

Potentiality of E-books as important electronic resources in college libraries

Dr. Abira Chakraborty. Librarian. Lady Brabourne College. Kolkata – 17

Abstract :

We, in the journey of our life, are the witness to a revolution – the revolution in the discipline of electronics, communication and computer science. We are now living in an electronic world or digital world. Naturally, the types of collection of academic libraries has also changed. Traditional college library collections were based on paper documents. Now, print documents alone cannot satisfy user's demand fully. The user, through internet and various other 'e-sources', has a much wider and bigger access to gather information regarding his or her requisite query. Today, most of the college libraries can be considered as a 'hybrid library'. Their collections are a mixture of conventional print materials and electronic materials – e-books, e-journals etc. Users, particularly in college libraries, still prefer to use print documents in comparison to e-documents. This attitude may be attributed to the 'inertia' or habit of using print documents for years. We, library professionals, have a definite role to help users to overcome these mental barriers immediately.

Today, no academic work is possible without consultation of e-documents. This article highlights on Types of e-books, Merits and Demerits of e-books, A small sketch of an ideal digital college library, The scenario of Lady Brabourne College Library, and finally, what should be the objective and focus of a college library regarding procurement and usage of e-documents.

Key Words : Information, e-books, e-journals, e-documents, College library resources, Digital college library.

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Introduction :

Library is an important area of an educational institution. The fundamental function of a college library is to assist institution's education by supplying right information at right time to its users. Till today, in our country, college libraries' collections are mostly based on paper based materials – printed books, journals etc. However, at present, the holding of college libraries is not only confined to paper documents; electronic documents also have made their entry into the library collection. The advancement in science and technology has changed the traditional concept of library. Simultaneously, the role of library professionals has shifted from knowledge manager to information service provider. Modern libraries are gateway of infinite information available in unrestricted way and in unlimited formats. Now, most of the college libraries are 'hybrid' libraries, which is a mixture of traditional print materials, electronic materials and web information. Due to rapid development in computer and communication technologies, it has become imperative for a library to pay attention to its e-collection and make a proper use of it.

E-book :

An e-book is the digital media equivalent to a conventional printed book.

In digital world, e-books can exist in many formats. The varieties may be –

- A print book in e-format, which is known as e-book or e-hybrid book.
- A print book with URL's directing readers to the web for supplementary or full text materials.
- Only electronic production of a piece of information that enhances text with images, audio and video.
- E-reference book available through net with text, images, audio and video, which is updated continuously to supply current information.
- E-book available only on internet in digital form – it may be free or on subscription basis.

Merits of E-books :

College libraries should emphasize their subscription more on electronic documents than print documents due to following advantages –

- The availability of required information is quicker in e-documents than print documents.
- E-books are easily accessible. These can be consulted from everywhere.
- E-books are portable for every user.
- Multimedia is integrated in case of e-books.
- Delivery of e-books is possible at the moment of demand.
- E-books save the shelving space, because, there is no need of physical storage for e-books.
- E-books can fulfill the purpose of learning through electronic media to both campus-based and distance learning readers.
- Rare books are available to readers in digital form.

Demerits of E-books :

The purchase of e-books has not got priority in college libraries till now due to certain disadvantages.

- There is no fixed physical dimension in case of e-books and the required hardware components are fragile and non-flexible. Most of the college library personnel are not technologically sound enough to keep abreast with the requirement of frequently changing hardware component. Naturally, conventional “printed book” purchase gets priority.
- In most of the cases, the downloading of full-text e-books and e-journals are expensive.
- Sometimes, there is a lack of compatibility between different hardware and software of using titles.
- Sometimes, subscription policies are different and difficult to understand in case of e-books.

- Without electricity, e-documents are not readable, but, this kind of dependency does not arise in case of printed books.
- Continuous reading of e-books for a prolonged period of time can cause adverse physical effects and medical complications to the reader.
- Faults of hardware or software cause malfunctioning of e-documents.
- E-documents may increase the threat of plagiarism in research works.
- Piracy is the most common and biggest problem of e-books.

An ideal digital college library :

An ideal e-resources library should possess only electronic materials or digital materials in its collection. To be termed as “electronic” or “digital”, a library should have the following characteristics –

- *Materials available in Electronic / Digital Formats* - Digital library resources may include converted materials from printed works, original electronic publications and multimedia resources.
- *Organization of resources* - The collection of electronic resources should be properly selected and organised to render prompt and easy access to its users.
- *Networked environment* - Digital libraries work in an electronic networked environment. They provide information through hyper linking facility. For this, proper infrastructure to create network (LAN / WAN) environment is mandatory to provide universal access.

