

HARMONIOUS BLENDING OF LIBRARY SERVICES IN THE DIGITAL AGE: A CHALLENGES

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Abstract:

In the 21st century, there has been a significant shift in the manner in which students access academic libraries and library resources. Digital Communication Technology (DCT) is a rapidly emerging field used by user communities in academic institutions to enhance their knowledge in their respective fields and to access digital information efficiently. Furthermore, having a knowledgeable, experienced and globally-oriented workforce is essential for any organization's success. To be the primary provider of the well-trained intellectual capital (knowledge), academic libraries must reconfigure both their physical space and their services. This paper will explore the challenges that libraries are facing in balancing demand and supply for library services, as well as implementing digital technology in their libraries in this digital age.

Keywords: *Blending of Library services, Emerging Output Measures, Environmental Factors, Library Services, Outcome Assessments. Traditional Input Measures, balance of demand and supply in the library services.*

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Objectives of The Paper:

1. To explore on Input Measures & Outcome Assessments.
2. To identify challenges/barriers for supply in library services
3. To know / understand Library professionals' efforts to achieve balance / equilibrium of demand and supply in the library services

Introduction:

Libraries are a vital part of society, providing a wide array of services to meet the diverse requirements of their patrons. From the provision of a vast array of resources and books to the implementation of cutting-edge programs and technology, libraries have become a vibrant center of knowledge and engagement. The core library services that are essential for the wellbeing of individuals, educational and research initiatives, literacy and life-long learning, and community advancement are: traditional services such as lending and reference assistance, as well as modern initiatives such as digital resources and maker spaces. These services are essential for connecting individuals with information and providing inclusive spaces for research, exploration, and personal development. It is essential for any library to meet changing library client demand, by customising / modifying existing library services and, of course, to maintain the balance of demand and supply. To do this properly, library professionals must identify and review the factors, responsible for challenging the demand of library services, in order to

provide the services that their users expect. Several factors must be considered, in order to address changing requirements, and necessary actions must be taken to provide user-friendly library services.

A) Trends in Traditional Input Measures-

- a. **Budgets** - Libraries are seeing a slight increase in their materials budgets and staff salaries. Operating expenses have gone up, a lot to cover the costs of automation and e-commerce, which means changes in staffing, materials, and space. Current budgets aren't enough to keep up with the rising costs of materials, the cost of investing in tech that's quickly becoming out-dated, and the need to retrain or hire and retain staff with the skills to use and use the tech. Plus, there's the cost of running the campus network, buying software, and the cost of licensing, storing, and delivering e-information from other units on campus.
- b. **Collections** – The majority of libraries are cutting back on serial subscriptions, buying fewer single-volume books, and trying to keep up with user demand for more on-premise delivery of materials – spending more and more of their resources on licensing access to e-books. The decrease in acquisitions could be due to, the higher cost of materials, better distribution, better distribution through collaborative purchasing (through consortia, organization networks and inter-institutional agreements) or a change in user perception of libraries. Librarians are working with fewer student volumes, than ever before, but this is confusing and pressing for libraries.
- c. **Infrastructural Equipment** – From microform equipment, to photocopiers, to the card catalogue, hardware, software and systems have all changed, over the past few decades. Libraries need a budget and an articulated replacements cycle, for all of these items. In many cases the capital budget, does not cover the cost of replacing equipment, before it becomes out-dated. Libraries also need to find the money to replace equipment with one-off funding from grants.
- d. **Space** - After years of cutting or removing user and staff space, to accommodate increasing physical collections, increasing numbers of libraries are seeking offsite storage solutions to address their space challenges and how to pay for offsite storage within an already tight budget. The current standards of user, staff and collection spaces in libraries, do not take into account the space that technology occupies.
- e. **Staff** – While the overall number of employees is steadily decreasing, many library systems are hiring more staff to manage the growing number of library information technology (IT) roles. Clerical positions are being phased out across the entire library. Position creation or reclassification is occurring at a higher level (in terms of salary) because more advanced technical or management skills are required, now than ever before. Typically, new or updated positions are created by merging open positions, as salary lines are not sufficient to accommodate them. Retraining staff to keep up with technology changes, adds to the pressure to find more funding for travel, training, etc., in an already tight budget.

B) Trends in Traditional and Emerging Out Put Measures Materials Circulated –

The use of print resources is on the rise. Overall circulation is decreasing. In-house usage of library materials is decreasing. Reserve Items C\circulated – The circulation of print reserve items is rapidly declining. Even in institutions that don't offer electronic reserves, the number of print reserves is dropping. In some

institutions, faculty are reducing the number of materials they put on reserves. The drop in the number of reserve items and usage is likely due to full-text resources being available on the Web - provided by the library or other entities. If there is no usage data on other sources of information, what does a decrease in use mean, for education and research? Electronic Reserves - Electronic reserves are popular among students and faculty. However, the benefits of desktop delivery are outweighed by the additional costs associated with desktop delivery.

