

Printed Media and Electronic Era: Challenges before the Librarians

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INTRODUCTION

The recent advancements in Information Technology (IT) have changed the scenario. This IT revolution has affected each and every aspect of human society and has opened new opportunities and challenges for all. Due to dramatic revolution in IT, especially in digital storage media, librarians have been constantly struggling with the dilemma of database between printed or electronic media.

The publications of journals and other important resources in electronic form have further brought significant changes in the global information process. The number of journals published electronically is increasing rapidly due to the expansion of internet services. A plenty of electronic journals are available free of cost over the internet. As a result, a debatable issue has come up before the librarian: whether to subscribe printed or electronic journals because major portion of library budget is exhausted on the purchase of journals. In a developing country like India where

infrastructure is lacking, library budget is shrinking, trained manpower is in shortage and the telecommunication and electricity problems are being faced by many states, the librarians are facing the tough choice of right decision.

HISTORY OF PRINTED MEDIA

In the early civilization, people used clay tablets; bone, metal, wax, wood, silk leather and paper for recording, storing and distributing information. In more recent times people started using films, plastic and magnetic tape for recording their knowledge.

For many years the text to be printed was cast in metal to set the text line by line. More recently, typesetting has move away from hot metals to computerized typesetting by utilizing very high speed optical methods. The ways of information and retrieval systems are changing with these developments. The present era is being called as electronic era and the digitization of information is taking place everywhere.

ADVANTAGES OF PRINTED MEDIA OVER ELECTRONIC

- ❖ Computer screens are not ideal either for continuous scanning or reading documents. A reader feels more ease in reading a printed form rather than its electronic version.
- ❖ No special training is required for browsing the information from printed media and has easy access. Whereas electronic media cannot be accessed without proper knowledge.
- ❖ Printed media is a well-established source of information retains stability. On the contrary, with the rapid changes in IT, the system becomes obsolete in no time.
- ❖ Management of printed media is easier than electronic media which requires minimum infrastructure.
- ❖ Preservation of printed media is easier than electronic form which needs a controlled temperature 20°C.
- ❖ The life span of printed media is longer than electronic media which is damaged easily on account of uncontrolled humidity, dust and direct sunlight.

- ❖ Printed media is often more useful to researchers who do not have a completely formulated question.
- ❖ Electronic resources are generally more expensive than their printed versions. For example “**BOOKS IN PRINT**” in electronic form costs twice as much as the subscription in the printed version.

IMPACT OF ELECTRONIC PUBLISHING ON LIBRARIES

The e-publishing has revolutionized the format of recorded knowledge in the same way as the invention of the printing press. E-publishing not only covers the scientific journals but also a variety of activities such as online services, magnetic disc products, CD-ROM and other digital products. With so many options available, the situation has become complex and it is difficult for librarians to take a final decision in favour of printed media.

In the present era of budget cuts and growing cost of journals, the most substantial part of right decision would be the monetary aspect. But the decision cannot be made on cost basis alone as the cost of printed as well as electronic sources is increasing year after the year. Moreover in some cases the price of

electronic media is much higher than printed one. The decision should be based on some additional aspects such as efficiency of access to information, plan for future development and the infrastructure available.

The problem is that in recent years, a large number of online journals have been launched which have no print versions at all. The result of this would directly or indirectly be affecting the progress of the developing countries which do not have proper infrastructure and adequate funds. Medscape General Medicine Journals have been launched online and have no print version at all. The second type of e-journal is the Lancet Interactive which includes the content of their print version but often with additional online section. Enormous important journals such as Nature Online, Science Online, New England Journal of Medicine, British Medical Journal (e-BMJ) and many more are available online. In this situation where several important journals are being published online and have no print versions at all and some of them are searchable free of cost, the benefits of IT revolution would be availed by advanced countries whose infrastructure is fully

developed. The underdeveloped and developing nations will be deprived of the fruits of IT revolution.

CONCLUSION

In changing scenario where a vast revolution is taken place in information and communication technology, it is really tough for librarians to make a right choice between print and electronic media. The solution to this depends on various factors and cannot be resolved with one factor or the other. Various things such as technology available, comparative cost, user's requirement, library budget and many other factors are to be taken into consideration before making a final decision. The life span of electronic media is short, preservation is too difficult, the future is unstable and library budget is limited, it would be unwise to subscribe all sources and journals in electronic form only. As regarding printed media, the storage and lifting of print media is a major problem and it occupies larger space. Information retrieval process is slower in print media than in electronic media where information retrieval is possible within no time. Beside this, the information in print media is not up-to-date whereas

electronic media provides the latest information.

Keeping in view the advantages and disadvantages of print and electronic media, it is suggested that all the indexing and abstracting journals such as Chemical Abstracts, Biological Abstracts, Current Contents and some important journals like Nature, Scientific American, etc. may be subscribed in electronic form. All full texts and core journals which are essential for the research purpose may be procured in printed form.

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