



Use of digital media and demand for digitized contents in higher education sector of Pakistan

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Abstract The use of digital media is on rise around the world and same phenomenon is emerging in Pakistan. The study was intended to explore the use of digital media and demand for digitized contents in higher education sector of Pakistan. The research questions were answered by a comprehensive literature review along with semi-structured in-depth interviews of 25 library experts. The findings conferred that the use of digital media in higher education is on rise and demand for digitized contents is growing increasingly. The findings of the study made a good case for the libraries to focus more on acquisition of information resources in digital formats as well as initiate digitization initiatives.

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Introduction

We are experiencing profound impacts of ICTs on every walk of life. The world is emerging as global village where people around the world are able to communicate real time in an interactive way. Societies are emerging as information and/or knowledge societies. Governments are transpiring as electronic governments. Hence, we are experiencing a digital transformation in our societies from an analogue world to digital one.

The use of digital media is on rise around the world and same phenomenon is emerging in Pakistan, a country with 175 million populations. Higher education sector received a profound attention of authorities in recent years. ICT

applications have widely been introduced in higher education institutions. Telecom sector of Pakistan received significant investment and emerged as one of the most developing sector in last decade.

Higher education sector is the most pivotal sector of information consumption. Smith (2008) mentioned numerous studies to demonstrate the increasing use of digital information sources by students from primary to graduate schools. Traditionally, academic libraries were engaged to collect information resources around the world to quench the information needs of the users. Libraries are, especially in higher education sector, the store houses of rich information resources but mainly in print. Digital information publishers recognise the very importance of these resources. This was the major reason that the most influential players of digital era e.g. Google, Microsoft, Open Content Alliance, etc. invested a large number of financial resources and joined hands with libraries to digitize their print information resources. Hence, it seems

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significant to seek the opinion of the library experts on the use of digital media and demand for information in digital formats in higher education sector of the country. The analysis will enable the library administrators, funding bodies, and decision makers to understand the emerging trends and prepare accordingly to meet the information needs of users effectively and efficiently.

Literature review

The review of literature relevant to the study covers relevant resources in published, unpublished, and electronic formats on digital transformation at large, increasing use of digital information, emerging information society in Pakistan, increasing use of digital information in Pakistan, and higher education institutions of Pakistan.

Digital transformation

The information and communications technologies (ICTs) enabling the global information and knowledge economy – so-called ‘Cyberinfrastructure’. The term used to describe hardware, software, people, organizations, and policies – evolve exponentially, doubling in power for a given cost every year or so, amounting to a staggering increase in capacity of 100–1000 fold every decade (Atkins, 2003). We are experiencing profound and rapid changes in economic, social, cultural and political spheres of our society. These changes are mainly fuelled by the development of information superhighways. The revolution of information technology and telecommunication sector has created a platform for the free flow of information, ideas and knowledge across the globe.

The countries around the globe are emerging as information and knowledge societies. There is an increased dependency on information and communication technologies worldwide. The development of information society core indicators (United Nations, 2008) presented a view of the global information society – and the picture is a highly consistent one. The study (United Nations, 2008) confirmed that developed economies in general, along with several developing economies in Asia, are presenting a promising development in information societies. Use of ICT in these economies is rising. United Nations with International Telecommunication Union organized World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in two phases i.e. Geneva in 2003 and Tunis in 2005 with the purpose to assess progress and prompt further global action to capture the promise of ICT for all (WSIS, 2005a, 2005b; World Summit on the Information Society, 2007). The ultimate goal of these activities is to transform this analogue world into digital one.

The electronic access to resources and services considered important in contemporary world. The world is experiencing digital transformation in terms of e-initiatives like e-health, e-government, e-democracy, information rich portals, digital libraries, etc. The basic factor in this transformation is the growth of telecommunication infrastructure. There is an unprecedented growth in the use of cellular phones, personal computers, networks, wireless networks, interactive television, PDAs and the like.

International Telecommunication Union (<http://www.itu.int/>) maintains a large number of reports, indicators and statistics about telecommunication. These indicators (International Telecommunication Union, 2009) revealed a prominent growth in ICT applications, teledensity, telephone (landlines and wireless) accessibility, etc. world over. Moreover, the results of the United Nations E-Government Survey 2008 indicated that governments are moving forward in e-government development around the world and infrastructure index reveals that investment in cellular phones has been dramatic over the past three years in both the developed and developing countries (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2008).

Asia and Pacific make the most populated region of the globe. Information society indicators of Asia & Pacific presented a very bright picture and prospects. The region showed a phenomenon growth in information society applications. In the last decade, the Asia and the Pacific region has experienced continuous ICT infrastructure development and service uptake, which have led the region to become a world leader in ICTs. By the end of 2007, the region accounted for 1.4 billion mobile cellular subscriptions, nearly 600 million fixed telephone lines, and more than 551 million Internet users, which accounted for 39 percent of the world total. From 2000 to 2007, the region added 415 million users, with an annual growth of 24 percent (compared to 19 percent globally) (International Telecommunication Union, 2009).

Increasing use of digital information

Information has been recognized the most vibrant force and factor of production in the contemporary economy. The world has witnessed an unprecedented global flow of information by virtue of development in ICTs. Developments in ICTs enable the conversion of information mainly in analogue formats to digital formats and disseminate among peers and virtual networks. The recent studies conceded that dependence on digital information is growing worldwide. The demand of digital contents influenced the landscape of information production and pushed the information publishers to switch from traditional print base information production to electronic information.

Digital information offers significant advantages in comparison with print resources. Digital information has common characteristics and qualities, regardless of whether the content is stored on DVD, CD-ROM or other storage media, and can be linked to other materials to create multimedia. It can be stored and delivered in a variety of ways and can be copied limitless times without degradation of the original (Hughes, 2004, p. 4). The generally accepted advantages of using digital information over print are: multi-access, speed, enhanced functionality, multimedia contents, re-useable information, ease in management, interoperability and cheap storage (Lee & Boyle, 2004, pp. 6–7). Harley (2007) explored the attitudes of humanities and social science faculty about the use and non-use of digital resources. The survey targeted 4443 faculty members of community colleges, University of California campuses and liberal arts colleges in California, USA. The survey revealed that instructors who use digital

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