

THE VIRTUAL LIBRARY: CHALLENGE AND SERVICES

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Abstract: - *This paper highlights the virtual library and the virtual library services. It describes the services and challenges of virtual library in India. Recently many libraries are providing their services to users by virtual library services. Technological devices and Internet are major components to access the virtual library. Everyone can access information from virtual libraries through remote communication, so that virtual libraries are playing the main role in order to provide quick information. Therefore, the importance of virtual libraries at the academic level cannot be denied.*

Keyword: *Virtual library, Virtual reference service,*

Introduction

The information need of user arises from his work environment and keeps changing over time. The present era is devoted to digital information and is mainly demand and consumption in electronic form. Demand for digital information is the main basis of Web 2.0 and its meaning is the second generation of the Internet. The first generation of the Internet was based on reading only, but Web 2.0 has brought communication to new heights without being limited to reading. It facilitates social interaction and collaboration for the user.

Accepting the challenge of time, the library has also started extending its physical version to virtual version. The library has been affecting

with the services of Web 2.0 technologies and becoming Library 2.0 to support the emerging virtual communities. Library 2.0 is “a model for library service that encourages constant and purposeful change, inviting user participation in the creation of both the physical and the virtual services they want, supported by consistently evaluating services” (Casey and Savastinuk, 2006). Now libraries are connected with users in more interactive and collaborative manner. It has started perform all the tasks using technology and providing its services in both print and electronic form to the users. (Maness, 2006) also indicated that “library for the twenty-first century, rich in content, interactivity, and social activity”.

Concept of Virtual Library

Library is a services oriented organization, without the services library have no existence and it becomes necessary for library to be fulfill the user's requirement at the right time and the right place. (Accart, 2006) also highlighted that “in order to survive, libraries must attract their current users, and of course new people”. This objective can be achieved by providing virtual library service to the users. Virtual library defined by (Farha, 2001) as “Library without walls, where a user can remotely access the library's collections, resources and services, located within and outside the physical boundary of that library.” (Gapen, 1993) discussed the virtual library as “the concept of remote access to the contents and services of libraries and other information resources, combining an on-site collection of current and heavily used materials in both print and electronic form, with an electronic network which provides access to, and delivery from, external worldwide library and commercial information and knowledge sources”. On the basis of above definitions the author can say, the virtual library provides access to collections, resources and services in both print and electronic form to all without restrictions of time and geographical position.

Virtual Library Services

Libraries have given a new shape for the traditional service, which name is the virtual services. Through virtual services it provides all services in electronic form without limitation of

geographical boundary and it allow to library staff and users to communicate with each other in real time with the help of communication technology by using the instant messaging, e-mail and other social services. Some of virtual services are discussed below:

- **Library Websites**

The website increases a greater visibility of the library at global level and makes the user aware to what the library has to offer. This allow the libraries to extend further their services outside the physical boundary of the library and user makes able to access the information or services from the library without taking a step outside of their doors. Website works as launch pad for variety of inter-related web based service. “web-based library services promotes the image of the library as an innovative, progressive, and integral to the commitment to excellent in education and research” (Halub, 1999). It is the best way to support value added services.

- **Library online Catalogue**

Catalogue provide rich source of data available in a particular library and increase the usage of the library resources. Dr. S.R. Ranganathan third laws is “every books its reader” and online catalogue fulfill this law through increasing the visibility. It has also given a great deal of freedom to library for share their catalogue at large scale. This method does provide a very detailed and rich source of information to the user.

- **Ask a Librarian**

Ask a librarian is the extend version of the reference librarian, where user clarify their queries through visiting the library. But, ask a librarian given an opportunity to user for communicate from anywhere and seeks needed information.

- **Chat**

Questions are answering as entering and maintain online conversation. This is not delay for the answer because it is real time conversation. So, user can get the response regarding queries in limited time.

Challenge in Virtual Library

User's requirement changes due to advancement of communication technology. Today's user wants authentic information instead of the full document at his desired place, for which library is moving towards the virtual version. Transition of libraries towards virtual services is facing big challenges in their efforts to building. Some challenges are discussed as below:

- **Technical infrastructure**

“Virtual library is that any person who has a computer and connection to the library networks can access not only the resources of that library but also variety of information available through national and international networks like internet and intranet without being physically present in library” (Kaliyammal & Selvi, 2004). To create a

virtual library first challenge is to develop or update the technical infrastructure to provide access of collections, resources and services. This infrastructure includes servers, telecommunication, systems and applications software. To maintain and develop these infrastructures, libraries need more financial and technical skill requirements.

- **Copyright**

The challenge here is the protection of the legal rights. It includes copyright, publicity, privacy and intellectual property etc. Copyright protects the intellectual works of owner. Virtual Library is effective in collecting and organizing information and knowledge in digital form, when the virtual library is providing the access to these information and knowledge, they need to serious concerns associated with the ethics of copyright and intellectual property protection.

- **Speed of access**

Another challenge in front of the virtual library is to provide an effective and quick access, because speed of access are greatly influenced the usages of resources and services. High speed of access attracts more users to use the services and it helps the library to convert those users to a permanent user.

- **Special skills**

To building digital library for providing value added services to their user, library staffs are require having the special skills of technology handling, collecting, organizing and distributing of resources in digital format.

Thus there are many challenges in the virtual library, but with the help of technology, training programs and outsourcing, the library can be well managed in the virtual version.

Summing up

The virtual library is not replacing the traditional library, but it is playing a supporting role in providing services to the user in interactive manner. It has offered improved access to the collections, resources and services of the library. User can connect with the library instantly and get the necessary information. To building the virtual library, librarian has facing some challenges. But these challenges are not so big in front of its features; they can remove through help of technology, training programs and outsourcing. Through this paper, author underlines the importance the virtual library and shows that this version of library will provide equal and universal access to resources.

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