A STUDY OF PERCEPTIONS OF INTERNET USE IN ACADEMIC LIBRARY SERVICES

SHARANABASAPPA
Research Scholar, Dept. of Library Science,
Sri Satya Sai University of Technology & Medical Sciences,
Sehore, Bhopal-Indore Road, MadhyaPradesh, India

Dr. ARUN MODAK
Research Guide, Dept. of Library Science,
Sri Satya Sai University of Technology & Medical Sciences,
Sehore, Bhopal-Indore Road, MadhyaPradesh, India

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to identify and discuss the usefulness of Internet in the life of academic libraries. It also identifies and critically discusses the negative influences posed by the use of Internet as a great medium of intellectual communication and also appraises its suitability within the Indian context. An enhanced utilization of Internet to prop up library and academic development which are pertinent to social interaction, peace, and balanced cognition, a group of vigilant users are necessary. Governments, University administrators, and librarians who support positive maximization of Internet gains are imperative. National development through academic libraries is endangered in an environment where there is no human face in the management and utilization of digital academic libraries. This is because it will reduce the moral and academic standard of the people and breed educated criminals who visit libraries only to do mischief.

KEYWORDS: Internet, Impact of internet on library & information services, tools & services, Internet problems; Internet services; academic libraries; libraries, values of Internet.

INTRODUCTION

By the turn of the century, information, including access to the Internet, will be the basis for personal, economic, and political advancement. The popular name for the Internet is the information superhighway. Whether you want to find the latest financial news, browse through library catalogs or exchange information with colleagues, the Internet is the tool that will take you beyond telephones, faxes, and isolated computers to a burgeoning networked information frontier. The emergence of computer and telecommunication technologies in recent decades has had a great impact on libraries. Many of these technologies have been integrated into library operations such as acquisition, cataloging, circulation, interlibrary loan, and reference services. Today's library activities are no longer confined within their physical territories. Many libraries are electronically networked and rely heavily on computer and telecommunication technologies as a means of providing library and information services. Information can be stored in various electronic forms and transmitted at high speed over electronic networks to wherever there are computer facilities to receive it. Internet has become an integral part of library

and information centres that helps in meeting the information requirements of the users in a timely manner. "In fact, the library and the Internet are being viewed increasingly as a versatile unified system, providing an enormous variety of materials in different formats". The use of the Internet has enabled easy access to many resources, and information sharing has, therefore, significantly increased. 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.

At the initial experience, the Internet may appear to be baffling, incomprehensible, mystic and enigmatic, but with a steady interest and untwining of its processes, it becomes a thin of joy that enhances socio-intellectual development. Since its inception, millions of people are hooked to it. It has influenced communication systems, radically affected research and learning, and greatly helped to constrict the world into a global village. It has been in a constant state of change and development, thereby lending itself to extensive and massive use globally. The Internet has shown marked potential benefits in the production, preservation and dissemination of information in libraries especially academic libraries. Many people have written about its origin, meaning and the facilities it offers without concisely looking at its usefulness and its negative influences in academic libraries in India. This paper is, therefore, designed to examine the conceptual definitions of Internet, and critically appraise its usefulness and negative influences, intent on discussing ways out of those influences.

WHAT IS INTERNET?

¬ The term Internet has been coined from a concept inter-networking that denotes interaction between networking of computers. It is an umbrella under which different networks, small and big, freely exchange information across the globe.

¬ The Internet grew out of the Advanced Research Projects Agency's Wide Area Network (then called ARPANET) established by the US Department Of Defense in 1960s for collaboration in military research among business and government laboratories. Later universities and other US institutions connected to it. This resulted in ARPANET growing beyond everyone's expectations and acquiring the name 'Internet.'

¬ The Internet is a global system of interconnected computer networks that use the standard Internet protocol suite (TCP/IP) to link several billion devices worldwide. It is an international network of networks that consists of millions of private, public, academic, business, and government packet switched networks, linked by a broad array of electronic, wireless, and optical networking technologies.

