

E-JOURNAL: COMING OF AGE

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ABSTRACT

Electronic Journals have now been recognized as a major link in scholarly communication. The timely publication, ease in delivery, incorporation of multimedia contents, hyperlinking and search facility etc. are some of the features which have attracted interest of both library and scholarly communities. The article deals with importance, definition, evolutionary trends and access of e-journal. It discusses along with advantages, the burning issues and challenges to the present and future library and information professionals. The article ends with the comment that the electronic journal is finally "Coming of age" as result of the explosion of Internet use, particularly World Wide Web technology.

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0 Introduction

The recent developments in information technology have changed the world scenario. Each and every aspect of human society has been affected by IT revolution and has opened new opportunities and challenges for all. The recent trends and advancements in IT have also imposed certain responsibilities and challenges on library and information Professionals. Now-a-days, the publishing industry is switching over from print media to electronic media. All most all the sources of information, especially the reference sources are now available on electronic media like online, CD ROM and Internet. Because of these advancements, media reaches the people in short time, at a less cost and occupies less space.

The 21st century is witnessing revolutionary impact on the publishing and information delivery systems due to the emergence of Internet, particularly the WWW as a new medium of information storage and delivery. A significant change in the global information process has been noticed in the publication of journals and other important information resources in electronic form. The electronic delivery of journals has resulted in elimination of paper, minimization of storage and transportation costs and the ease in handling complex data, tables, moving pictures, sound images and video clips. Further, unlike sequential design of printed papers, web technology makes it possible for the publishers to design things never possible in print such as interactive hyperlinks to related sources, links to full range of multimedia.¹

Although, increasing number of e-journals are beginning to appear on the web, their appearance has primarily been driven by the technology and its availability to the publishers

rather than its demand by the user. It is estimated that about 2250 e-journals are available free of cost over the Internet. Most of these are newsletters rather than journals, but 10% or more are scholarly. As a result of this, an important issue before the librarians is : whether to subscribe to printed or electronic journals. The issue is critical as major portion of a library budget is usually exhausted on the purchase of journals.²

1 Definition

There is no universally accepted definition of e-journal. Somebody calls it as 'Paperless Journal', some people say 'Virtual Journal' and some say as 'Online Journal'. The experts in these fields give the definitions on the basis of production, distribution etc. Before coming to definition of e-journal, we have to consider first the definition of a journal. According to ALA Glossary "a journal is a periodical especially one containing scholarly article and/or disseminating current Information on research and development in a particular subject field³." If this task is done by electronic media then it may be called e-journal. In other words, if the contents of a journal are produced and stored only in electronic form, then it is called e-journal. When the content of a journal is produced, stored and scanned in a database and then retrieved online, then is called "online" journal. Some specialists define e-journal as any serial produced, published and distributed nationally and internationally via electronic network such as INTERNET. David Pulinger and Brain Shakel (1990) defined e-journal as "e-journals are those whose text materials are directly entered by file transfer from a computer or by other transfer mechanism in a machine readable form, whose editorial processes are facilitated by computer and whose articles are available in electronic form to the reader⁴."

Thus, an e-journal is a journal that is published on-line. Many print journals are now releasing their online versions to subscribers.

- ?? Unlike a database that indexes several journals, e-journal collection is made up of single journals that have to be searched one at a time.
- ?? The majority of e-journal collection consists of the full-text electronic versions of journals.
- ?? E-journals provide an excellent source of journal articles and can be very useful when doing research.

2 History and Development

Vannevar Bush first described the "e-journal" in 1967 as a part of MEMAX proposal. Before that, on this matter, a project was taken by UNESCO in 1967 under the name of "to test networking computer as means of improving scientific communication." Their first product was published in the form of a e-journal in 1980 named MENTAL WORKLOAD. The first prototype e-journal named CHIMO was published in 1976 by the New Jersey Institute of Technology. From 1990, most of the e-journals came into the market and a few important were PSYCHOLOCO, OJCCT (Online journal of current clinical trial), etc⁵.

