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CONTENTS

	Page No.
Changing Financial Management of Library in Present Era <i>Meera Raikwar and J.N. Gautam</i>	1-5
E-Libraries: An Emerging Need of the Present Era <i>Rekha Bairwa and Charat Lal Bairwa</i>	6-9
Status of ICT Infrastructure facilities and services in Technical Information Centres (TICs) of DRDO Laboratories in India: A Study <i>D.V. Nagesh, T.D. Kemparaju and A.Y. Asundi</i>	10-16
A Bibliometric Analysis of Literature of DESIDOC Journal of Library and Information Technology during 2010-2018 <i>Amruta Kashelkar</i>	17-22
Computer Literacy: A Survey of Students in Social Sciences and Humanities <i>Neha Kumari Teli, Naveen Chaparwal and P.S. Rajput</i>	23-27
E-Library Practices <i>Avhad P.E. and Kirit H. Shukla</i>	28-32
Citation Analysis of Theses in Botany Submitted to the Shivaji University, Kolhapur 1964-2010 <i>D.D. Waghmare</i>	33-38
Productometric Study of Zoology Faculty Members in Vikram University, Ujjain <i>Shweta Boriwal</i>	39-41
Use of E-Resources by Faculty and Students in GGSIP University, Delhi <i>Niranjan Singh</i>	42-48
Mobile Based Library System <i>Nitasha Gandotra and Nidhi Tyagi</i>	49-52
Information Seeking Behaviour of Library Users: A Study of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi University, Katra (J&K) <i>Vinod Kumar and Anil Kumar Dhiman</i>	53-59



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E-LIBRARIES: AN EMERGING NEED OF THE PRESENT ERA

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ABSTRACT

Seedling of libraries is meant basically for communication of knowledge to the society specially to the new generation to overtake the most important task of research. Libraries are always growing, developing and empowering with the emerging technology and media popular in the present era of digitization. E-libraries are digital libraries where the information is acquired, stored and retrieved in digital form. E-library is a system of distributing full-text and multi-media databases accessible on computer networks. It has normally a good collection of machine readable publications and facilities for remote access to several databases.

Keywords: Library, e-library, digital library, virtual library, e-resources, challenges.

INTRODUCTION

We are living in an era of constant changes. The knowledge acquired by a person during the formal education is facing the challenges of instability, insecurity, instability, insincerity and of becoming obsolete at a very rapid rate in the digital environment. Lifelong learning is the only way to overcome these challenges and thrive in the rapidly changing environment.

The emergence of information society has created an urgent need for acquiring and implementing the technological advancement in library services. Last two decades have witnessed an increasing use of IT in library services to meet the pace of the matters changes. This has given birth to the concept of electronic library (e-library) or digital library.

WHAT IS AN E-LIBRARY?

An e-library is established with the aim to provide instant access to the digitized information and consists of a variety of information sources-paper to paperless forms including multimedia. A digital library is not only digitization of printed paper forms of physical resources in to electronic resources, but also thoughtful organization of electronic collections.

An e-library is a collection of information that is stored and accessed electronically. It provides a central location for accessing information on a particular topic. These libraries are the group of interlined workstations connected to the high-speed networks.

"A digital library is a new kind of library, whose collection exists only in a digital/electronic format and does not contain any conventional books." The terms virtual library, electronic library or digital library are more or less synonymous. All such libraries largely contain digitized information along with print based publications.

An e-library means to exploit the facilities of IT with the object to share resources available globally so as to render right information to the right user at right time. Past few decades have witnessed a high growth in digitization of books and journals.

E-LIBRARY VS TRADITIONAL LIBRARY

A library, traditional or digital, exists to serve a more or less well defined community. Traditional library is an entity in which information containers (i.e. traditional formats in which information is stored in paper based, magazines, journals, books, monographs, reference materials etc.) are

selected acquired, organized, disseminated and preserved. Before the convergence of information technology, the physical location of the community was extremely important to a library's ability to provide service in a timely and efficient way. Earlier it was necessary for libraries to select, organize, store, disseminate, and preserve information with the physical limitations of the institution. But the whole notion of e-library is based on the fact that information no longer must be physically located where library users are in order to be useful.

GENESIS OF E-LIBRARY

E-library is now not only going to be very popular but it is not so new. The major milestones in the development of e-libraries are:

- In early 1970s, e-libraries were built around mini and main frame computers providing remote access and online search and retrieval services to users using computer and communication technology available at that time. Earliest application of digital library concepts involved character-coded storage and full text indexing of legal and scientific documents.
- During mid-1970 and late 1970s, several software packages were released for computer based storage, indexing and retrieval of documents in character-coded form, for example, IBSS a storage and information retrieval system (STAIRS), Battle Automated Search Information System (BASIS), INQUIRE, BRS/SEARCH DOCU/MASTER, STATUS etc.
- By 1980s, CD-ROM was introduced as a media with high storage capacity, longevity and ease of transportation.
- By the late 1980s, test storage and retrieval programs were available from many vendors for major computing environment including main-frame, microcomputers and LAN.
- In 1990s, the advent of World Wide Web (www) offered a crucial advantage with the availability of ready-to-use, publicly available, user-friendly graphical web browser for all prevalent platforms. Since then standard www clients such as Netscape, Navigator, Google chrome and Internet explorer are being upgraded regularly.

NEEDS OF E-LIBRARY

Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam former president and an eminent scientist of India, described the role of e-library as "where the past meets the present and creates a future. A digital library provides equitable access to knowledge to all the people, irrespective of place, caste, creed, color or

economic status. Digital library unites rather than divide. Therefore, there is need of the time to develop digital libraries".

