THE FUTURE OF LIBRARY DIGITAL RESOURCES AND TECHNOLOGIES

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Abstract -

Discusses about the impact of the ICT on the academic world and the reading habits. Describes the various types of digital resources and technologies used for the creation, storage, use and dissemination of the digital contents. Effects of these resources and the issues emerging out of the emergence and use of these resources and technologies are discussed.

Keywords : E-books, e-book readers, electronic theses and dissertations, digital preservation, digital rights management, information literacy.

Introduction :

Indian academic environment is experiencing a sea change in all its components. Old curricula are updated more frequently; continuously new courses are introduced; the students 'born with digital chip' have very high expectations from the academic institution, including the library. The teaching community is using the information and communication technology (ICT) extensively in the teaching academic and research venture. The academic administrators and the funding agencies too have very high expectations from their academic forces i.e. faculties, researchers and library professionals. All these and similar changes in the academic environment are basically driven by the digital revolution. Developments in the ICT and the digital technology have changed the way people read and write. One of the most noteworthy developments brought to the libraries by the digital revolution is the evolvement of digital resources.

Varieties of digital resources are produced in larger quantity in the modern world. These include e-books and e-journals, digital reference books, institutional repositories, open access resources, user developed information sources like the wikipedias etc. Evolvement of digital resources is a great opportunity to the library professionals and a boot to the reading community. At the same time it has wider impat on the whole of academic world including libraries and it brings many challenges also. This paper discusses the issues related with the digital resources and the associated technology which the present library professionals have to address.

Digital resources and their features :

The multifold devclopments in the ICT are producing variety of digital resources. The following paragraphs describe the various digital resources, associated technologies and issues in the use of these resources and technologies.

1. E-books:

E-books contain contents in the digital format. The e-book revolution began with the digitization of existing printed documents. In the recent days, however, many publishers are making available new books are e-books, which are referred to as 'born digital' ebooks.

Different agencies such as Google, Project Gutenberg are involved in making available printed volumes in the digital format. Google alone has digitized more than fifteen million books. At the same time most of the leading international commercial publishers are making available their new titles in the digital format.

Acquisition of e-books, counting their use, Digital Rights Management, issuing of e-books are some of the critical issues related with the e-book. In fact, in future the information professionals will be in demand for their advice on the changing copyright laws and digital rights management practices.

What will the effect of e-books on the printed books? Whether the printed book will survive or not? To me the printed book will always have its own place. However, their number may decrease that too in the long run not for want of users but due to decreasing cost of e-books.

2. E-book reader :

To read e-book we require e-book reader. E-book readers are electronic gadgets that enable to load, copy, store electronic contents in it. The contents of e-book stored in the e-book reader could be read easily like a printed book. It is a light-weight device with all in- built features to turn the pages, search a particular word, use dictionary to search meaning of words. It works on electricity and uses the inbuilt battery as backup. So that this device could be used as portable machine and could be used to read at any place, any time. Kindle developed by the Amazon.com is presently one of the leading e-book readers. Also there are many e-book readers manufactured by different companies with different features.

The trends in the development of e-book have not yet settled and it is quite possible the magic of technological development may bring something more surprising and superior to these present e-book readers.

High cost of the e-book reader is the most critical issue. So whether libraries can purchase multiple units of e-book reader and loan the technology i.e. the e-book reader. For implementing this, libraries require extended finance. So can we have such 'lonable' technology is the issue.

3. E-journals :

This is the most widely used digital resource. Hundreds and thousands of e-journals are made available by the commercial agencies, academic institutions and the agencies promoting open access initiative. Simple and advanced search facility is the most useful feature of the e-journals. The whole ccrttents of the journal including the back files could be search for any topic. They are available instantly and could be browsed in the 24 x 7 modality.

High subscription rates is the most critical issue related with the e-journals made available by the private agencies such as publishers and aggregators. So also the packages offered by them may not be very convenient to the libraries. Library professionals must negotiate intelligently the licensing terms and conditions. They should also be able to select price models suitable to them.

E-metrics: Measurement of use of e-journals and other electronic resources is one of the issues the modern library professionals have to deal with. Appropriate use measuring mechanism can only help in justifying the cost invested in the acquisition of digital resources.

Fortunately, specifications such as COUNTER (Counting the Use of Networked Electronic Resources) have evolved. Though there is need for further research and development in this area.

4. Electronic thesis and dissertations :

Theses are one of the primary documents made available in limited copies to the universities and research institutions where the researcher has carried out his research work. However, the academic world believes that the theses should be made available for further researchers easily. The digital technology has proved very beneficial for the preservation of theses. Institutions like Vidyanidhi and INFLIBNET are making available theses in the digital format over the Internet.

Copyright and plagiarism are the issues to be resolved in this matter. The user communities need to be educated about the use of theses with proper citation. The plag arism detection software needs to be made available to all concerned agencies at reasonable cost and free of cost.

Information Literacy :

The present user is exposed to the technology based library and information environment. However, all users may not be familiar with the all the technologies used by libraries and information centers. So there is need for extended information literacy programmes. The academic authorities and the user communities have to realize the importance of information literacy and respond to it more positively. The library professionals too need to invest more efforts in this venture.

Conclusion :

The fast developments in the ICT are putting extra pressure on libraries and information canters for its extensive adoption. The reading community too expects that libraries should provide more and more technology based services. With this, the libraries too are changing, however the pace of change need to be expedited. Efforts need to acquire skills to understand and use e-books and other e-resources. They have also to strengthen existing services and have to provide innovative services.

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