UNDER-GRADUATE STUDENTS AND THE ROLE OF E- LIBRARIES TO UPLIFT THE QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

Digital libraries, designed to serve people and their information needs in the same way as traditional libraries, present distinct advantages over brick and mortar facilities: elimination of physical boundaries, round-the-clock access to information, multiple access points, networking abilities, and extended search functions. As a result, they should be especially well-suited for the disables. However, minorities, those affected by lower income and education status, persons living in rural areas, the physically challanged, and developing countries as a whole consistently suffer from a lack of accessibility to digital libraries. This paper evaluates the effectiveness and relevance of digital libraries currently in place and discusses what could and should be done to improve accessibility to digital libraries for under-graduate students.

Introduction:

Higher education researchers have developed several models to explain how students choose whether to attend college Past research on college access has been theoretically grounded in economic and sociological arguments, but both theoretical models acknowledge the importance of information. Human capital investment theory explains college choice by assuming that people are rational actors who decide whether and where to attend college, with the intention of maximizing their expected benefits and minimizing their anticipated costs. These rational actors are expected to make the best decision given the information they have; however, "differential access to information" affects their abilities to make the best decision for themselves of social and cultural capital suggest that the predisposition to attend college is mediated through social networks that support college attendance and access to cultural knowledge that is derived from class or cultural statuses. Structural barriers make it harder for people outside the designated social network to access resources that support college attendance, including information resources and supports

Most research on college access has focused on the topics of college(the motive to attend college at all) and college choice (deciding which college to attend), but not on the college information search process. When research does focus on the college search process, it does not look specifically on searching for information about colleges. Search is operationalized "in terms of the sources of college-related information that students and parents use… and/or the number of colleges that students consider or to which they apply" While information use may be defined as information search this operationalization of information use is dependent upon information-seeking, and so ignores the information seeking process and the sources of information available to the disables(divyangs).

Review of Literature :

Much of the literature discussing issues of accessibility to electronic information and communication systems for minorities, those affected by lower income and education status, and persons living in rural settings, addresses one or more aspects of the *digital divide*, but rarely includes the role of digital libraries and the relevance of their content for these disadvantaged. Common in the articles and books reviewed is the discussion of the causes of the *digital divide*, as well as the effort to find solutions for bridging the widening and deepening gap between those who have access to electronic information technologies and those who do not (Chowdhury, 2002; Dijk, 2005; Gates Foundation, 2004; Tedd and Large, 2005). In the United States, primary reasons preventing user access to electronic information systems have been identified as lack of appropriate technologies, information technology illiteracy, and language barriers (Tedd and Large, 2005), as well as fear of steep learning curves, and reluctance to ask for assistance (Gates Foundation, 2004). Solutions include the increase of accessibility to public computer stations and the provision of free-of-charge workshops on how to efficiently use computers and the Internet (Chowdhury, 2002; Dijk, 2005; Gates Foundation, 2004; United States Senate Hearing 107-1097, 2002). These services are often the only means for minorities, the poor, the uneducated, and those living in rural settings, to gain access to electronic information and communication technologies, and are currently offered almost exclusively by public libraries, placing a heavy burden on these institutions (Gates Foundation, 2004).. As a result, libraries offering access to computers and the Internet for their patrons have been equipped with screen readers and reading software for persons with visual and cognitive impairments, as well as with specialized workstations for those with other physical handicaps (Mates, 2010; Tedd and Large, 2005). Where remote access to library content is concerned, for the blind several programs are in place that provide free of charge access to current literature and materials in the public domain. However, not

all databases are encoded in a manner that is suitable for the blind and visually impaired (Mates, 2010; Tedd and Large, 2005; SLA Info News, 2010).

Literature addressing issues of accessibility to digital libraries for persons living in developing countries is manifold and provides in-depth discussion of the topic. For developing nations, the greatest barrier to both the establishment and provision of continuous access to digital libraries is the ongoing struggle to meet, on a daily basis, the basic human needs for entire populations, an effort so pervasive as to leave no resources to cover the high cost involved in the creation and maintenance of digital libraries (Chowdhury, 2002; Rosa and Lamas, 2007). Additional difficulties include insufficient, restricted, or nonexistent Internet connectivity, lack of suitable technologies, absence of trained manpower, high levels of information illiteracy, as well as a widespread disinterest of the greater population in electronic information and communication services and their uses (Chowdhury, 2002; Witten, 2004; Worcman, 2002). Despite the manifold obstacles in place, various projects are currently underway to provide developing countries with suitable digital libraries. Among those most successful is the *Greenstone* digital library system, an open-source, multi-lingual software suite designed to run on outdated computer software and hardware (Chowdhury, 2002; Greenstone, 2007; Witten, 2004; Worcman, 2002). Care is taken to customize digital libraries for developing countries with information that is helpful to "reduce poverty, increase human potential, and give a useful education" (Witten, 2004, 965). To further enhance relevance of content, the majority of digital libraries designed for developing nations include the ability to add "collections of locally produced information" (Chowdhury, 2002, 385), a feature that provides unique opportunities for otherwise uninvolved members of this vast group of the disadvantaged to participate in the process of recording and storing, in their own words, the histories of their families, communities, and the country at large (Chowdhury, 2002; Worcman, 2002).

