DIGITAL REFERENCE SERVICES: WHAT DO USERS EXPECT FROM LIBRARIANS?

SOFIA AXONIDI
MA LIBRARIAN
s_axonidi@yahoo.gr

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Outline

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- Digital Reference Services
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From Reference Services to Digital Reference Services

The core service of traditional libraries is the Reference Service for clarifying the information needs of users.

The advent of new technologies was twofold beneficial for the libraries in order to evolve their services and be competitive with other providers.
Digital Reference Services (DRS):

▪ are the transition of the Reference Services to digital environment exploiting the potentials of web technologies (Chowdhury and Margariti, 2004).
▪ Lankes (2004) refers to DRS as “a network of expertise, intermediation, and resources out at the disposal of a person seeking answers in an online environment”.
▪ Reference and User Service Association (RUSA) focuses on users’ convenience to contact with the library without the time and place restrictions (RUSA, 2010).
Digital Reference Services

Types & Formats of DRS

Asynchronous
- E-mail
- Web forms

Synchronous
- Chat
- Instant messenger
- Video conferencing
- Learning forums
Digital Reference Services

Advantages of DRS:
- Availability for usage at anytime and anyplace
- Expanding the interactive learning of users
- Comprehensive answers from the staff
- Minimization of ambiguity through the written replies

Disadvantages of DRS:
- Absence of in person interaction, which in advanced inquiries may complicate the process requiring more details and delaying the process
- In asynchronous means, the immediate replies are not certain
- Costs
- Purchasing appropriate hardware and software (Dollah and Singh, 2009)
Digitallibraries are mainly defined by the spectrum of technical characteristics and not the services.

Sloan early in 1998 examined various definitions and pointed out the lack of human factor in digital libraries.

Choi (2006) said that “digital libraries has to be an information service center than being merely an information warehouse”.

Research Gap: the lack of personalized services for supporting directly the users in digital libraries.

▪ R.Q.1: Which are the current relations between users and librarians for retrieving information?

▪ R.Q.2: Which communication way between DRS or in person communication would be considered more accurate by users?

▪ R.Q.3: Which are users’ expectation from librarians in order DRS to operate effectively?
Methodology

- Qualitative methodology
- Research method: Case study
  - ESTIA, the Institutional Repository of Library and Information Center of Harokopio University
- Sample: Purposive and snowball
- Research technique: Interview
- Data analysis: Constant comparative analysis
Findings

Interviewees’ preferences to contacting with the staff of the library were detected in order their relation with the library to be investigated

- In person communication was the dominant
- Calling and sending e-mails was next
Findings

Comparing DRS with in person communication
Role of the library

▪ Evolving the promotion techniques

▪ “Many students ignore the services of the Library saying “Do Google”, [...] As the Library’s services exist, they have to be promoted [...] Many of us pass through the Library thinking that the staff will suggest only 3-4 books and that’s all. [...] I didn’t know that a Library has these provisions.”

▪ Librarians “are no longer gatekeepers of information” (Butler and Byrd, 2015) as information is easily accessible online. Their role has modified from providing plain answers, to stimulating the critical thought and guiding the researches (Butler and Byrd, 2015)
Expectations from the staff

▪ Collaboration with the professors to distribute the DRS to students
▪ Characteristics of librarians: willingness, skillfulness, supportiveness and familiarity with new technologies
▪ Dedicated staff for managing the requests through the DRS and provide apt replies
▪ Detailed job description with the precise duties of staff who will deal with the DRS
Conclusions

- The human factor is omitted while a digital library is built.
- Librarians, through DRS in digital libraries:
  - will provide a personalized support to distant users
  - will continue to literate users
  - will be able to stimulate their thoughts
- The competitive advantage of digital libraries to other digital providers can be the human intermediation
References


Digital Reference Services: what do users expect from librarians?

“people may well begin to believe that, as physical barriers to access to information are reduced through technological means, the services of the librarian are no longer as necessary”

(Sloan, 1998)

Sofia Axonidi
s_axonidi@yahoo.gr

Thank you!