¬ The Internet is a tool that connects millions of computers together, allowing them to communicate with each other. Information is not "stored" on the Internet. Rather, information is stored on host computers; the Internet is simply a tool that allows you to access the information stored on someone else's computer.

¬ The Internet carries an extensive range of information resources and services, such as the inter-linked hypertext documents and applications of the World Wide Web (WWW), the infrastructure to support email, and peer-to-peer networks for file sharing and telephony. It provides access to the most diversified source of information hosted by individuals and various organisation worldwide on a vast network of servers.'

¬ Not confining itself to any particular definition, the Internet can be defined as the wired or wireless mode of communication through which one can receive, transmit information that can be used for single or multiple operations.

¬ No one owns Internet, although several organizations the world over collaborate in its functioning and development. The high-speed, fiber-optic cables (called backbones) through which the bulk of the Internet data travels are owned by telephone companies in their respective countries.

The main characteristic of Internet is:

¬ Users across the world can connect or access information irrespective of time and space factor.

¬ Point to point communication, rather than one to many broadcast communication.

¬ Provides access to large number of databases.

¬ 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.

¬ Instant and interactive community creation on a global base.(Singh, 2001)

IMPACT ON LIBRARY & INFORMATION SERVICES

Perhaps no other recent innovation has impacted the library profession to such a great extent as Internet. Not only is our world becoming an interconnected global community, but this early use of the Internet has changed the fundamental roles, paradigms, and organizational culture of libraries and librarians as well, which created profound impact on L&IS by offering new modes of information delivery and a vast information source. There is a continuing evolution of the roles and functions of libraries and librarians, which appears to parallel the growth of acceptance and use of the Internet by library professionals. The innovative use of Internet technologies enables us to reach both local and distant users much more easily and effectively than hither to possible. Technologies such as email and Web provide tremendous opportunities for library & Inf. Scientists to deliver the information to the desktops of our users. Web offers significant advantage by integrating different library & information services with a common user interface offered by Web browsers. Realizing the potentials, many libraries are rushing to getting the connectivity.

BENEFITS OF INTERNET

Internet helps academic libraries in their bid to uphold their institutions' teachings, learning, publishing and research objectives. Many of these libraries obtain their digital collections in the Internet and are readily accessible. Through this, they have access to the vast array of resources like technical reports, dissertations, journals, books, articles, etc. The usefulness of Internet can hardly be overstated; it has enviably demonstrated its invaluable benefits to academic libraries as can be seen in the discussions below.

It provides a wide variety of useful information: Internet's richness and global applicability is very stunning. This is why within a decade of its appearance, it has become a worldwide phenomenon that has automatically changed the way we interact and learn. Appraising the usefulness of Internet to libraries, Jegede (1995) stated that Internet has successfully combined the knowledge of universities, libraries, art galleries, government departments, scientists, searchers, and up to thirty million individual companies. Continuing, he stated the obvious importance of African libraries joining the Internet as communicating, exchanging and seeking, disseminating information and educational resources. Corroborating this, Annan (2004) observed that in only a few years, the Internet has revolutionized trade, health, education, and indeed, the very fabric of human communication and exchange. All these portray the great potentials of Internet in academic libraries, some of which are yet to manifest.

Internet is a powerful search tool for library users: As a powerful search tool for retrieval and dissemination of information, Internet is like a conglomeration of thousands of libraries merged together, and there is nothing one cannot find from it. Millions of topics, subjects and files are available in the net and as such a great relief for researchers. Internet has helped to make research easier, more interesting and more collaborative. For people who are investigating into different topics, Internet is a good point of access for materials. University lecturers, students and other library users, access from the Internet databases that are related to their lectures, homework and projects. Emphasizing this, Owalabi and Attama (2007) enjoined academic libraries in developing countries especially in Africa not to ignore the potentials of Internet in order to bring up their teachings to a globally accepted standard.

