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## **New Challenges for Historians and Librarians in Digital Environment**

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of the study is to examine how Historians and Librarians are facing challenges in today's digital environment. Undoubtedly, new information communication technologies affect all the disciplines as well as professionals. Historians and Librarians are also not untouched by this. For historians, the challenge has shifted from discovering rare sources to filtering out unwanted information while identifying all relevant sources. Historians has challenge of developing an understanding of how to use digital sources appropriately, and using methods to deliver new scholarship that enhances the understanding of the past. There are many of sources available; the challenge is to make use of them to deliver on their potential. On the other hand, Information privacy, copyrights, and information security are some of the challenging issues faced by the librarians in digital environment. This paper is an attempt to discuss the implications of these issues so that strategies can be devised to address them effectively and efficiently.*

**Keywords:** *Digital Environment, Digital History, Historians, Librarians, ICT*

### **Literature Review**

In the initial stage of research an extensive literature search was carried out on different databases on key terms such as Historians in digital environment, Historians and Librarians in digital age, Challenges for Historians, Information Sources of Historians, Challenges for Librarians etc. for understanding the research covered by earlier researchers. The searches were carried out on Internet as well as on online bibliographic and full text databases. Other appropriate sources were also used to gain the knowledge of actual work done so far in this research area. While reviewing the material, the emphasis was given on providing some insight into the current level of activity in the new challenges for historians and librarians in digital environment.

### **Introduction**

The digital age, with the advent of internet in the 1990's, has not simply changed the nature of resources and information; it has given new meanings to the transmission, dissemination and storage of information. The amounts of information and access to it have grown exponentially; a significant potential for using varied resources in numerous ways has emerged. However, several issues related to the uses of varied resources must be addressed.

Fast growing information communication technologies have changed the source of information and the way of historical research as well. Earlier, in the Middle Ages, monks and monasteries played an important role in preserving and distributing books, and spreading of knowledge. With the beginning of the printing press, this tradition disappeared. Subsequently, the historical record of text has been carried by librarians and

archivists. But now, in digital environment, the traditional role of libraries as repositories of the printed material has been changed. "In the current times libraries are witnessing a transformation from traditional libraries to hybrid libraries (providing access to both digital as well as print materials) in most cases and to digital libraries (provision of access to data that is in digital form) in few cases<sup>1</sup>." These libraries which are able to acquire, store and disseminate the data in effective ways. Unlike the traditional sources of information; today, information is available in a single click effort.

Undoubtedly, in the digital age, it is easy to get the desired information through numerous resources. On the other hand, the rapid growth of literature available on internet and in digital form, it makes difficult to identify which information is to be used. In many cases, historians fail to use existing sources of information. Though, a historian may know that something exists but be unwilling to make the use it; he may know it exists but be unable to obtain it, or he may be unaware that it exists. Whatever the reason, the results can be affected by this. A less good book or article is written, a less good class is taught and a less useful research is done than could be.

Sometimes, historians get restrictions, for some reasons, on physical access, such as failure to declassify documents, lack of guides of all kinds and, frequently, inter library loan. The primary responsibility for solving these problems must be taken by the librarian. This paper is an attempt to bring various issues to spotlight that are challenging not only for historians but also the librarians. It is hoped that this effort would help them to make strategies to address the challenges with the digital age.

### **Information Sources of Historians**

Today's Modern libraries are redefined as places to get open access to information in many formats and from various sources. For the research work, a historian mainly uses these sources:

- Books and Periodicals
- Microfilms
- Manuscripts
- Theses and Dissertation
- Newspapers and Government publications

Information sources are often located in archives or libraries, and historians will need to be familiar with referencing systems to locate information related to the subject they are researching. With the phenomenal increase in volume of publication and their availability on internet, it has been quite confusing for historians to select the right source.

"A problem that cuts across the various formats and was mentioned distressingly often is that of interlibrary loan. Interlibrary loan is particularly important to historians with their need of access to a wide range of material. The British survey of humanists found that two-thirds of the humanists' projects used interlibrary loan and that historians were most likely to use it<sup>2</sup>." The first step, again, is acknowledgment that there is a problem. As Jones,

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Chapman, and Woods concluded their citation study, "...librarians ought not to be complacent about the type of service they provide for historians. Perhaps the fact that academics often distrust the ability of the librarians to provide the service they require is an unconscious recognition that they are not receiving the service they need from today's libraries<sup>3</sup>.