In recent years, a large number of online journals have been launched which have no print version at all. Medscape General Medicine Journals have been launched online and have no print version at all⁶. The Royal Society of Chemistry, U.K. has also started a new series of journals, which are available in electronic form only⁷.

The Journal of Chemical Education has also been made available on electronic form as JCE Internet ⁸. Many important journals such as Nature Online, Science Online, New England Journal of Medicine, British Medical Journal (eBMJ) etc are available online.

The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineering (IEEE) encodes all journals it publishes in markup language for online viewing. The Elsevier Science publishers have launched Science Direct to extend Web access to more than 1,100 journals published by them. American Institute of Physics (AIP) offers only online versions (i.e. access to online version without subscribing to print version) to many of its journals. American Physical Society (APS) makes electronic version of its journals available on the Internet at no additional cost to the print version subscribers ^{9, 10, 11}.

3 Access

Many organisations offer access to the e-journals through GATEWAY system by offering the facility to both browse and search by keywords, titles, abstracts, authors name, journal titles. Advanced searching including natural language searching and concept searching are also offered by some, e.g. one article can be searched by words of similar meaning and not only by spelling. Most of the systems take a simple approach to indexing based on retrieving words by title, abstract, journal title and publisher's name. Selected articles can be displayed on user's desktop, delivered by fax or e-mail.

4 Advantages

An e-journal provides following advantages:

- ?? Timely Publication
- ?? Ease in delivery
- ?? Incorporation of multimedia contents
- ?? Hyperlinking
- ?? Use of sophisticated searching strategies
- ?? Distribution and correspondence not limited by time & geographical boundary
- ?? Lower Subscription cost.

5 Issues

Despite the benefits, there are still many problems or the questions associated with publishing e-journals. Some of which are listed below:^{12,13}

- ?? Lack of originality or 'Primary' material on electronic media, since most of them are electronic versions of print material.
- ?? Sometimes there is a lack of referred material/articles on the Internet which again adds to the skepticism about its genuineness.
- ?? On Internet, because the volatility of the medium, papers published today may not be available for posterity at the website.
- ?? At the initial stage, many publishers offer journals free of cost on the web and then introduce a subscription fee for the service. This is inevitable since the publication has

to sustain itself, but tends to mislead the users since they are initially led to believe that the content is free.

- ?? The journal needs coordination among the members of the publishing body and actual proximity does help.
- ?? Cannot succeed unless it satisfies the motivations and goals of both authors and readers.
- ?? In the case of e-journals we cannot be very sure whether the articles are referred or not, though there are exceptions to this.
- ?? E-journals mainly emphasize information access instead of ownership. Here comes the question of protection of intellectual effort or copyright in order to preserve the originality of the work. The electronic miracle has made copyright infringement quite easy. With the electronic distribution of documents, the entire articles can be downloaded and imported into a reader's word processor. The potential for misuse is vast here. But certain commercial publishers do assent their entitlement to copyright and Intellectual Property Rights through various licensing policies.
- ?? Pricing; reliability and accessibility of data; electronic archiving and beneficial availability; full text features; currency of information are all burning issues in the field of library and information profession and pose challenges to present as well as future library professionals.

6 Conclusion

E-publishing has revolutionized the format of recorded knowledge in the same way as the invention of the printing press did. Electronic information sources are attracting reader's attention in today's networked environment. In this environment these e-journals open up many exciting opportunities and potential for libraries. Thus, we can say that libraries in no part of the world can afford to ignore e-journals.

The actual quality of the contents of e-journals has to be taken into account since electronic version may not be the exact replacement of their print form. Librarians should be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of e-journals and they should identify and balance the facts that would make e-journals a success or failure in their libraries. Thus, due to large scale use of Internet facility, the e-journals are fast becoming popular. The electronic journal facility is still in its infancy stage and "it has miles to go." The present century will be dominated by e-journal as far Information Service is concerned. Hence we can say that e-journal is "Coming of Age."

7 References

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