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## What do they want? Millennials and role of libraries in Pakistan

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## ABSTRACT

The present study is aimed at determining the future role of libraries in Pakistan as perceived by the Millennials (people born during the 1980's and late 1990's) considering the current ongoing digital development. The quantitative research design, based on survey has been used for the study. The population consisted of students from large and medium sized general universities of Lahore, Pakistan. Stratified purposive sampling technique was carried out to select the pool of the subjects. A self-constructed and validated instrument was used to collect data. The collected data was analyzed using SPSS (16.0). The results revealed that Millennials want future libraries to allow easy access to a wide range of reading material in both print and digital form. They want to be able to round the clock access to electronic and print resources.

## Introduction

Libraries are supposed to play a vital role in meeting the information needs of civilized societies and can cater to the changing and increasing demands of the society and how the members of the society want to access information. The increasing use of digital information has posed certain challenges to information providers, especially the libraries. The digital revolution has produced a generation of technologically advanced and sophisticated people known as the “Millennials”.

Although different writers have classified generations with a slight difference in birth years, the earliest proposed year for Millennials is 1976 and the latest 2004. Millennials are also referred to as Generation Y, echo boomers, internet generation, iGen, and net generation.

It is commonly accepted that this generation prefers to interact electronically via e-mail and text messages rather than of face-to-face communication. This is largely due to easy access to latest information and telecommunication technology (ICT), such as laptops, personal computers, smartphones, wi-fi and social media. To stay connected with digital media has become a necessity whether it is work related or a social need. With this in mind, Gardner and Eng (2005) suggested that a separate framework is required to understand how academic libraries could be more responsive to the Millennials' needs as learners and researchers. This is important because this generation is different from other generations in terms of expectations, technological skills, multi-tasking abilities, and other strengths and weaknesses (Schofield & Honoré, 2010).

Along with the transformative shifts, the Net generation has been

going through changes in their reading practices. According to the results of a survey carried out by the National Literacy Trust in the UK, children were more inclined to have a cell phone than a book. The study indicated that a large majority (85.5%) of 7–16-year-old British children had their personal cell phones, as compared to 72.6% who had their own books (Paton, 2010).

Users around the world continue to flee the physical space and libraries, especially public and academic libraries appear to be in real trouble (Nicholas, Rowlands, Withey, & Dobrowolski, 2008, p. 5–6). Libraries are ought to offer online access to their information contents. They have to adapt according to the changing preferences of modern readers in order to sustain their value in a modern society. As noted by Smith (2008), “the contemporary users, internet generations, do not bother to go down basements or a dark attic to access the archival material located in library print resources. Users expect information of all kinds, and from all resources to be only a few key strokes away” (p. 11). There is a growing belief that the non-availability of electronic access to some information resource is the non-existence of the resource itself.

The virtual presence of the library has rendered its physical presence less important (Gannon-Leary, Bent, & Webb, 2008). Menchaca (2005) considered that online access to digital information is transforming intellectual communication and scholarship, while presenting complex challenges and opportunities to libraries and publishers.

In Pakistan, university libraries are meeting the challenges in a much better way than other types of libraries (Ameen, 2011). According to the Higher Education Commission (HEC) (2017) there are > 180 public and private universities and degree awarding

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institutions in Pakistan and all these institutions have their own libraries. In some cases, universities not only have their central libraries, but also departmental/subject libraries. HEC has set up a criterion for the establishment of new universities, both in the public and private sectors. Accordingly, a new university must subscribe to a certain number of current journals of international repute, have access to e-journals and a certain number of books from the main international publishers in the relevant fields (Higher Education Commission, 2007, p. 69). Higher Education Commission also offers funds to upgrade all public and private universities/degree awarding institutions allowing them to have online access to high quality international scholarly literature through the HEC national digital library program (Higher Education Commission, 2017). HEC offers access to > 30 databases and a range of E-books through Ebrary, Springer's and Project Muse and has also maintained a research repository of Pakistani PhD dissertations.

University libraries themselves also started digitizing literature i.e. thesis/dissertations, rare books and course materials etc. and building their own digital libraries (Rafiq & Ameen, 2013). Thus, in Pakistan the university libraries have physical collections as well as access to electronic material through HEC digital library and a limited number of digitized material.

Ameen (2006) argues that the size of collection in university libraries is somewhat better than other types of libraries in Pakistan, as university libraries get annual funds regularly for acquisitions. According to an old estimate by Khurshid (1993), university libraries in Pakistan hold more than a fifth of all the books in Pakistani libraries.