- a. **Gate counts** – Gate counts are decreasing. If you don't have to go to the library, to get the information you need, you can use your personal computer, set up an Internet chat room, or use a discussion facility in a course management software such as Blackboard that includes your class syllabus and assignments, as well as reading, quizzing, and grades. Electronic Resources Use – The need for desktop delivery is growing. The use of electronic resources is increasing faster than expected. Older journal volumes in electronic form are growing faster than the overall use of electronic resources.
- b. **Interlibrary loan transactions-** Interlibrary loan transactions- The use of interlibrary loans (ILL) is on the rise, in many cases at a rapid rate. This is likely due to the cancellation of journal subscriptions, the purchase of fewer monographs and the availability of citation databases, that store non-library materials. Better service quality could also play a role. The truth of the matter is that, we don't have the data, we need to know why ILL is on the rise. What we do know, is that new technologies are changing ILL, blurring the boundaries between ILL services and document delivery services and shifting costs.
- c. **Library Orientation/Instruction** - Presently, there are more sessions and participants in library instruction than ever before. This number has been on the rise for some time, but it seems to be decreasing. This could be due to distance learning technologies, being used to provide library instruction. Other environmental factors that could be impacting library instruction include, the growing technological sophistication of users, who are able to transfer skills from vendor databases to another vendor's databases. Students and faculty are increasingly using information sources and services, that are not offered by the library. If this is the case, library instruction may not be meeting user needs or behaviors
- d. **Printing and Photocopying** –Printing is on the rise and photocopying is on the decline. This is likely due to the availability of full-text e-books and printing of e-journals. However, we need a little more context to understand what's really going on, at any given institution. Maybe users are printing more, outside of the library. But why the sudden drop in staff printing? If libraries can recoup printing costs, the new revenue will eventually make up for the loss of photocopying revenue.
- e. **Reference Questions answered-** Reference questions answered & Use of reference service varies, but it seems to have decreased significantly over the last year. Traditional face to face reference services, with librarian are being challenged by, information technologies used to reach an ever more remote audience, such as email, chat, and "See You, See Me" video conferencing software. Reference services offered by the library appear to be in competition with reference (or "like") services offered by outside entities.

C] Trends in Outcomes Assessment-

Outcome assessments are problematic, because they are based on input and output metrics that are hard to interpret and institutional performance targets, that are often vague and can be challenged on campus.

- a. **Cost-effectiveness-** Libraries seem to be stuck on how to measure cost-effectiveness. If they want to survive, they need to understand the costs of what they're doing. It's hard to allocate the costs of a collection or service. And it's even harder to allocate those costs to content, staff, facilities, hardware and overhead. This is made worse by the fact that in today's world of ever-changing technologies, prices and workflows, it's difficult to tell the difference between start-up and on-going expenditures. Even if libraries could reliably and precisely allocate and calculate the costs of their collections and services on a regular basis, the analysis wouldn't be enough to measure cost effectiveness. In order to be cost effective, you need to have a clear definition of "value" to users and a way to factor in that qualitative model. For instance, undergraduate students seem to prioritize convenience and delivery speed over the quality of information delivered. Buying e-books or digitizing information increases value, but it also increases costs.
- b. **Changes in Reading & Literate Habits** -Using library resources remotely means that users of unlimited resources and services don't even have to be affiliated with your institution. Faculty members love the ease of using the Web, but they know, how to tell if an information source is reliable and up-to-date, and they usually have months or even years to finish a project, so they'll use interlibrary loan or document delivery services for their research. On the other hand, students can't tell the difference between appropriate and inappropriate sources for their assignments, they don't have much time to finish their projects (partly due to procrastination) and they're enamoured with the Web. Because it's so easy to access the Web, students don't use library collections and services as much as they used to, and in the absence of high-quality information and tools at the surface level, this may compromise student learning. That's why some faculty members don't let their students to use Web resources in their class projects. Technology is complex, high-maintenance, and can be circumvented through pre-packaging course materials.
- c. **Changes in the Technological Infrastructure** - As computers become more accessible and students buy their own, how does this affect library usage? How does wireless access compare to student-owned laptops? Students seem to prefer desktop delivery, and if they have their own networked computer, then in their minds they don't need to go to the library. That's why there's a decrease in gate counts and a decrease in traditional library materials. Is there a correlation between student computer ownership and campus computing infrastructure? Is there a correlation between large and small library trends? Is the %of remote usage of resources and services affected by campus computing penetration and network bandwidth? It seems like libraries are having trouble figuring out how to track changes in technology.
- d. **Environmental Factors** - Traditional measures are hard to interpret, when there is no environmental contextual data. Explanations of why library usage is changing are only speculative. The bigger picture

surrounding libraries needs to be looked at, to determine the environmental factors, that could be contributing to the changes happening in libraries and to interpret library trend data in a different way. The list of factors below is not exhaustive. It is meant to inspire thought and discussion. Further research is encouraged and encouraged.