Internet facilities and services are often reliable: The Internet apart from being a renewal and search instrument, the web pages and services which it offers are often reliable sources of information dissemination. Lending credence to this, Yumba (1997) advised that academic libraries ought to create web pages where they can publicize all sorts of information for their clientele. Such information should include uploading their catalogue entries, electronic journals, on-going research activities available.

Internet is a powerful medium for publishing: In terms of publishing, Internet is most relevant, and publishers are highly using it for presenting the contents of newspapers, magazines, and books. As a result of such electronic publishing, the publishers make a great savings in terms of printing paper and distribution costs.

Moreover, up-dating information on the net is more instantaneous and current than on the paper. Speaking on Internet publishing, Annan (2004) observed that in managing, promoting and protecting its presence in our lives, we need to be no less creative than those who invented it. There is a greater need today for publishing than before, scholars want to report their scientific findings expeditiously, the Internet has been of great help in this regard as all the processes involved in traditional or manual publishing are usually circumvented.

Internet aids creation and easy transmission of knowledge: Internet makes data transmission faster and therefore, enables one to access information from all over the world. Through this, knowledge has grown widely. In consonance with this, Christian mirror (2006) observed that experts in information technology stated that advancement in knowledge between A.D 2005 doubled the growth knowledge between 1975 and 2000.They have equally projected that in another two or three years, growths in knowledge will double that of the last five years. This global growth and expanse in knowledge is due to Internet development. Speaking on the importance of internet knowledge transmission, Ki-moon (2007) observed that internet has become the backbone of our globalize world. He further stated it has become a powerful tool even in the United Nations' mission to promote peace and security, development of human rights, particularly in the flows of information and knowledge that it enables. The potentials of internet to enrich the skills and understandings of library users have helped to lessen poverty and improve the living standard of citizens in developing countries. For this, academic institutions, national and international bodies have seen Internet usage to be a top priority in the agenda of different decision-making bodies.

Internet enables academic libraries to download files, texts, graphics or programmes from public data libraries stored on host computers in academic and commercial institutions. Corroborating this, Bride (1998) gives the gains of Internet thus;

• Sending mails to friends, academic and commercial institution anywhere in the world. Messages are delivered almost immediately, and cost no more than the price of a few seconds telephone time.

• Taking part in group discussions, either in real time chat rooms or through articles in newsgroups. Pursue a special interest, hobby or obsession, through one of the thousands of newsgroups, from around the world where ideas, advice and files are exchanged.

• Watching video clips, viewing exhibitions in art galleries and museums and looking through cameras thousands of miles away are the possibilities the Internet offers.

• Getting the latest national and international news weather reports, stock market prices and financial advice, travel information and booking of flights can be done online.

• Joining in multiplayer games; contributing to interactive art and graffiti sessions.

• Going shopping for books, CDs, gifts, insurance, PCs, software, even for the week's groceries if you live near a virtual supermarket can all be done with the Internet

• Looking up information in an increasing number of reference books, such as the World Wide Web virtual library and the CIA world face books can be done with the Internet

• Performing keyword searches on electronic libraries to find papers that contain references on your chosen topic and one search scans the linked world.

INTERNET PROBLEMS

Considering Internet's full potential as a tool for news, education, communications, entertainment and research, one gets poised to adjudge it to be vice-free, of total and incalculable significance in academic libraries. Yet, internet is never without some problems that might cast doubts in the minds of some people as to its full utilization and usefulness. Below are some of the problems which the use of internet has brought into academic libraries.

