

**THE FUTURE OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: CHANGING FORMATS****Varsha Varma***(College Librarian) SNDT College of Education, Pune***Abstract**

This paper is based on the assumption that the future of academic libraries is in the hands of the librarians. The paper further emphasizes the need for change in academic libraries in the context of the emerging knowledge society. Librarians should consider the impact of ICT on, and paradigm shift in academic libraries. It is time for librarians to review the change occurring within higher education and how information will be provided in academic libraries to their vastly changing student population. The integration of technology in higher education has an impact on academic libraries in two ways by changing formats of reading material and the scholarly communication options, and secondly by changing how information is delivered, beyond the classroom experience. Society may be on the verge of a revolutionary phase of mobile device use in higher education generally and in libraries in particular. This paper also emphasizes that more important whether the library is traditional or digital, is the mandate and the context of the library. It also enlists the challenges and opportunities facing the academic libraries. The paper concludes that the future of academic libraries is in the hands of librarians.

Keywords: *Academic libraries, Paradigm shift, Future libraries*



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Introduction

Libraries have for long played a central role in the lives of colleges and universities, in supporting learning, teaching and research. National Knowledge Commission has been given a prime focus is on its five key areas of the knowledge paradigm – access to knowledge, knowledge-concepts, knowledge-creation, knowledge application and development of better services. The Commission is basically focusing on three main areas of expansion, excellence and inclusion in higher education in India. But these three dimensions of NKC's focus must be supported by an efficient and effective academic library system. According to Report of The Committee to Advise on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education under the chapter entitled The Idea of a University, "Universities perform a critical role in an economy and society. They create knowledge. They impart knowledge. And they disseminate knowledge. Universities must be flexible, innovative and creative. They must be able to attract the best talent whether teachers or students. They must have the ability to compete and the motivation to excel." (NKC, 2009)

We cannot even contemplate a transformation of our higher education system without reform in our existing universities. And a library is not merely a place; it is rather platform to imagination of innovative minds to facilitate progress. In the past few decades, some technological changes have appeared gradually and their impact on higher education has been incremental. Libraries have long been endless sources of information for students. However, the face of libraries is changing as content is moving toward a digital platform and Internet access is becoming more of a human necessity than a privilege. Our society's digital revolution has transformed the traditional world of libraries in to digital format.

➤ Changes in the physical form of the library collection

- Changes in the relationship between library and its users
- Changes in the way collections are acquired, organized, stored, and delivered
- Changes in the design of library buildings and facilities and in participation by libraries in consortia.

Paradigm Shift

Academic libraries are the libraries attached to colleges and universities. Preservation of and access to knowledge and information is their main mandate while supporting the mission of the respective colleges and universities. Information and communication technology (ICT) has made a deep impact on all types of libraries. Today we are talking about digital and virtual libraries. At the same time we are very much worried about the future of libraries in general and academic libraries in particular. But we would like to emphasize that the future of academic libraries is dependent both on external and internal changes. The ICT is providing the library and information professionals with both opportunities and challenges. There is a paradigm shift from standalone libraries to library and information networks; from printed publications to digital documents; and from ownership to access. This transition is the result of the impact of ICTs, the Internet and the web on different types of libraries. (Singh, Kaur, 2009)

The role of the librarian in the future

Contrary to the belief of some that the Internet will render librarians and their services obsolete, the digital revolution has made librarians all the more essential. A deep knowledge of the scope of what is readily available online, and sound judgment on its reliability, is just one service that university librarians will be called on to provide in the future. The move toward digital collections and services forces librarians to focus on helping users:

- Navigate the Internet
- Understand unorganized sites
- Consider certified sources on the Internet.

The nature of the Web requires librarians to offer customized consultation and interpretation services, thereby adding value to electronic resources. With information technology now a librarian is giving improved services to users.

With the advent of computers, the nature of libraries has changed dramatically. Computers are being used in libraries to process, store, retrieve and disseminate information. As a result, the traditional concept of library is being redefined from a place to access books to one which houses the most advanced media including CD-ROM, Internet, and remote access to a wide range of resources. Libraries have now metamorphosed into digital institutions. Gone are the days when a library was judged by its quantitative resources. Today, libraries are surrounded by networked data that is connected to a vast ocean of Internet-based service. Academic libraries are considered to be the nerve centers of academic institutions, and must support teaching, research, and other academic programmes.

How are academic libraries changing?

Whether it is a traditional library or a digital library, the mandate of the library remains unchanged. It is preservation of, and access to knowledge and information to facilitate progress. The role and reach of library is expanding. Library is no more a physical place alone. It is rather a gateway to world's knowledge and information. Information is available to the users round the clock. But the main issue is not facilitating end-users access to pertinent information; rather it is to develop critical thinking skills among the information seekers. Librarians must sensitize about this and focus more on customization and personalization in the digital context. The library of the future will be more a portal through which students and faculty will access the vast information resources of the world. It will concentrate on access and knowledge management rather than on physical ownership of materials. This new library needs to bring together scholars and information resources without necessarily

bringing either to a physical building. The library of the future will have the mission of helping scholars discover what relevant information exists, anywhere in the world and in a variety of formats and media.

