From Editor's Desk

MEETING USER EXPECTATIONS

Institutions of all kinds are in a state of flux as a result of the impact of globalization and the Internet. There have been visible and fundamental changes in the ways in which we work, conduct our daily lives and interact with others. The changes are too strong and rapid and most of these changes are fuelled by developments in information and communication technologies (ICT) – computers, smart phones, and the World Wide Web. These technologies boost our capability to access, process, store, retrieve, and communicate information and have fundamentally changed the way we engage in work and recreation. Today's world is more networked than ever and countries and communities are much more interdependent on each other as a direct consequence of globalization, which itself is a product of developments in technology. The far-reaching developments brought about by technology in the past two decades have transformed the workplace, which is very different from what it was before the advent of the new technologies. This is true of every kind of institution – banks, schools, hotels, airlines, shops, governments, libraries, etc. Libraries are in the business of information storage and communication. Technology has come to affect practically every information activity - generation, transmission and communication, processing and storage, search and retrieval, accessing, dissemination and use of information.

Many have challenged the future validity and utility of libraries. The Wall Street Journal carried an item in 2014 with the caption, "Do people need libraries in the digital age?" Looked at in terms of their basic objectives, the goals of a library have not changed and continue to be defined by the Five Laws of Library Science of S. R. Ranganathan. It is difficult to find more succinct statements of the objectives of libraries of all kinds. The mission of libraries has been to advance learning by ensuring quick and enduring access to information resources. What is the future of libraries in this rapidly transforming society? It is difficult to look into the future unless we understand the past. Early libraries were the preserve of the aristocracy. It is primarily in the period following the Second World War – this

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is certainly true at least in so far as the developing countries are concerned - that the idea of the library as an agency to democratize access to information gathered strength thanks to the efforts and initiatives of organizations like IFLA and UNESCO. So libraries moved from a state where they were the exclusive preserves of a few to become more inclusive and provide access to information resources for all those who needed access to such resources.

Thus libraries of the 20th Century included a strand of social justice based on the notion of freedom of access to information for all (the Second Law of Library Science). In fact the core values of libraries were defined in terms of promotion of free flow of ideas and information through open access to recorded knowledge, through commitment to information literacy and through respect for diversity and individuality of people. However, because of the breathtaking changes that technology has brought about, libraries need to constantly reinvent themselves in order to remain relevant and keep up with technological advances –from scrolls to print-on-paper books to eBooks and to open access resources. Factors such as the digital revolution, the knowledge economy, are transforming the information landscape. The present phase of transformation is unlike the earlier phase of IT impacting libraries which resulted in automation of libraries. In the library automation phase the focus was on using IT for library management to improve the efficiency of the library. The utility, value or relevance of the library as an institution was not being questioned. The present phase of developments triggered by ICTs is fundamentally different as it has affected how people disseminate, publish, access and use information and information resources. While one need not agree with the suggestion that libraries are no longer needed in the digital world, it is important to take note of some major implications of such questions that are increasingly being raised:

- The traditional library is no longer the only or even the principal mechanism for people to find and access the information / information resources they need; several mechanisms have come into being, especially since the advent of the Web that threaten to replace the conventional library or function in parallel limiting the role of the conventional library. Web search engines and social media are among such mechanisms;
- Even if the library continues to be an important link in the communication process, it necessarily has to alter and modify its functioning so as to remain relevant in the rapidly changing information environment.

An issue that is very difficult for librarians to understand relates to the fact that the majority of the potential user population does not use the library to get information. Google and Wikipedia are among the first places users go to in search of information. There are a few studies by OCLC to suggest that many people get their information from human resources [1]. In other words many end users no longer build their information search workflows around the library as the world has moved far away from a situation where

information resources were scarce to a situation where there is abundant information and even information overload. As Dempsey [2] stated as early as in 2008, it is for libraries to build their services around users' workflow. People have come to use digital spaces quite extensively when in need of information and also the social media to stay in contact with friends and colleagues. There is even evidence to the effect that users are prepared to sacrifice content for the convenience of accessing information resources and manage with low quality content. The Google is widely used not because it retrieves the best quality resources, but because it is very easy and convenient to use. In an era where accessing information is no longer a major issue, the library needs to reinvent itself.

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