a user in terms of cost. The user has to pay for both a traditional library and a digital library. There is a huge chance that the digital library is less costly as compared to the traditional one. When the user evaluates the cost-benefit analysis, the digital one outweighs for most of them in this case. One more thing, the same source can be accessed by a number of users at the same time while this is not possible in a library having physical sources. One source can be utilized by one user unless it has a number of copies available.

A digital library offers a highly structured approach which is easy to manage not only for the service provider but also for the user. For a reader, it is very easy to move between catalogues and one chapter to another without any hassle. For the library service provider, there is a need to manage the digital record of all the physical books in an online database. Otherwise, the large stock of books and physical sources gets hard to manage. This implies that a traditional library is also dependent on technology and the internet for its effective and efficient management. Besides, the library has the limited capacity to store and provide the printed material to its users, on the other hand, while a digital library has a larger database in which almost everything can be stored ("Chapter 2: Digital vs Traditional Libraries," n.d.). With the years passing, more and more articles, magazines, newspapers are published which are harder to manage and record in physical cupboards and shelves and eventually a digital space would be required to store all of them.

The disagreement for a digital library is that it lacks the traditional reading environment and it depends on the internet and technology. With the absence of that, there is no access. However, the evolving technology has offer a number of alternatives and solutions, internet connection is becoming faster and is also accessible from the remote areas. Technology is getting better day by day, and hence the resources linked with it will also improve from time to time. There is also an argument that it becomes harder to obtain required information from huge database, but the modern technology allows the user to use the keywords and makes it easier than a traditional library which is based on codes, ISBN numbers etc. to obtain a specific source.

In a nutshell, looking at the benefits and alternatives that a digital library provides as compared to the traditional one, it is easy to anticipate that one day the digital library will surpass traditional library. It is not only cost efficient for the user, but the library service provider government and is eco-friendly as well. Students who make most of the use of library sources highly prefer the digital sources in this age of internet and technology. It is a much better option than the traditional library where paper-based resources are facing out in every fare of human life. The modern age is the era of technology, and hence government and policymakers must invest in Internet Architecture Infrastructures to support the use of the digital library.

References

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