CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Many people see the Internet as the future provider of information located on local and remote servers throughout the world. The initial uses of the Internet were limited to electronic mail, file transfers and remote logging to computer systems using the Telnet utility. However the availability of the World Wide Web (plainly referred to as the Web) clients, like *Mosaic*, *Netscape* and *Internet Explorer* with their graphical user interface, have made the web a popular vehicle for disseminating and retrieving information. The availability of the web has also created a feeling among some library professionals and members of the public that the library will lose its role in providing information in the near future. Others see the availability of the web as an opportunity for libraries to provide access to an even bigger universe of information.

The literature suggests that libraries have traditionally functioned as scholarly information centers at different educational levels. For as long as they have been serving the information needs of the academic community, libraries have demonstrated technological flexibility and innovation. This is one reason why many librarians believe that the library of the future is expected to have an even more complex structure than today, thus creating a proportionately greater need for librarian assistance and for bibliographic instruction. In addition to helping patrons use local information resources, librarians will help patrons navigate the vast and complex networks in pursuit of the necessary information.

On the other hand, those who believe that the library will loose its ground for existence see no need for it, because the information that the library is providing will be available on the Internet. Those who are advocating the continuing existence of the library believe that people will continue to seek help from the library, as the web references will not replace the many excellent print and CD-ROM references.

Society has for some time been exchanging physical labor of all sorts for information based activities. If one subscribes to the "work smarter, not harder" notion, then one could say that in the information age we are exchanging brains for brawn. This is why some people think that the library of the future will not loose its ground for existence, but will only see some changes in its functions due to developments of the information age.

Based on the literature, the ideas on the impact of the Internet on the library are controversial. While some people think that there would be no need for library and librarians in the near future, there are other people who are advocating the importance of library and information professionals as major components in the new information era. One question that emerges is what do library users and librarians perceive the library of the future to be like? This is one issue explored in this study.

Statement of Problem

At a fundamental level, we are witnessing a change in behavior that enables a transformation to take place in our use of technology. In libraries, we are

using technology to deliver new services and to structure our organization more effectively. There is a continuing evolution of the roles and functions of libraries and librarians, which appear to parallel the growth of acceptance and use of the Internet. The use of the Internet is changing traditional library functions such as acquisition, storage, access, retrieval and dissemination.

This research is designed to investigate how a group of library users, i.e. postgraduate students, perceive changes that are likely to take place in the role of library due to the emergence of the Internet. However the perception of users would provide only a one-sided picture on the impact of the Internet. For this reason, the views of librarians were also sought on how they perceive the changes brought about by the Internet.

Aims of the Study

This research was designed to investigate the different views and ideas of postgraduate students at the University of Malaya on the impact of the Internet on the library. The research also investigated the changing role of the library and librarians towards their users, and whether they felt that the Internet will change or support the library in the future. The research also sought their views on the changes, which may take place in the library of the future.

The other aims of this study were to find out the extent to which postgraduate students at the University of Malaya were satisfied with information provided by the Internet, and to know the role of the library in helping their patrons to navigate information from sources other than the library.

The research also sought to find out what information professionals (librarians) thought about the Internet.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. Do postgraduate students at the University of Malaya use the Internet in doing their research? If so, what are their patterns of use?

2. What help do the postgraduate students at the University of Malaya receive from the Library with respect to the Internet, and what are their expectations for the future?

3. What changes do the postgraduate students foresee in the role of the library as result of the introduction of the Internet?

4. What are the perceptions of librarians at the University of Malaya and what changes do they foresee in the role of the library as result of the introduction of the Internet?

Significance of the Study

The forces affecting libraries are numerous and complex and they are not easily described and calibrated. This research is best seen as an initial examination of some of the relevant trends, intended to improve our understanding of the issues

and choices that are emerging so rapidly. In general it is an attempt to show technological changes affecting libraries, and to show the impact of the Internet in particular.

There is no doubt that the Internet is now affecting all aspects of life, since one of its perceived main objectives is to provide information. Libraries are expected to be the most affected entities because the Internet is now making available information that users are expecting. This is why James-Catalano (1995) views the Internet as the world's ultimate library. This fact has made it significant to study the impact that the Internet will have on the library in the future.

The significance of this study also stems from the hope that this study will provide a rationale for closer collaboration between the library and information providers on the Internet for better information services focusing on:

1. The impact of the Internet on access to information and resources in the library;

2. The changing role of those involved in supporting the information search process;

3. The skills that students will need to maximize the opportunities offered by the Internet.

The Internet is newly emerging as a source of information, especially in Asian countries including Malaysia. This fact has necessitated that some attention be given to the topic concerned.

Limitations

The impact of the Internet on libraries in Malaysia has received little investigation, and this has led the researcher to rely on some fragmented literature to build up a background upon which the study could be carried out. The scarcity of literature is one serious limitations of this study.

Other limitations are that evaluation of changes of the Internet on library functions, librarians' role and users' behavior needs a long time since the changes occur over a long period of time.

The most important limitation of this study is that it is confined to postgraduate students at University of Malaya. As such the results cannot be generalized to the wider population, but nevertheless provides some indication of the probable trends.

Definitions

The following definitions are used in this study:

Internet: The Federal Networking Center (FNC-United States) agrees that Internet refers to the global information system that:

(i) is logically linked together by a globally unique address space based on the Internet Protocol (IP) or its subsequent extensions;

(ii) is able to support communication using the Transmission Control Protocol/ Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) suite or its subsequent extensions or other IP compatible protocols; and

(iii) provides, uses or makes, either publicly or privately, high level services lyred

on the communication and related infrastructure.

(Source (FNC) Resolution: Definition of Internet

Available at: http://w.fnc.gov/Internet_res.htm)

Library: A library (from latin *liber,*"book") is a collection of written, printed, or

recorded material (including films, photographs, tapes, phonograph records, video

discs, microforms, and computer programs) organized and maintained for reading,

study and consultation. Source (Encyclopedia Britannica, vol. 22, 1995).

The encyclopaedia of Information and Library Science define the library

as:

1- The term used for a collection of books and other library materials which have

been kept for reading, study and consultation.

2- The term is used for a place, building, room or rooms set a part for the keeping

and use of a collection of books, etc.

3- Refer to a collection of programs or routines that are used frequently by

application programs or system programs. For example, if five users

frequently use the same routine, such as a square root functions, then one copy

of the routine is put into a "library" and accessed as required instead of each

user having to program a square root function every time it is wanted.

Source (Encyclopaedia of Information and Library Science 1993,Vol.6.pp)

World Wide Web (WWW): The World Wide Web (WWW) is a navigational

and retrieval system that helps users locate information on the Internet and

displays that information on their computer. By using a Web browser one can

retrieve and view documents digitally stored on computer networks from around the world.

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Source (http://www.lf.org/technology/basics.html)

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Organization of the Report

This report is divided into five chapters. The introduction includes a general background, the statement of the problem, the objectives, research questions, limitations, assumptions and definition of terms. The second chapter covers the literature review on the impact of the Internet on different library functions, changes in the role of the library and librarians, and the future of the library profession. The third chapter discusses the methodology used. The fourth chapter presents the analysis of the results. The study ends with findings, recommendations and conclusion.