Problem statement:

Both economic and sociological approaches assume that information about college is present, but that it is not equally accessible to all disables, creating an information asymmetry in which some disables have better access to college information than others. The premise that increased information about college will help disabled students make better decisions underpins even the United States Department of Education's decision to develop a college ratings system . Theoretical models of college access and choice present an economic information problem, but researchers in this area ignore a fundamental information resource available to high college (disabled)students: the school library. The school library is a

specific venue where students might access multiple sources of college information, but no studies explore whether students actually use those sources. This study attempts to remedy that gap in scholarship. What role does

the high school library play in college access and choice? Specifically, does the school library serve as an information resource for college bound disabled students? The library and information science (LIS) literature presents the role of the college library as being primarily focused on teaching information literacy skills, providing resources to support the school's curriculum, and providing leisure resources for students' entertainment purposes.

College libraries are documented as providing study and leisure materials. Considering the provision of study and leisure materials, which are expected services of a high school library, is there a difference between a high college library's role in providing college information and its role in providing general study and leisure materials and services?

In an ideal world, poor and rich students alike would have access to school libraries with equivalent resources and services. In the real world, poor and underrepresented students have fewer college libraries resources and services in their school libraries than rich students do. If the high school library does play a role in college access and choice, does that role differ based on students' ethnicity, race, or socioeconomic status? A better understanding of the role of school libraries in this process would be beneficial to school librarians, school administrators, and above all, college disabledstudents.

Objectives:

• To explore the extent of Digital library usage by college students.

• To solicit their purpose of seeking information on Digital libraries by under graduate students .

• To investigate the kind of resources consulted by under-graduate students.

• To identify the impact of Digital libraries on college students

• To find out the problems are faced by under-graduate students in seeking information.

METHODOLOGY:

For this study , the researcher has purposively selected 60 college students belonging to different disciples as- BA, BSc , B Tech, MA, MSc etc., colleges of district Mathura in UP. Regarding to the nature of the study Exploratory research design is opted for the purpose. 60 Indian students from district Aligarh in U.P. are selected purposively. Principles of *Statistics* are used to check the authenticity of hypothesis.

Hypothesis:

- Under-graduate students are induced of digital library benefits.

- Digital library , used by students; is private public library not college library.

- Urban students are more aware than rural students, about use of digital libraries.

Discussion: From the **60** respondents(Disabled undergraduate students), 51 / 80.50% respondents accepted that they are induced of digital library benefits and economic relaxation. 45 / 70.50% Disabled undergraduate students(targets) accepted that they are benefitted by the private libraries in place of libraries in colleges. Amongst the 30 (50%) rural students 27 (90% or 40.5% of total 60 targets) accepted that they are not aware of the use and benefits of digital libraries. The digital libraries established in colleges or at government institutions , are not much m-more than a show piece, in lack of availability of electricity and internet network.

Conclusion and Results:

While discussions revolving around usability and accessibility to digital libraries and online databases have been ongoing for more than ten years, it is apparent that solutions to issues of accessibility to digital libraries for the disadvantaged are still in their infancy. For minorities, those affected by lower income and education status, as well as for persons living in rural communities, a major hindrance to furthering the cause of digital libraries appears to be the "long-standing three-way tension between commercial interests of publishers, the need of society and information users, and the social mandate of public libraries" (Witten, 2004, 963). For the physically disabled, varying standards, differing needs for those affected, and the reluctance of creators of databases, websites, and programs to employ "access for all" standards even when these are readily available, are pervasive problems that consistently prevent universal access. Where developing countries are concerned, major obstacles to universal access to digital libraries are high cost issues such as lack of Internet connectivity and outdated or incompatible

technologies, as well as lack of trained manpower, and general disinterest in electronic

information technologies. It thus appears that the digital libraries community as a whole has a

long way to travel on the road of providing universal access. As Witten (2004) summarizes,

universal access means that digital libraries must be designed to educate their users according

to

their abilities and capabilities; are multi-lingual in design; make available their content as

textual and non-textual materials; run on low-end devices; and refrain from "providing a

lowest-common denominator solution that sacrifices high-end capability where it is available" (Witten, 2004, 967). On the upside of this list of deficiencies, steps are taken to remedy what is lacking, awareness is spreading, and technology in every sector is advancing in leaps and bounds, helping to create new avenues for accessibility. Taken together, these developments provide hope for a better future not only for the disadvantaged but for humankind as a whole who will gain invaluable insight and unique knowledge from a portion of the population that is, despite having been labeled "disadvantaged," no less capable of adding outstanding contributions.

In sum, access to information is an essential necessity for all but especially so for those considered disadvantaged. With this in mind, the digital libraries community must continue to strive to create as many access points as possible for those who are in need of the extra effort that will prevent them from becoming disadvantaged in the first place.

TABLES:

Table1: "If the students are known to Digital Libraries"

S No	Responses	frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	282	94.0
2	No	016	5.33
3	Neutral	02	0.67
	Total	300	100-00

Table2: "If the digital libraries are useful to under - graduatestudents"

S No	Responses	frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	291	97.0
2	No	07	2.33
3	Neutral	02	0.67
	Total	300	100-00

Table 3: "Digital catalogue is helpful to find books in short time ."

S No	Responses	frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	288	96.0
2	No	07	2.33
3	Neutral	05	1.67
	Total	300	100-00

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