Services academic library should develop in future

1. **Searching through online public access catalogue (OPAC)** – It is high time that Academic libraries should give facility of OPAC, it plays important role in information retrieval. Catalogue and their access are the most visible aspect of libraries, particularly when they are online.
 - OPACs, which are used in a particular library using either multi-user system local area networks.
 - Those, which can be accessed by other libraries through emergence of internet. These are very easily and quickly accessible on the internet from any part of the world. The availability of these catalogues on web allows anyone to see the contents of various library collections at their home.
2. **E-mail based reference services:** Users send the queries or requests to the librarian using e-mail facility. E-mail reference service is being popular service provided by librarians today. This service does not require any additional software and from librarians point of view e-mail based reference service is an easy to use and provide assistance at no extra cost and training is not required. Quick and ready reference services can be offered using email. Also renewal of books can be done with the help on e-mail. A reference librarian can send table of content, list of new arrivals to the faculty members, departments through e-mail. So that the students come to know about it.
3. **Website based services:** A library web page is designed and provided by librarians and provided links to different reference tools and databases which provide both short and long range services to the users. Today's user are very well computer literate they always refer the library website, library face book page, library newsletter and find out the subject based resources and gets the information required their own. Librarian should go one step further to give these services to the students.
4. **Telephonic or online enquiry service-** This service allows the users to ask question on line and/or on phone and receive answers free. The user asks a question for reference librarian through telephone, at that time if the information is readily available, reader will get answer immediately. Otherwise the librarian searches answer of the question. Telephonic renewal or through e-mail of library books is also possible.
5. **Chat Reference Service:** In this service a reference librarian and the user can communicate with each other using short text messages in real time by using normal chat software e.g. WHATS App. and gets clarification of the complex question asked by users and try to solve instantly by using different resources. With the help of e-mail and also by using some software allows librarian for instant messaging and also allows collaborative browsing between the librarian and the user.
6. **Video Conferencing / web camera reference service:** In this reference service librarian and user are able to see each other e.g. Skype. The discussions with experts, meetings and online demonstrations can be made available to users.
7. **FAQ (Frequency asked question):** In this service users can get response to standard queries information about the organisation their services, activities and progress etc.
8. **Ask-a-Librarian:** This is also an e-mail based online or off-line based service. User can ask a question to the librarian. And using different tools librarian searches the answer and respond to user. Many libraries are providing this type of reference service to users.
9. **Social networking based services:** In this service librarian are using social media tools for sharing information and distributing educational resources to users. e.g. face book.

10. **Mobile based services:** In this service librarian are using smart phone for services Mobile wiki, mobile dictionaries, Web-OPAC etc for sharing and distribution of information to the users. Library professionals can send messages regarding library timings, holidays, membership renewal with help of online sms services.(*Dhawle, Hase, and Dahibhate, 2014*)

User education and role of librarians

It is accepted that user education in the forms of library instruction, tours and programmes is necessary to promote all these services. The library staff should have strong technical skills and an ability to identify specific areas in which technology can advance the institution in fulfilling its academic mission. They should understand the user information needs; work effectively with faculty members to enhance teaching and research activities, willing to learn new skills for efficient and effective services. Regular training programmes will help staff to improve their skills for their daily operations and services, and better understanding of knowledge resources (books, journals and electronic media including web based resources). (*Raju, 2014*)

In SNTD Women's University Branch Library, Pune we use most of the techniques given above. We use these techniques to develop information literacy skills, to search the information or to give better library services. At the time of orientation library professionals give in depth information about searching the databases, how to use OPAC and how to write bibliography. Library professionals personally go to each department and give hands on experience of this to maximise the use of databases. There is library Face book page. We continuously update this. News about library is posted on this page. E-mail and telephone service is regularly used by students, faculty members and staff for renewal of books, for reminders. Table of content as well as list of additions is send to faculty members through e-mail.

Conclusion

Academic librarians have a challenging journey ahead of them as they face the constant changes and developments in the profession. With these changes, academic librarians will have to reinvent themselves through continuous learning to take on new, expanded, and challenging roles. Knowledge sharing and leveraging their collective knowledge will help them continue to demonstrate their value adding capabilities to the university and all its users. Positive attitudes, a strong sense of service, expertise in both paper and electronic environments, and a market- facing mindset will position them to take on new challenges as well as to exploit both internal and external future opportunities. Academic librarians need to education and refresh them self with updated knowledge and to acquire new competencies to function and excel in the new generation of academic libraries.

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