

Internet Access and Use in Reference Services :

A Case Study in Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)

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Abstract - The aim of the study is to find out how the integration of the Internet contributed to the reference professionals and the reference services in an academic library in Malaysia. The study investigates the perceptions of reference librarians pertaining to the importance of Internet in reference work. The study had been conducted at Perpustakaan Sultan Abdul Samad (PSAS), a library in Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). The quantitative method is used whereby data are collected through questionnaire. This research is aimed to investigate the perceptions of reference librarians pertaining to the importance of Internet access and use in reference work. The result shows that the Internet has contributed effectively in their reference works and also encountering the queries with the quality information through the Internet use. The Internet also enhanced their productivity level. In short the respondents realize that the Internet services in PSAS, UPM was very effective and give high-quality impacts in doing reference works or activities. It can be showed that the reference librarians viewed Internet as a tool that gives a lot of benefits in their job and easy utilizing it compared to the printed materials assistance.

Keywords - Internet; Reference services; Reference Professionals; Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)

I. INTRODUCTION

A reference service is considered as one of the key activities in an academic library. The reference services works will assist users in finding, selecting and using various information sources and materials. Reference work is the branch of the libraries services which includes the assistance given to the reader in their search for information on various subject. It is a personal assistance given by the librarian to individual readers needing information. Librarians have used functional, ontological, bureaucratic or formal definitions (Kieft, 2008).

Technology has changed library and information services globally. It holds the key to the success of modernizing information services, not only does it introduces new ways of information handling, it also bring about change in the structure of information and its communication Rana (2009). The heavy use of the Internet in librarians' daily work is illustrated in the large percentage (90.8 per cent) of the replies to the question about the frequency of Internet use, which is used more than once per day (Semertzaki, 2007).

Most of the librarians and information professionals today turn to the Internet for providing the reference and research services. The other major use of the Internet in libraries is for the communication purposes and for delivering the information to the patrons. However, the Internet is also a powerful tool for the technical processing and management services in libraries. With the available printed traditional library tools, a technical service librarian can use Internet for advance, innovative and quick technical processing of the library materials. Acquisition librarians may use it in the selection of the library materials. A library manager uses it in decision making, library management and administration. Reference and research librarians are highly depending upon the Internet to respond the ready and long range types of reference questions nearly in all kinds of libraries (Sauers, 2001).

Reference librarians concern critical-thinking skills, emotional intelligence, teaching ability, and question analysis to connect the user with appropriate resources. Furthermore, it is involving face-to-face interaction between a patron and a librarian who answered every type of question from one or more multipurpose service points, prevailed throughout the "paper era." (Rao and Babu, 2001).

A reference service is considered one of the key activities in an academic library. Reference librarians assist users in finding, selecting and using various information sources and materials. To be more effective and efficient, they rely on a variety of printed and electronic sources to provide relevant and accurate information to their users. Another source that is becoming more and more popular among reference librarians is the Internet. It enables them to search, retrieve, request, receive, and download information from sources scattered all over the world. The Internet continues to have a profound effect in promoting the sharing of information, making rapid business transactions, and supporting global collaboration among individuals and organisations. As a result, a huge number of information sources are available through the Internet, coupled with the flexibility, speed and accuracy in information retrieval that have brought a revolution in information generation, access and utilisation (Abdoulaye & Majid, 2000).

The reference service works began when the reference librarians got questions about any subject studied or written, every adventure taken or every word spoken. A patron looks for hours and cannot find what he needs (Rodkewich & Vries,

2001). He turns the problems over to the reference librarian and ten minutes later there is an answer. To the patron it seems a miracle, but there is nothing supernatural about it. Traditionally, librarians have not been the producers of information that has been the work of the scholar. The job of the librarian is to sift through mountains of published resources and choose the best research produced to be gathered into a collection. Then they do to organize the collection so that it is usable. Finally they protect and preserve this collection for future generations. Selecting, collecting, organizing, preserving and sharing are the principles upon which a library is built (Mabry, 2001).

Recently, the effect of the Internet on reference services has attracted the attention of library and information researchers all over the world. Tenopir and Neufang (1992a; 1992b; 1995) and Tenopir and Ennis (1998a; 1998b) surveyed the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) in 1991, 1994, and 1997 respectively.

As all librarians know, the Internet is a wealth of public information. Many Web sites maintained by organizations and government agencies, as well as many private companies, offer vast warehouses of information. Such sites make the Internet an invaluable source of reference material. A library of any size using the Internet can access social service and health agencies, legal aid sources, museum and travel information, government sites, company information, and much more. All of this is free. Additional information is available through pay-access sites, such as the Electronic Library, and hundreds of online databases. The Encyclopedia Britannica can be accessed and searched online. Names, addresses, and telephone numbers can be located from national directories. Homework information and homework help can be found at thousands of places. Virtually any research topic can be found on the Internet, including articles from magazines and journals, newspapers, books, and proceedings. There are collections of thousands of books online in the public domain (Su, 2001).

II. OBJECTIVE

The objective of the study was to investigate the perceptions of reference librarians pertaining to the importance of Internet access and use in reference work. It covers the impact and contribution of the Internet access towards reference librarians in their daily operation.

III. METHODOLOGY

Questionnaire was chosen as the research instruments in data gathering. The respondents in this study comprise of the librarians and staffs from reference department of Perpustakaan Sultan Abdul Samad (PSAS) library, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). The experiences and ideas of librarians, the opinions and also perceptions of students and the available documentation on Internet and reference service are the units for the analysis.