Besides these, library staff should have proper training to handle the electronic resources of their library. Users should also have knowledge, or get oriented through training to use the electronic resources effectively.

Digital library functions :

The most important functions of an electronic library are the followings –

- To provide friendly interface to users.
- To make available required materials through networking facilities to every user.
- To support and improve regular library functioning.

- To enhance advanced search, access and information retrieval.
- To provide faster and prompt library services.

Management techniques :

The management techniques of electronic/digital materials are quite different. The main components of digital collection management are – Metadata management, Content servers for storing and serving multimedia objects, and Web server for the presentation of library content. The main activities of library management include Acquisition, Bibliographic control, Maintenance, Collection development and Access facilities.

For acquisition, libraries have to keep close contact with research communities, where the materials are created and disseminated. It is necessary to decide that which documents are needed by users in print version and which are required to be accessed remotely. A system need to be designed to establish control links between electronic publications.

The scenario of Lady Brabourne College library :

Lady Brabourne College, is one of the premier institutions for women's education in India. Established in 1939, it is named after the wife of Lord Brabourne , the Governor of Bengal.

The library is situated in the first floor of the building. The library has two sections – one is main library and the other is library annex. Apart from the main library and library annex, each department also has a seminal library. The library is enriched with collection of more than one hundred thousand of printed materials, which includes text books, reference books, journals, magazines and old, rare documents. The collection also includes electronic materials - CDs, Floppies, on-line resources etc. This library is partly automated and the work of automation is going on using open source software 'KOHA'.

The college has subscribed the membership of N-LIST programme. Through this programme, students and faculty members can get benefit of the resources of e-books and e-journals of INFLIBNET for their consultation. But, it has been noticed that users' demand are focused more on print documents than electronic documents in our college too.

Conclusion :

Electronic materials i.e., e-books, e-journals etc do not make majority of their share in college libraries' collection till now. The demands of users are, till now, usually more on print documents than electronic documents – although the scenario appears to be changing. The acceptance of e-documents in college libraries is gaining momentum in India as well as West Bengal. Students, faculty members and other staff members prefer the use of e-documents, because, e-documents provide hyper-linking, cutting, pasting and printing facilities.

Users of college libraries, especially in West Bengal, are more habituated to consult print documents than e-documents. The demand for print documents may be due to non-availability of sufficient electronic documents in college libraries. It has been noticed that most of the college libraries of West Bengal have little or no infrastructure to procure and use only e-documents. Owing to poor financial strength, they can hardly accommodate required hardware and software components to give electronic service to their users efficiently. Moreover, library people, in most of the cases, are not technologically up-to-date to deliver electronic service to users with the desired degree of efficiency.

In spite of these barriers, the demands of e-documents in college libraries are increasing day-by-day. Students belonging to newer generation are eager to use e-documents, and demands for e-documents are on the rising mode amongst them. Presently, research works are also practically impossible without consultation of e-books and e-journals.

It is obvious that in near future all academic libraries – belonging to school, college and university, will have to switch over their most of the collection to digital form. Traditional libraries will get transformed to 'Digital library' gradually.

To enhance the usage of e-books, e-journals in libraries, we, librarians, have to take certain conclusive, well-thought, definite steps. Only then, we shall be able to justify the role of library as a "repository of knowledge" of the present day. To remain abreast with the demands of time, librarians have to increase the collection of e-books in college libraries. They also have a role to build awareness among the members of the library regarding the e-book collection of the library. Library professionals must develop innovative policies and processes regarding procurement of e-books. They should be up-to date to the technologies to accommodate the publication and access to e-books. For betterment of usage, e-books should be included in the curriculum at various levels.

To switch over the traditional college library to a modern digital library, there are certain barriers, which a librarian faces everyday. The biggest barrier is the hesitation of a large number of users to use e-documents, arising primarily out of their habit or inertia of using print

documents as their sole or major source of information. Librarians should organize information literacy programs to develop awareness regarding e-books. Administrators should give more emphasis on purchase of e-documents. Publishers should emphasize to produce more e-books and make their products (print books) available in electronic form simultaneously.

It is obvious that in near future all academic libraries – belonging to school, college and university, will have to switch over their most of the collection in digital form. Traditional libraries will get transformed to 'Digital library' gradually. E-books will take lion's share of library collection in coming days. Without an e-collection, no library will be able to satisfy users' demand in this fast changing world.

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