It is worth mentioning that currently the government of Pakistan is trying to promote library culture especially the e-library culture. The Punjab Government has announced that it intends to launch > 2000 digital libraries with free access to digital resources to the public (The News International, March 29, 2015).

Digital developments have significantly affected the social and academic environment of Pakistan. There is a rising concern about how libraries can stay relevant to this generation. How do they perceive the role of libraries in meeting the academic and other information needs? Libraries are faced with the challenge of playing their role in an effective manner in order to provide services to the youth in accordance with their demand for the availability of information in a certain form i.e. electronic form. Therefore, the current study was designed to investigate the perceptions of Millennials higher education students regarding future role of libraries.

## Literature review

A review of literature shows that the role of libraries is quite often under discussion and scrutiny. It is interesting that the changing role of libraries was foreseen about two decades ago when Marchionini and Maurer (1995) suggested that digital libraries have important roles to play in teaching and learning. They predicted that the schools and libraries will continue to exist and hold as much importance, as they serve cultural and social as well as informational roles, and the same holds true after two decades. Researchers further articulated that digital libraries will allow parents, teachers, and students to share common information resources and to communicate easily as needed. They were of the view that in many respects, digital libraries will become digital schools. This represents a return to Alexandria, in which learners came together to share and explore information, knowledge and skills. A local expert believed that libraries will remain important in future but will have to play a dynamic role as an integral part of the information super highway (Ameen, 1998).

Likewise, Jantz (2001) articulated the impact of e-books on academic library services. The author concluded that although we are at the early stages of the life of the e-book, there will be talking books, digital papers and electronic ink, and all these innovations will surely impact the library services. Martrell's prediction also seems to hold true as he stated, "we need to create a range of services unthinkable in the

twentieth century, but mandatory in the twenty-first century, if we are to provide society with the value-added services it will need from its professionals." Furthermore, when a student in ten or twenty years from now visits the (virtual) library, this action should have meaning that is distinct from the current one.

Covey (2002) investigated how students and the faculty perceive and use the entire information scenario. She concluded that librarians have to understand their job and iterative behavior of the research process. Librarians need to learn the required set of skills instead of relying on a trial and error approach. Library administrators are required to assess the library culture to identify the gap that exists between the present and the coming future. To fill the gap, change management theory could be applied. The author has suggested guidelines, best practices and standard instruments that may be used to make the best academic library.

Changing reading behavior and relevant challenges to libraries have been an area of concern for the last two decades. Tam and Robertson (2002) have suggested that in the digital paradigm, library and information service has to cope up with the change. They should also evaluate what changes and developments need to take place. They should carry out a pre-change analysis by investigating why changes need to be made and then set objectives. Further, there is a need to carry out a force field analysis by forecasting the likely impact of change: who will be affected by the change, and to what extent. The authors concluded that commitment and a willingness to adapt to the changing information environment will help ensure the survival of the libraries in this digital age.

In this context, Schmidt, Sennyey, and Carstens (2005) used the term "Open-access" and examined the prospective implications of open access on library operations. Authors defined the term "open access" to mean "free full-text scholarly articles and unrestricted to all users to read, copy, download, and distribute over the World Wide Web". The context of the examination took place assuming that the traditional model of publication and open access do exist. The results suggested that open-access sources were increasing at a fast pace. However, the traditional model would exist with the open-access model in future only when academic libraries would reconsider strategies applying a user centered philosophy. Authors recommended various ways of marketing their open-access libraries to their patrons, and stressed that it will be very important in the future to facilitate users with useful and reliable resources and more importantly there will be a need to communicate to the users about these resources.

Lynch (2005) explained that the idea of digital library was developed in the 1990s. However, the future role of digital libraries should not be evaluated only on a transactional basis but also on how information resources and services can play their role in the entire human lifetime, from early infancy to old age. The next decade for digital libraries might well be considered most profoundly by the shift from technologies and prototypes to the universal, immersive, and persistent placement of digital library technologies and services in the broader information and information technology landscape.

To compare the experience of research scholars and faculty members working in digital and physical libraries, Blandford, Rimmer, and Warwick (2006) conducted semi structured interviews. They discovered that future technologies could be used to promote positive user experiences. They believed that the new communication patterns should not try to replace those of the previous, but to increase human and technical competences by valuing both the physical and the digital elements of people's experience of books and other embodiments of our written culture.

In addition, Castelli (2006) discussed the future role of libraries in a digital environment and argued that in the future libraries will have to give access to a large variety of multimedia and multi-type documents from varied sources. The digital library will have to provide a controlled sharing of resources to cater to the level of user's satisfaction. Both, the consumers and producers of information will be the users of

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