

Assessing the training needs of users in accessing electronic resources

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Abstract. One of the recent trends at the level of academic libraries has been the development of large electronic collections. Currently in many such institutions they almost reach the size of printed collections and many say that they will soon exceed them. In Romania, academic libraries have also started to give special attention to electronic documents and they provide at present access to a large range of electronic resources. However, research conducted by the author among the users of academic medical libraries in 2007, 2008 and 2011 revealed a low level of interest and usage of electronic information resources. An extended and more detailed investigation of these aspects was considered necessary and this paper presents the results of a 2013 research conducted among the users of two branches of the “Carol I” Central University Library of Bucharest, the Faculty of Political Sciences Library and the Faculty of Letters Library, and analyzes user behaviour in accessing library services and information resources.

Keywords. information users, electronic resources, user behaviour, academic libraries, Romania

1. Introduction

Access to information has undergone dramatic changes over the past two decades, speed, diversity and openness being some of the most important features that illustrate its evolution. New information and communication technologies underlying this development and their benefits are situated on several levels, from the diversification of document supports and means of accessing information to the improvement and strengthening of the relations between libraries and information services and users. Users are currently in search of more and better content and access (Neal & Jaggars, 2010) and electronic documents that can be accessed at any time and from anywhere, and this is exactly what libraries are currently trying to provide them with. Developing collections of electronic resources has been one of the directions that info-documentary structures have followed. And, if initially the number of

these documents was not very high in a library, currently, in many libraries, academic libraries in particular, electronic collections almost reach the size of printed collections and many say that they will soon exceed the printed collections. Another important direction on which libraries and information services have focused their efforts along with this increase of electronic resources was that of user training in order to access these information resources and to benefit more from the facilities they offer.

In Romania, academic libraries have also started to pay special attention to electronic documents and they currently provide access to a large range of electronic resources. They have recently established a consortium, which has more than 80 members, the Association of the Universities, Research and Development Institutes, and Central University Libraries in Romania / Asociația Universităților, a Institutelor de Cercetare - Dezvoltare și a Bibliotecilor Centrale Universitare din România – Anelis Plus. The acquisition of electronic information and documentation resources for supporting education, research and innovation and the development of a national repository of electronic documents are among the objectives of this national project. (Madge, 2013)

In the past seven years, one could notice a low level of interest and usage of electronic information resources and a greater preference for printed information resources among Romanian users. (Porumbeanu 2009a; Porumbeanu 2009b). At the level of users of medical academic libraries, one of the reasons for this limited use of electronic information resources was the lack of user training in accessing these resources and also the lack of actions on the library's part to promote them.

An investigation of users of other academic libraries in Romania was considered necessary in order to see if things are different or the same.

2. Research on user behaviour in accessing library services and information resources

User behaviour is influenced by the wide range of information resources available and the improved means of access. Users' information needs and preferences are different as well as the motivation behind their information queries, therefore their information practices are clearly different. In order to have a current perspective on academic library users and their behaviour and to collect users' suggestions for the improvement of information services, we conducted a survey among users from two branches of the largest academic library in Romania.

2.1. The objectives of the survey

The survey was undertaken in January-February 2013 and had three main goals:

- to determine the users' profile: information resources most frequently used; user preferences for either traditional or electronic information resources;

- to evaluate the need for user training on the use of electronic information resources;
- to collect users' suggestions for the improvement of information services provided by academic libraries.

2.2. The survey sample

We decided to focus on users from two branches of the “Carol I” Central University Library of Bucharest, a larger and a smaller one, the Library of the Faculty of Letters and the Library of the Faculty of Political Sciences, branches which are distinguished not only by the size of their collections and number of users, but also by their history.

2.3. The “Carol I” Central University Library in Bucharest

This Library was founded in 1895 and was the first large academic library in Romania to introduce an integrated automated system (VUBIS) in 1994; it has provided users with Internet access since 1995. It has 15 branches (faculty libraries). In 2012, the number of employees was 261 (186 in the Main Unit), of which 238 working as librarians. (Biblioteca Centrală Universitară “Carol I”, 2014)

2.4. The Library of the Faculty of Letters

The Library of the Faculty of Letters is one of the most important and one of the largest branches of the “Carol I” Central University Library in Bucharest and it was the first automated branch library in the complex. Its beginnings date back to the end of the 19th century (1892), but its current services are perfectly adapted to the information needs of 21st century users. It has two reading rooms, one for books and one for periodicals, and a direct access lending centre with automated operation (opened in 1996). Its Great Reading Room, which was recently rehabilitated, is included in the national heritage. (Istoric. Biblioteca Litere, 2015) According to the library's 2013 report, it holds a collection of 124,857 volumes. The 2013 statistics indicate a total of 1,595 registered users, with 56,113 volumes consulted and 31,234 user visits. (Tabele statistice sintetice privitoare la activitatea B.C.U. „Carol I” din București în anul 2013, 2014). The current number of employees is eight (librarians).