E-library is needed to provide quality based service at the user's doorstep. E-libraries are needed for the following reasons:

- (i) Information explosion: E-library can handle the problem of information explosion somehow, it can manage large amount of digital content by simply providing line, without actually procuring the document.
- (ii) Easy to understand: The visual graphical information system of e-libraries is more popular as compared to text based information system.
- (iii) Information retrieval: E-library can help to retrieve information relating to specific purpose.
- (iv) Distance learning. It provides learning facilities from home, office or other distinct place, I, which are convenient to user.
- (v) Shifting of the environment: E-library provides the facility that the users of new generation lie, i.e., reading from the computer screen.
- (vi) Multiple functions of same information: In e-libraries, it is possible to structure and organize the same digital information in variety of ways, by using hypertext which serve multiple functions.
- (vii) To procure on-line publications: More and more information is going to be published over internet, as such e-library is needed to procure the on-line publications the on-line publications and to provide link to important sources of information.

MAJOR CHARACTERISTICS OF E-LIBRARIES

E-library is a modern form of library, which enables to satisfy the needs of its user in the form they desire. The main characteristics of modern e-libraries are:

- (i) Provide access to distributed information resources,
- (ii) Same information resource can be shared by many at the same time,
- (iii) Reduce the need for physical space,
- (iv) Ability to handle multilingual contents,
- (v) Variety of digital information resources
- (vi) Users at remote place may build their own personal collections by the facilities provided by E- library,
- (vii) Paradigm shift both in use and ownership,
- (viii) Collection development is based on potential usefulness and appropriate filtering mechanisms,
- (ix) Presupposes the absence of human intermediaries,

- (X) Provides better searching and retrieval facilities,
- (XI) Electronic information can be used and viewed differently by different people, and
- (XII) E-libraries break the time, space and language barriers.

PRINCIPLES OF DESIGNING AN E-LIBRARY

An e-library should be designed to facilitate variety of information resources residing on variety of computer systems in different locations to a number of users of different notions and needs. The design should be based on following eight guiding principles:

- a. An e-library object should not be tied to a particular technology,
- b. Users want intellectual works, not digital objects,
- c. The technical framework exists within a legal and social basis,
- d. Understanding of e-library theories need standard terminology,
- e. E-Libraries are more than collections of bits,
- f. Names and identifiers are the basic building blocks for the e-library,
- g. The underlying architecture should be distinct from the content stored in the library, and
- h. Repositories must look after the material they hold.

Challenges Faced During Building An E-Library

The following challenges that must be met while creating a large and effective e-library:

- ❖ Develop improved technology for digitizing analog materials,
- ❖ Design search and recovery tools that compensate for abbreviated or incomplete cataloguing or descriptive information,
- ❖ Design tools that facilitate the development of cataloguing or descriptive information by incorporating the contributions of users,
- ❖ Launch protocols and standards to aid the assembly of distributed digital libraries,
- ❖ Address legal concerns related with access, copying, and dissemination of physical and digital resources,
- ❖ Integrate access to both digital and physical things,
- ❖ Develop approaches that can present heterogeneous resources in a coherent way,

- ❖ Make the National Digital Library useful to different communities of users and for different purposes,
- ❖ Provide more efficient and more flexible tools for transforming digital content to suit the needs of end-users, and
- ❖ Develop economic models for the support of the National Digital Library.

Advantages of E-Libraries

The advantages of e-libraries are now widely recognized by all the fields of society, education, corporate and public bodies. The main advantages of e-libraries are:

- ❖ **No physical boundary:** The user of e-library need not to go to the library physically, people from all over the world can get access to the same information, as long as an Internet connection is available,
- ❖ **Freedom of accessibility:** E-libraries can be accessed at anytime and anywhere across the world with the internet facility. The same resources can be used at the same time by a number of users.
- ❖ **Preservation and conservation:** An exact copy of the original document can be made any numbers of times without any degradation in quality.
- ❖ **Space:** E-library has the potential to store much more information because these libraries require very little physical space to contain. It can accommodate huge number of information resources in small space.
- ❖ **Economy:** The cost of maintaining an e-library is much lower than a traditional library because it is saving large sums of money paying for staff, book maintains, rent of space and additional expenses,
- ❖ **Information retrieval:** In e-library, the user is able to use any search term (word phrase, title, name, subject, etc) to search entire collection. It provides very user friendly interfaces, giving click able access to its resources.
- ❖ **Networking:** Particular e-library can provide the link to any other resources of other e-library very easily thus a seamlessly integrated resource sharing can be achieved.
- ❖ **Structured approach:** E-library provides access to much richer content in a more structured manner i.e. user can easily move from the catalogue to the particular book then to a particular chapter and so on.

Disadvantages of E-Libraries

Despite of the several attractive features, e-libraries have following disadvantages also:

- ❖ **Expensive:** Building of an e-library is very expensive because large cost is incurred for conversion of print materials into digital format, for the technical skill staff, and for the cost of maintaining online access charges viz. service bandwidth cost, etc.
- ❖ **Machine readable contents:** The contents of digital library can be studied only with the help of a computer.
- ❖ **Requires electricity:** E-library wholly depends on electric supply and in absence of electricity, its contents cannot be accessed.
- ❖ **Copyright Law:** Copyright laws hamper e-libraries. The works cannot be shared over different periods of time in the manner of a traditional library.
- ❖ **Health hazards:** The continuous study on computers causes several health problems to their users.

CONCLUSION

E- Libraries have become a great demand of the present day in spite of the disadvantages as stages above. It offers a number of facilities which can strengthen the knowledge of an individual and the nation.

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