- e. Learning and research outcomes** –Responding to the (unclear) mandate, to hold students and faculty accountable for their performance, libraries are starting to measure the effect of the collections and services they offer on users. The focus has been on user satisfaction and the quality of service. The simplest and most popular measure is a survey on user satisfaction alone. However, this measure alone is an “easy outcome” as it gives little, if any indication of what factors contribute to user dissatisfaction.

D] Information Resources and Services Provided by Entities Outside of the Library-

Systematic quantitative and qualitative studies need to be, conducted on these information sources and services, in order to understand how they affect library use and the communities that libraries serve. If the goal is to improve user experience, does it matter if the library provides the service or if someone else does? Some of the important changes that developments in ICT have brought about, in information services are:

1. Changes in form, competition, methods of producing and providing information products and new business models of using information products. This requires procedural and infrastructure changes as well as financial implications within the library.
2. Extinction or significant transformation of certain conventional information services such as press clippings, content pages, institute information, etc.
3. Switch from physical services to virtual services, to provide convenience in time and place to access services.
4. The emergence of the Internet, as the largest repository of information and knowledge.
5. Use new tools and technology, to disseminate information.
6. Transforming the role of the LIS professional, as subject matter expert and end user directly involved in information work and therefore requiring new skills.

Changing Requirements/Demands Of The Users-

- Cover to Cover Photocopy Services.
- Facilities of Camera Copy services in addition to the Scan Copy services.
- Have a NRC (Network Resources Centre) in the Library.
- Have a reader's friendly environment & attitude of the library staff.
- ILL Services / Resource Sharing with some reputed Library & Information /Network Center.
- Library Services through Mobile/Cell Phone.
- Printing Services inside the library with reasonable rate.
- Regular and in systematic user guide for accessing library resources.
- Round the clock (24x365) Library Services.
- Unlimited Download Facilities of E-resources.

Basic Challenges:

Academic libraries today face a number of challenges in providing regular library services for a number of reasons. Among them, there are two challenges that are very difficult to overcome and also deserve due attention. That is :

- Libraries must continue to purchase books and journals to strengthen their collections, despite the problem of not knowing exactly what to buy due to the information explosion that comes with increasing costs and timing, even though library budgets are shrinking.
- Libraries must decide how to respond to the constant development and change of electronic information technology, entering the information world to change the traditional methods and methods of serving libraries.

Library professionals' efforts to achieve balance / equilibrium of demand and supply in the library services:

1. Appropriate measures should be taken immediately for systematic/intensive user learning, so that student users can safely use internal and global resources for their learning purposes. Not only that, it also helps to use the library's printed materials appropriately.
2. Authority has to take immediate action for Automating the Library by using any standard LMS (SOUL, LibSys, Koha etc.) but never use any local software.
3. Library staff must take care, to update information for themselves.
4. Proper infrastructure (spacious building, interiors, electrical installations), including IT, should be created within the library, giving equal importance to the library as well as to all other faculties. The NAAC Assessment Guidelines may be considered for this purpose.
5. Regarding updating the existing library staff towards ICT, appropriate time should be set aside for them to participate in national level seminars and workshops in addition to the participation of RC/OP etc.
6. The authority should take immediate steps to automate the library using any standard LMS (SOUL,SLIM, LibSys, Koha), but never using local software.
7. The concept of Open Curriculum is open to users, so that they can enrich themselves with knowledge, for example: IGNOU Course Materials etc.
8. Try to develop a local resource center, by bringing together the closest local universities, to eliminate the lack of opportunities, to use library resources for all users in general.
9. Try to get interlibrary loan facility, by becoming a member of a national level information resource center.
10. Try to take outstanding initiatives to establish the organization's organization, to achieve better ratings from NAAC as well as provide standard services to users e.g. digitization of articles, final examination of the course, syllabus of different courses, etc.

Conclusion:

With the advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), came networked systems and new methods of acquiring and utilising information sources. In recent times, the age method of information provision

has received a jolt. The practise of collecting books and journals and displaying them for users on long rows of shelves is under scrutiny. Because of the dynamic nature of society, user requirements are also dynamic in nature. Due to a variety of factors, libraries are facing several challenges in providing regular library services today. Thus, when libraries clearly define the role, organizational structure, educational guidance/learning and training for library users, the application of IT in libraries can achieve the set goals successfully.

A positive attitude at all levels in the institution is a prerequisite for large-scale development of the institution, not just the library/librarian. It must be done on the basis of the candidate's knowledge of LIS and ICT, at a moderate cost. In light of this, the current paper is an attempt to unravel the demand and supply of library services, and it includes the trend of traditional library performance measures, changing user requirements/demand, information services, and achieving Balance or Equilibrium of demand and supply in the library services.

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