

Library Electronic services in Ahmed Al-Farsi Library: a simulated approach

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ABSTRACT

Academic libraries have important factors in the process of learning among other factors of education and research. Due to the new electronics technology development and new electronics storage media for storage and dissemination of information, Libraries are reengineering its services; we speak about electronic references, full text data access, Web resources, that are integral part of education in the electronic environment. E-services can be used by both consumers and businesses, and can be accessed via a wide range of information appliances (Hoffman, 2003, p.53). This paper focuses on the challenges that e-services are posing and will pose for research purpose. The study has focused on the issues that University of Bahrain (UOB), College of Health Science (CHS) library has had to deal with as a result of e-services adoption as well as the future challenges that e-services provide for CHS, Ahmed Al-Farsi Library (AAFL). The study is based on a number of conversations with UOB library management & staff and information provided on the Web page. The librarians also have to adapt to this new development for e-delivery and storage and dissemination of information, to form and to inform about the e-resources for learning. We have to develop added value services to the role of library as a key factor in learning.

Keywords: Electronic Services, Digital Library, ICT, E-resources, Information Dissemination

Introduction

The networked ICT technologies (such as the Internet) are having a dramatic effect on how services and especially knowledge services are revolutionized, intended, produced and

distributed. In addition ICT-networks such as the Internet have created the basis for the development of new types of services. E-services are defined here as services that are produced, provided and/or consumed through the use of ICT-networks such as for example Internet-based systems and mobile solutions. E-services can be used by both consumers and businesses, and can be accessed via a wide range of information appliances (Hoffman, 2003, p.53). E-services include also selling of physical goods on the Internet as for example an airline ticket that is purchased online, but delivered by surface mail to the buyers or e-government. There are three main characteristics of e-services:

- The service is accessible across the Internet or other electronic networks
- The service is consumed by a person across the Internet or other electronic networks

Normally the production, provision or consumption of a service requires the interaction between the service provider and the user of the service. Traditionally this has been based on personal interactions, most often face-to-face interactions. In e-services, the production, consumption and/or provision of services takes place through the intermediation of an ICT-network such as Internet-based systems or mobile solutions. Examples of e-services are e-banking, e-library services, e-publishing, airline tickets, and e-government, information and location services. The advent of e-commerce and e-services has raised a number of challenges for knowledge intensive service organizations such as consulting companies, libraries and publishers, as well as for companies selling physical goods.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the challenges that e-services are posing and will pose for research purpose. The study has focused on the issues that University of Bahrain, College of Health Science (CHS) library has had to deal with as a result of e-services adoption as well as the future challenges that e-services provide for UOB Library. The study is based on a number of interviews with UOB library management & staff and information provided on the Web page.

PURPOSE

In order to understand how digitalization and e-services are changing the library and its activities it is important to understand what a library is, and what its major roles in learning are. According to Gladney, H. M, et-al(1994) Digital Libraries is defined as “a digital library service is an

assemblage of digital computing, storage and communication machinery together with software needed to reproduce, emulate & extend the service provided by conventional libraries based on paper and other material means of collecting, storing, cataloguing, finding and disseminating information. Marchionini and Maurer (1995) distinguish three major roles that academic and research libraries serve in learning.

The first role is sharing expensive resources. These resources are physical resources such as books, periodicals, media, and human resources such as the librarians that provide a number of responsive and proactive services.

The second role that libraries serve is a cultural role in preserving and organizing artefacts and ideas. Libraries have historically had the role of preserving material to make it accessible to future learners in addition to ensuring access to materials through indexes, catalogues and other aids that allow users to find what they need.

The third role of the library is that of serving as a physical knowledge space, where people meet to study and read and often to exchange ideas.

Features of Digital Library:

Cleveland (1998) describes some characteristics of digital libraries that have been gleaned from various discussions about digital libraries (DLs), both online and in print:

DLs are the digital face of traditional libraries that include both digital collections and traditional, fixed media collections. So they encompass both electronic and paper materials.

DLs will also include digital materials that exist outside the physical and administrative bounds of any one digital library

DLs will include all the processes and services that are the backbone and nervous system of libraries. However, such traditional processes, though forming the basis digital library work, will have to be revised and enhanced to accommodate the differences between new digital media and traditional fixed media.

DLs ideally provide a coherent view of all of the information contained within a library, no matter its form or format

DLs will serve particular communities or constituencies, as traditional libraries do now, though those communities may be widely dispersed throughout the network.

DLs will require both the skills of librarians and well as those of computer scientists to be viable.

Ahmed Al-Farsi Library, CHS

Ahmed Al-Farsi Library (AAFL) was established in 1976 through a generous donation given by Shaikhan Ahmed Al-Farsi. Ahmed Al -Farsi library is located at College of Health Sciences Bahrain, University of Bahrain (UOB); the college of health sciences is the only provider of high quality, efficient and comprehensive health care training for nurses and allied health professionals in Bahrain. The college was established in 1976 and has developed both new facilities and new programs since then continually responding to the changes in demand from the health care industry.

Today the library has total collection of 25,000 books in print. However they expectation of new books in print is reducing, due to the digitalization process and e-services adoption, while the number of e-books to go up especially as the quality of e-books improves. In addition AAFL counts today approx 11,000 e-journals, while the number of paper journals has gone down has decreased. The adoption and implementation of e-services and self-services has resulted into a number of organizational changes, changes in the organizational structure, the competencies of the librarians and relationships between the library and the publishers and the library and the users. AAFL is moving towards a combination of physical and virtual library, as many services are getting transformed into e-services and self-services. Therefore Internet and e-services might change many aspects of the library and its relationships with users and publishers.