### **Challenges for Historians**

Mainly, historians use different traditional print resources to find out primary materials for research purpose. In today's digital scenario, useful information is available in electronic form which is easily navigable also. But, number of volumes and their availability on internet, it has been quite confusing for historians to select the right source. In this atmosphere, historians have to face several problems. Some of these major problems are mentioned below:

The digital environment has not only changed the nature of resources and information; it has transformed quite a few basic social and economic enterprises. As the amounts of information and access to it have grown exponentially; a significant potential for using different resources in numerous ways has emerged. However, several issues related to the uses of varied resources must be addressed. "Historians today have the opportunity to use long runs of messy textual data, reconstructed models of places and spaces, and tools repurposed from computational and engineering environments to explore past phenomena. For example, by using a process called optical character recognition (OCR), heritage institutions and commercial publishers alike have made millions of pages and billions of words searchable in ways hitherto impossible and unthinkable. This has been an extraordinary boon for scholars<sup>4</sup>."

Until the time of the information revolution, the computers were used for calculation. As most historians work with texts, it is hardly surprising that this style of computing has made little impact on the wider discipline. However, there has been a fundamental change in the field of computer technology for the past few years. Computers that have been computed to calculate work have now become the main source of information. Thus, computers are proven to be useful in the research field for historians in today's era and have become the focal point of study of history. "Along with being useful, information communication technology has also made a lot of problems for historians. The challenge for digital historians is deceptively simple: it is to do good history that combines the computer's ability to search and summarize, with the researcher's ability to interpret and argue. This involves both developing and understanding of how to use digital sources appropriately and more importantly, using digital sources and methods to deliver new scholarship that enhances our understanding of the past<sup>5</sup>."

Today, many historians have become "digital historians" without being aware about the different sources that are available at "single click". Digital sources do increase both the opportunity and the complexity. Opportunities are relating to the ability to search, find and analyze historical sources and the complexities are related to implications of digital sources. In these circumstances, historians should critically evaluate digital sources, as similar they critically evaluated other sources and consider these implications in their arguments. At the

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moment, this is more difficult than it should be because debates around the benefits and problems of digital sources have generated much heat but little light; more understanding of these implications is required. Secondly, there is a pressing need to develop and understand new techniques to deal with the errors in these sources. Thirdly, there is the need to develop and use methods to exploit digital sources. Even there are large quantitative databases came available, statistical techniques were available to help analyze them; however, there is no obvious correspondent for large textual sources.

### **Challenges for Librarians**

In the age of information technology, libraries started providing access to information in electronic formats such as CD-ROMs, World Wide Web and online databases. New steps towards automation have changed the library services. Access from multiple locations, making more resources available; making information available in raw forms are some new trends. In these conditions, librarians have to face many challenges; such as:

**Information Privacy:** "Privacy is essential to free inquiry in the library because it enables library users to select, access, and consider information and ideas without fear of embarrassment, judgment, punishment, or ostracism<sup>6</sup> and in a library (physical or virtual), the right to privacy is the right to open inquiry without having the subject of one's interest examined or scrutinized by others. The Michigan Library Privacy Act, MCL 397.602(2)(i), defines a "library record" as a "document, record, or other method of storing information retained by a library that contains information that personally identifies a library patron, including the patron's name, address, or telephone number, or that identifies a person as having requested or obtained specific materials from a library<sup>7</sup>." The protection of privacy includes the protection of network from outside intrusions to the information of users, maintenance of data integrity within the network of the library.

**Information Security:** In today's digital environment, Information security is important issue that affects all sectors. Without effective information security confidential information can be accessed by unauthorized persons or integrity of information can be compromised. "Libraries need to have policies, protection measures and trained staff in place in order to safeguard their investments in computer and computer-related technologies, personnel and services. Maintenance of information security in a digital environment is one of the most important challenges for the libraries. In the digital age availability of secure, efficient and cost effective networks of access, would be the core competency of the libraries<sup>8</sup>." Minimally, effective information security in libraries should include- training all personnel in information security issues and procedures, physical security of equipment, staff assigned to information security tasks, and computer security procedures and monitoring for different types of access.