IV. RESULT

A. Impact of the Internet

The result found from the respondents' opinions pertaining to the impact of the Internet use and access in their reference work. There were asked whether the Internet has increased reference librarians workload. The numbers of respondents which answer somewhat agree and agree that the internet has increased their workload in reference job are the same, which are 9 (25.7 %) respondents. 8 (22.9 %) stated disagree that Internet has increase their workload. 5 (14.3 %) strongly agree for this opinion and just 4 (11.4 %) of them strongly agree that Internet increase the workload. This result is in contrast with Abdoulaye and Shaheen (2000) that founded most of respondents disagree with the opinion.

The second aspect is related to the perception whether Internet have enabled reference librarians to work more effectively and efficiently. 19 (54.3 %) respondents agree that the Internet make their work easier and faster. 8 (22.9 %) stated strongly agree. 4 (11.4 %) respondents disagree with the statement and 3 (8.6 %) were somewhat agree. Only 1 (2.9 %) respondents strongly disagree with the statement. This result is similar with Abdoulaye and Shaheen (2000) which shows the majority agreed with the statement. The table below (Table 1) shows the result of the respondents' feedback on the question.

TABLE 1
Internet enabled to work more effectively and efficiently

Perception	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	2.9	2.9	2.9
Disagree	4	11.4	11.4	14.3
Somewhat Agree	3	8.6	8.6	22.9
Agree	19	54.3	54.3	77.1
Strongly Agree	8	22.9	22.9	100.0
Total	35	100.0	100.0	

Meanwhile the third aspect is pertaining to whether the Internet enhanced their productivity level. A majority of 24 (68.6 %) respondents agree and 11 (31.4 %) stated strongly agree. This is very much similar with Abdoulaye and Shaheen (2000) which the majority agrees and only a few disagree. The respondent realizes that the Internet services in PSAS, UPM was very effective and give high-quality impacts in doing reference works or activities.

B. Internet Contribution

Respondents were asked seven statements that determined their perceptions on the contribution of Internet on reference services. In the first statement, respondents were asked whether the Internet is capable to provide more options or abilities to reference librarians. 19 (54.3 %) agree and 16 (45.7%) strongly agree. The second statement; is the Internet enhanced reference services a great deal. Most of the respondents agree 21 (60.0 %) and strongly agree 14 (40.0 %). The third statement; is using the Internet could save their time in performing their daily tasks. It was found that 17 (48.6 %) respondents strongly agree. Meanwhile 15 (42.9 %) respondents agree and only 3 (8.6 %) choose somewhat agree.

The fourth statement is to find out whether the Internet allows reference librarian to use variety information sources (Table 2). Most of the respondents agree with the opinion which was presented 18 (51.4 %). 15 (42.9 %) strongly agree and 2 (5.7 %) of them disagree. The fifth statement; is the Internet usually provides more accurate information to the queries. 15 (42.9 %) respondents agree.11 (31.4 %) of them somewhat agree and 6 (17.1 %) strongly agree. Though 3 (8.6 %) respondents feels that the Internet is not totally provides accurate information to the queries. The sixth statement; does Internet allows reference librarian to connect people with information more efficiently and effectively (Table 3). Most respondents agree with the statement which presented by 23 (65.7 %) respondents and 9 (25.7 %) of them strongly agree. Meanwhile 3 (8.6 %) said somewhat agree.

TABLE 2
Internet allows reference librarian to use variety information sources

Perception	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Disagree	2	5.7	5.7	5.7
Agree	18	51.4	51.4	57.1
Strongly Agree	15	42.9	42.9	100.0
Total	35	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 visualizes the opinion pertaining the Internet allows reference librarian to use variety information sources.

TABLE 3
Internet allows reference librarian to connect people with information

Perception	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Somewhat Agree	3	8.6	8.6	8.6
Agree	23	65.7	65.7	74.3
Strongly Agree	9	25.7	25.7	100.0
Total	35	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 viewed that librarian are having good communication level in connecting their dearest users effectively.

The above six statements had been investigated by Abdoulaye and Shaheen (2000) and totally shows comparable result in their previous research study.

However, the statement of whether the Information from the Internet is less authentic or reliable than the printed sources; 14 (40.0 %) respondents stated disagree. 13 (37.1 %) respondents stated somewhat agree and 5 (14.3 %) agree. 3 (8.6 %) strongly agree with this statement. It can be showed that the reference librarians viewed Internet had given a lot of benefits in their job and it is easy utilizing it compared to the printed materials. Besides; the information in the Internet almost reliable if the reference librarians are knowledgeable to apply it in the best way. The finding had dissimilarity with the same author which the majority of 16 (41 %) respondents agree.

V. CONCLUSION

The study has shown the impacts and contributions of the access and use of Internet in reference services at PSAS library, UPM. Internet have a wide impact to the respondents whereby the majority of the respondents absolutely agree while using Internet has increase their workload rather than not using the Internet services. A large percentage of the respondents agreed that they could do their reference work effectively and efficiently via Internet services. Most of them agreed that Internet enhanced their productivity level. In short the respondents were realize that the Internet services in PSAS, UPM was very effective and give high-quality impacts in doing reference works or activities.

Internet has a wide contribution to the reference librarians whereby most of the respondents support that Internet capable to provide more options to reference

librarians. A majority of them stated Internet enhanced reference services a great deal. The respondents strongly agreed that using the Internet could save their time in performing their daily tasks. They also visualizes the opinion pertaining the Internet allows them to use variety information sources. It can be viewed that librarian are having good communication level in connecting with their users effectively. In the ICT era, the library professionals would benefit from the knowledge on the compensation of adopting Internet as valuable scholarly tool in academic library. It is significance to the practitioners in any academic libraries to realize that the Internet contribution will assist them in encountering the patrons. Besides, it is also beneficial for the society to become conscious that library professionals are giving the best information services to the dearest clients by using advance skills of Internet, Information Retrieval, Information Seeking and Searching.

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