Posting of unedited and invalidated information: Internet provides useful and copious resources for intellectual work in academic libraries. Yet, it harbours a great deal of misinformation which cause enmity, wrangling and damage. According to Chete, Chiemeke and Oboerhiri (2010), information on the Internet assumes very diverse forms, such as phoney business rumours to spur or induce stock activity, bogus or false quotations or actions attributed to public figures, fabricated medical breakthroughs citing names of respected or nonexistent researchers. It also includes malicious rumours designed to defame individuals, vengeful flames against companies from dissatisfied customers and employees, and so on. Many of the material posted on the Internet may be misleading, inaccurate, or even fraudulent. This is because many or these materials posted never pass through professional editors and some writers are not specialists in the areas they are writing. Many people, therefore, tend to doubt the accuracy and appropriateness of the information usually found on the Net.

Showing of pornographic material: Today, many parents cry out bitterly against the violent acts and, or pornographic films given out on the Internet. Of course, the greatest challenge of our time is the increasing exposure of our youth to pornography and other unwholesome values on the Net. This has become a source of great worry to educators, librarians, parents, and to governments. This exposure becomes more annoying when it is shown almost all over the Internet so that even those not interested in it are directly or indirectly led into such sites even when searching on different subjects. By this, it becomes very difficult for students to avoid complete exposure to erotic materials. This accordingly influences youthful passion for sexual violence such as nudity, rape and many other terrible moral declines among the youths. The Internet is therefore creating a more downward trend in our moral regeneration and rectitude.

Problems of Hackers: Another great source of concern for Internet users includes the issue of security. There are some mischievous programmers called hackers. They very often break into large computers using stolen passwords and security loopholes to steal information, transfer money to their accounts and carry out a lot of other criminal activities. They do enormous and incredible amount of damage if they dare break into one's account. This occurs only to computers that are networked.

Internet is very derailing to the young minds: Following different services which Internet offers, many students are constantly hooked to it and very often led astray. They digress and move away from their original intention for surfing the Net. The social media such as face book, and to go which are very common in India can be addictive, making students spend so much time on them even when classes or lectures are going on. Moreover, because of the copious and galaxy nature of information in the Net, students usually waste their time only to make nothing out of it. Even where they sometimes access useful and relevant information, they get confused arranging it because of the information glut.

Software itself can sometimes become a great danger on the Net: Programmes known as viruses-mail bombs, Trojan horses and worms are spread rapidly through the internet. They enter into all the internet-based computers and cause damages to data on the systems that are receiving them. Computer viruses are simply small programmes that hijack a computer and use it (Computer) to reduce and spread themselves. As they attach themselves to computer programmes and data files, they spread by copying themselves into floppy disks, unto the hard disks and across networks. There are hundreds of different viruses, and more are daily being created by people only to damage other people's computers and files.

Internet vitiates the powers and efficacy of copyright laws: Since a lot can be posted to and retrieved from the net, there is the great tendency for many writers to commit plagiarism. Plagiarism which has to do with the other people's intellectual work without due acknowledgement has become enormous as a result of indiscriminate use of Internet facilities. Plagiarism and free access to some copyrighted works not only reduces the power of copyright laws but strongly undermines the intellectual growth and creativity of the people.

CONCLUSION

Internet as a source of information has become a household word all over the world. This is because of its wonderful services in the promotion of research, teaching, and learning. It has not only revolutionized the teaching and learning standards but has also made the world a global village. Its presence and extent of utilization appears to be the only yardstick for measuring a library's viability and modernity. In the present knowledge economy, Internet has become the pivot of information collection, preservation and dissemination. In the modern world of information explosion, internet has become a necessity for the libraries. The use of internet is now facilitating the role of librarians which should be of great concern to the profession. The use of internet

tools and services by the libraries are changing the overall development of libraries. Libraries are using the internet mostly for acquisition, cataloguing and reference functions. Librarians can increase the users of libraries by providing valuable information of library holdings through internet. Lastly, basic training should be provided to the staffs. In order to run the libraries smoothly libraries should take the initiative in providing best services to the users and make the internet an integral part of library's infrastructure. Therefore each and every should be attached with internet. This paper discussed the conceptual definitions of Internet. It also examined its usefulness to academic libraries, its negative influences, and at the end x-rayed the ways of vitiating these influences.

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