**Copyrights:** The Copyright act has been amended six times till date since the day the act came into effect in 1958. The Government of India describes that some of the important amendments to the Copyright Act in 2012 are extension of copyright protection in the digital environment such as penalties for circumvention of technological protection measures and rights management information, and liability of internet service provider and introduction of statutory licenses for cover versions and broadcasting organizations<sup>9</sup>. With the ubiquity of

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the Internet as a unique and utterly new medium of worldwide human communication, the protection of copyright works has become a serious concern. Globalization of virtual networks has made the situation more complicated. "Computer networks and digital information technology are bringing us back to a world more like the ancient world where anyone who can read and use the information can also copy it and can make copies about as easily as anyone else could make them<sup>10</sup>." However in order to develop the common grounds for the enforceability of law, there would be a need to educate the users as well as the librarians about the importance of ethical and moral behavior.

**User-Centric Applications:** Librarians must have to pay attention towards user centric applications in the library to make easy access to the users. There is a need for the LIS professionals to shift their philosophy from the 'Library Centered' approach to the 'Learner or User Centered' approach and make the libraries relevant with the changing times.

**Information Literacy Skill:** Information literacy skills and knowledge is very important for information professionals. With the existence of the Web, IL is even more important. Modern users are needed more guidance to help them find, select, evaluate and use of information.

**High Level Services:** New Multimedia objects availability and higher future bandwidth will yield new highly sophisticated interactive systems conceived, maintained for content by academic librarians. It is also challenging for information professionals to provide high levels of services to meet newer and higher expectations of users at cheap costs.

Emerging challenges of acquiring and providing access to electronic knowledge resources require librarians to change their role to information scientist by learning and applying new skills by understanding the evolving technologies to manage and provide quality online information service to the knowledge society users. In addition to being library manager, they also act as technical processors and information provider and taking care of information quality in digital environment.

### **To Be Done**

Historians and librarians already have common goals. Both aim to create courses that are "structured in such a way that inquiry is the norm<sup>11</sup>" that train students to evaluate critically and use the sources they find in order to solve problems, and that turn students into lifelong learners. "Most historians undoubtedly recognize the need to make students proficient users of digital resources, but few address the issue directly, or consider potential help from librarians whose mission it is to keep informed about such e-resources and e-tools<sup>12</sup>." In the exploration of digital history, Burton recognizes the need for more students training: "The web has moved so quickly from having a few sites to being saturated, that guides are needed on how to evaluate sites on the web and where to find history projects and archives<sup>13</sup>." In order to deal with the problems of a historian and librarian in the digital age, these points should be kept in mind.

- Almost all historians use a wide variety of traditional print resources to locate primary materials. Libraries and archives must maintain access to traditional means

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of locating resources while building easily navigable Web sites that contain useful information.

- A librarian or information professional must be able to participate actively in the educational process rather than gathering and disseminating information to the public through workshops, orientations, training etc.
- To train students in history research—to show them how to access and select e-resources, to evaluate them and use them, and to develop those critical reading and thinking skills, history faculty and librarians must need collaboration
- While the faculty are the experts in the historical subject matter and are best equipped to teach students the intricacies of crafting a research question and interpreting sources, librarians have their own expertise in finding, evaluating, and using sources and are better prepared to keep up with fast-changing information technologies.
- There is also a growing movement to promote primary source or archival literacy, based on the “library as lab” paradigm that assumes all history students should acquire familiarity with primary source research.
- Whether possible or even preferred, requiring that data be stored in a common format is unlikely for the foreseeable future.
- Archiving decisions for materials which are common to many libraries will be made in consultation with other libraries to determine the appropriate forms and sharing-mechanisms. Digital preservation efforts will need to be coordinated.
- To make the service and development of information systems successful, librarians need to understand how people relate to information in every social situation. They need to be managers of information.
- Information professionals should be well informed on new inventions in ICT. Librarians should team up with other professionals from different backgrounds such as engineering, communication, computer, electronics and other fields, to develop new technologies.

### **Conclusion**

Electronic revolution has helped us provide better access to resources, but this made the situation more complicated. “Historians most often use written sources, but audio and visual materials also have become important objects that supply information to modern historians. Historians must be aware of the climate of opinion or shared set of values, assumptions, ideas, and emotions that influence the way their sources are constructed and the way they perceive those sources<sup>14</sup>.” In the age of digitization, today we are witnessing the transformation of libraries. Now, Libraries are moving from a book-centered to a learning-centered pattern. Computer technology has made resources available in unprecedented ways to ease teaching and research as well as transforming teaching and research. In coming decades mobile technologies would become mainstreams and librarians have to prepare for such changes. It is needed to explore new teaching strategies and learning materials to tackle the challenges of digital environment.

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