Impact of Electronic Publishing on Collection Development

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Abstract

This article discusses the definition of Collection Development in IT environment. Problems of collection development in traditional libraries and how it can be tackled in IT environment are also discussed. Finally the problems faced by the library and information centres in procuring electronic publications are mentioned.

1. INTRODUCTION

Libraries have always been dependent on development in the publishing industry and in scholarly research and communication. Changes in this industry have a direct impact on the information systems and services. Technology has altered the mode of publication in such a way that though the traditional sources of information continue to be produced, by and large information market has been flooded with the attractive electronic form of publications. Care must be taken that these alternatives to library are not glorified as able to perform information services are limited or bound by any traditions. The library must take initiatives to take a lead in the exploitation of electronic information sources, at the same time acknowledging the problems in doing so.

Electronic sources present the following problems:

- Integrating them with more traditional forms,

- Costs of acquisition versus access,

- Determining what 'collection development' really means in the electronic environment.

The role of collection development in dealing with distributed electronic sources may be little different from the print-on-paper world. This perhaps raises the biggest question of all as to what does the future hold for collection development? This needs to be speculated based on the trends in this specially.

The most important stage regarding the evolution of electronic publishing is from the early 1960s to the present and to be continued into the future. This has an impact on creators (authors), producers, distributors, intermediate users (library & information centres) and end-users. This article concerns with its impact on the intermediate users.

In the 1960s, the electronic distribution of information sources had a limited impact because it largely took the form of distribution via magnetic tapes for use on large mainframe computers. The impact increased dramatically in the 1970s as online networks came into being and continued to increase as the network expanded, costs reduced and the volume of resources available on online multiplied. In the 1980s, various forms of electronic publishing

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were available and accessible via conventional computer networks or television while others could be distributed in tapes and discs including CD-ROMs. By 1990s, tele and satellite communication has widened the scope of electronic information access.

This ability to access sources online has a profound impact on the economics of information acquisition (collection development) and customer services, bringing in the cost-benefit factor. A system's effectiveness (quality) can be interpreted in terms of its capability to achieve its goals and objectives. The capability is defined in terms of its utilisation and utilisation depends on the value or benefit of its users and ultimately the beneficial effects tend to increase as the resources increase.

A vast majority of libraries all over the world, including both the developed and developing countries, suffer from economic pressure. Inflation and escalation of prices have caused many problems in the library and information centre's (LIC) acquisition policy, particularly on journal subscription. This has resulted in inadequate collection.

Another defect from which most of the LIC's collection suffer from is that of its uptodateaess. The user group's major worry and complaint of the LIC is that its collection lacks currency besides the fact that they are under stocked/inadequate. Amongst the varied reasons contributing for this situation, the most relevant one in this context that can be identified is the static quality. Once produced, the text in print forms cannot be altered and rearranged, though it can possibly be highlighted.

The third problem is that 'library is a growing organism'. The LICs suffer from space problem. The traditional printed material, particularly those, that are over-sized like newspaper collection, not only occupy large space, but also they are heavy in weight to be stored in shelves and on upper floors and above all to be handled by the users. This creates a negative effect on collection maintenance. Preservation of old and rare printed materials are perennial problems for collection managers. This situation has

warranted the LICs to take serious steps to maintain the conventional collection of information sources.

The key question is the need to restructure LICs' policy decisions and procedures of collection development to accommodate the emerging technologies. The need, cost speed and users' satisfaction are the essential factors determining collection development. DW Lewis points out that users will demand more from the LICs than they have in the past Qualitative services are expected, failing which, LICs in their central role as providers and organisers of information, cannot survive and will become less valuable/beneficial to its user community. Margaret Johnson opines that 'LICs will no longer be regarded as the focal point for information any more if it slips outside their purview. The library's significance to the administration and function of its parent body will diminish'. If this is allowed to happen, it is easy to predict a decline in library funding as well.

FW Lancaster raises the question that 'given that the library must continue to take a lead in the exploitation of information sources in electronic form, what exactly does this imply for collection development?'.

In the electronic environment, a publication need not be 'owned' to be readily accessible. Many sources of information can be made available to the user community that could not be available if the library were'to acquire or purchase and store the same. The above said problems can be controlled by developing electronic information access. An electronic collection can be more flexible and dynamic, leaving wider variety {world's information resources) and choice of selecting only that part of the document (a page or an article) that is relevant and the whole source need not be acquired.

The interesting feature of this environment is its speed and quality. The delivery of information is so expeditious that the fourth law is effectively operational. The search options for an item are much easier and simplified. Location of an item in the machine readable

form is quicker than that of the conventional printed shelf collection.

It has also been pointed out that 'collecting electronic information is more problematic than collecting printed documents. Also collecting printed documents is not without it problems as well'. Nevertheless, collection development, whatever form it takes, still requires policies and strategies governing the acquisition program. Simply duplicating the collection practices evolved for print materials in the network environment does not seem responsive to current needs or capabilities.

An obvious challenge in developing countries is the problem of how to integrate electronic resources with traditional forms. The need for total integration cannot be taken for granted as most of the LICs and library professionals have taken up. It has been pointed out that the future LICs must be a combination of 'actual' and 'virtual' materials (The 'virtual collection' is an electronically browsable collection). The next century collection shall be an accumulation of information-bearing objects • printed, aural, graphic and digital * housed within the physical library; and also indices, abstracts and catalogues through which, using electronic channels, the library user has access to pre-iden lifted resources held by other libraries and information providers.

One major problem the developing countries experience is the cost factor involved in acquisition and access of electronic sources. Though they are very popular with the library users, yet they tend to be more expensive than their printed counterparts, particularly with regard to the accessory or supporting infrastructure facilities. It is true, that electronic resources are economical in space. However, space economy cannot compensate for the financial increases elsewhere. Though the telecommunication and computer technologies have largely declined in their cost factor, such reductions do not apply to all the information technologies concerned with the LICs.

Another problem is the lack of ownership (only access) of resources to claim funds from the concerned authorities. The funding bodies must realise that electronic information resources are leased rather than owned, and others do not exist in the library at all. In the changing context, if the LIC's funding is not increased, they tend to become useless.

Another problems facing the collection development issue are identified as:

i) Finding out what is available;

li) Evaluating the sources available; and,

iii) Acquiring and servicing the sources required.

The electronic information sources not having adequate bibliographic control, are not easily located, and are not well reviewed. Electronic documents are so fluid, interactive, and are changed frequently and not owned by any library, that the concept of evaluation has totally changed from that of the print-on-paper.

More than collection building, it is the provision of access which has gained significance. Technology has i profound beneficial effect on resource sharing programs. LIC's activities are no longer individualised but a collective approach is absolutely essential in the electronic environment. Acquisition policies of individual LIC's must weigh the merit of acquiring by cooperative venture and the funding bodies must come to accept this type of collection management. And also the vendors of commercial products must understand the imperative facing LICs to enter co-operative venture.

Implementation of innovate technologies that have revolutionised the LIC's operations is widespread. All the LICs in developed nations have totally shifted to electronic environment and those of them in the developing countries are in the process of marching towards the new electronic environment to find their place and fit into the changing information society, with all its limitations.

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