E-Services implementation at AAFL

Over the last few years AAFL has adopted a number of e- services and self-services that are changing many aspects of the way the library operates. Many of the services provided by AAFL have been transformed into e-services after the number of e-services and Web based self-services. The main e-services offered at AAFL are as follows:

1. Access to electronic journals

2. Access to electronic books
3. OPAC
4. Bookmyne
5. Online book reservation

Examples of self-services include:

1. A self-service system for the online registration of research and other activities of the teachers.
2. Online reference search, online reservation of material available in the library, etc.

The Library is also working for archiving the bound journals in digital form with help of IT staff.

Organizational change

The digitalization process has changed the structure of UOB organization in several ways. First of all, a new organizational level, a management level has been introduced that can make the organization look more hierarchical than before, but it cannot really be compared with a classical hierarchical structure. In addition such a management level is mainly dealing with library development and with political issues. Most importantly the division of labor has changed. Especially the number of IT-related jobs has grown; for example 10 years ago UOB had 6 employees dealing with IT, while today they employ 20 people in the IT department. While 2 employees are placed at CHS. The IT department is expected to grow in the future in special fields. In addition almost everybody in the library has to be IT literate and librarians have to grow together with IT, as the trend goes fast. Each employee is participating into several projects, mostly dealing with e-services and e-services development.

This is because the adoption of e-services and self-services has decreased the need for competences such as the classical librarian, as more and more services that earlier were done by UOB employees are now done by the users of the library. There is a shift from the librarians to the users in the production-consumption of (e-) services. The use of e-services and self-services is

increasing; 80-85% of the users of the library are using e-services and self-services. Earlier they needed 2-3 librarians at the reference desk, now one is enough. Due to all the organizational changes, this is causing resistance among the employees and users of e-services.

Most of the patrons of AAFL are happy to adopt the change and keen to learn electronic library.

Patrons

Since the introduction of e-services and self-services the relationships with the users of the libraries have changed immensely. The number of users coming to the physical reference desk is decreasing quickly, while the number of inquiries at the virtual desk is increasing; that's the reason daring me to say E-patrons, yet the total number of inquiries is decreasing, and in addition the user behavior is changing as well. While paper books are still important for the readers, the total number of library loans is decreasing and the number of downloads of e-books is increasing. This trend is also observed for the journals. While AAFL still has a substantial number of paper journals, more and more downloads of e-journals articles are taking place. They expect that the loans of physical books and journals will not be important in future and that most of the material login to the library can access the e-services 24/hours per day, 7 days a week no matter where they are. So they will have everything they need on the computer. Some things are printed, but others are not. E-services are making it easier and quicker for users to find, store and analyze such knowledge. In addition e-services are making it easier for more users to get access to the same piece of knowledge or information. In fact if only one user at a time could get access to a specific journal in print form, in electronic form many users can get access to the same journal, article, or book chapter simultaneously. In addition e-services are pushing customer relationships towards a virtual form. This is the case both regarding the relationship user-librarian and the relationship among the library's users.

Future Trends

There are many challenges laying ahead for AAFL. AAFL will continue to exist and keep the role of library as an information centre, but the way the information and

knowledge is provided will change. AAFL will still face several organizational and technological challenges in the future.

Application of Web2.0 technology there are many types of Web 2.0 technologies that can be used in combination to provide better services in academic libraries. One of the most useful combinations of these is social bookmarking and RSS feeder services. The “adequacy of instructions on how to use RSS” is also important as it enabled users to easily subscribe to RSS feeds of libraries. This feature was measured by the availability of explanation on what RSS is, how to find RSS feeds in library web sites and how to subscribe to an RSS feed. Even more importantly Web 2.0 technologies allow libraries the opportunity for more outreach activities and customizing their online presence for their patrons, helping “create new resources for their users” (Bradley, 2007, p. 8).

Standardization: is another technological challenge. Patrons want fast response and AAFL is working on this by looking at standardization issues and they have to keep doing so also in the future. Standards are very important for library’s e-services.

Copyrights: copyrights of what can be digitized are a big barrier to further e-services development and especially use by the customers.

Library patrons: Another future challenge comes from the library users. The users are becoming much more advanced and sophisticated in their online searches, young people have a lot of ideas about how to do things better. Here the challenge is to understand their needs and implement user-driven innovations in e-services.

Execution of Web 3.0

The way of working in the library is changing, therefore the type of competences needed might change moving more towards IT specialists and going away from the

classical librarians skills. Disagreement on e-services future development between the different groups in the library is also a major organizational and human resource challenge, even though most AAFL's employees like e-services.

Conclusion:

The article describes about the role of e-services in AAFL Library with fast emerging new technology, emerges is one of fast innovation, big transformations and change at organizational, as well as in the relationships with customers, publishers and other research libraries. In addition there are a number of challenges that AAFL has to face in the future in response to e-services. Some are IT-related; others have to deal with copyrights, licenses, standardization, and user-driven innovation. The general trend is that AAFL is becoming a combination of a virtual and physical library, moving more and more towards a virtual library by providing resources and knowledge mainly in digital form.

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