2.5. The Library of the Faculty of Political Sciences

The Library of the Faculty of Political Sciences is a new branch established in 2001 and integrated into the complex of the “Carol I” Central University Library in Bucharest. It is one of the most unique libraries in Europe, hosting/sheltering political literature and, especially, anti-communist literature. A number of donations from institutions, but also from professors and personalities of the Romanian culture, led to the establishment of an extremely valuable specialized collection in the Romanian, English and French languages. (Istoric. Biblioteca Facultății de Științe Politice, 2015). The reading room has thirty seats and is equipped with three workstations with wireless Internet. The

library also has a lending centre allowing for home study. According to the library's 2013 report, it holds a collection of 13,851 volumes. The 2013 statistics indicate a total of 424 registered users, with 17,488 volumes consulted and 5,010 user visits. (Tabele statistice sintetice privitoare la activitatea B.C.U. „Carol I“ din București în anul 2013, 2014). There are currently two librarians working within this branch.

2.6. Methods of data collection

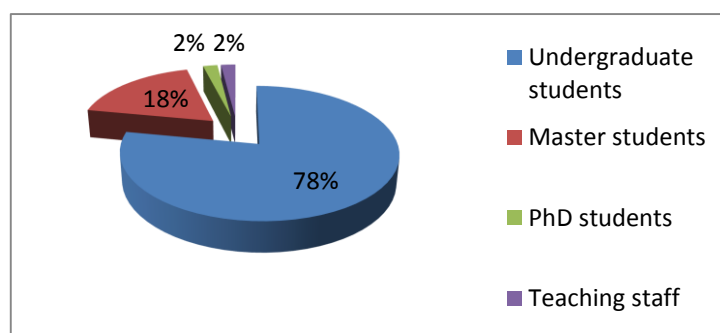
A questionnaire was developed based on previous questionnaires that had been used by the author to carry out user surveys. The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions. 160 questionnaires were distributed to the users in the two libraries mentioned above, 80 in each library. There was a reply rate of 88%.

3. Some key findings from the survey

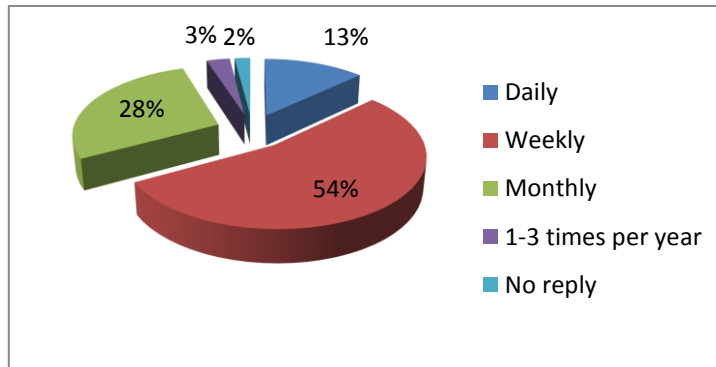
Some of the results from this survey are provided below.

Most of those who answered the questionnaire are undergraduate students (78%). We also had answers from master students (18%), PhD students (2%) and teaching staff (2%). Most of the participants in this survey (86%) are aged between 19 and 25 and 14% are aged over 25.

Even if the questionnaire was distributed to the users of the two branch libraries, who specialize in Romanian language and literature, communication sciences, European Studies, managerial assistance and political sciences and international relations, among them there were also users from other faculties, such as the faculty of foreign languages and literatures, and the faculty of journalism, who have access to all branch libraries of the “Carol I” Central University Library in Bucharest.

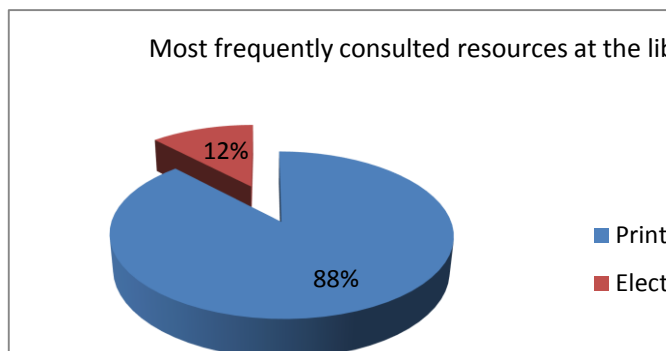


With reference to the frequency of library usage, most of the respondents come on a weekly basis (54%), then on a monthly basis (28%), on a daily basis (13%), and 1-3 times per year (3%).



These results show, as in the case of the previous research conducted in Romania by the author, that, despite of the fact that they have access to a large range of electronic information resources, most users came to the library to consult printed resources (63%), and only 18% come to consult electronic documents. 17% state that they come to consult both types of resources.

The majority of the survey participants indicated that they most frequently consult printed documents at the library (88%), with only 12% indicating electronic resources. When asked clearly about their preference, most participants chose printed information resources (75%), only 16% choosing electronic resources, 8% stating that they would be interested in using them, but they are not really familiar with them.



When asked to specify the reasons for which they **prefer** printed over electronic information resources, the participants in this study offered the following answers:

- those that **prefer** the printed information resources indicated:
 - It is easy and comfortable to use them
 - They are practical
 - You don't get so tired when using them

- More reliable information
- More information
- The pleasure of feeling a paper book (to turn over its sheets)
- those that **prefer** the electronic information resources indicated:
 - They are accessible from everywhere
 - Easier to use
 - Quick access to information
 - Time saving
 - No need to go to the library
 - Information is physically lighter

When asked to specify the reasons for which they **don't prefer** printed over electronic information resources, the survey participants offered the following answers:

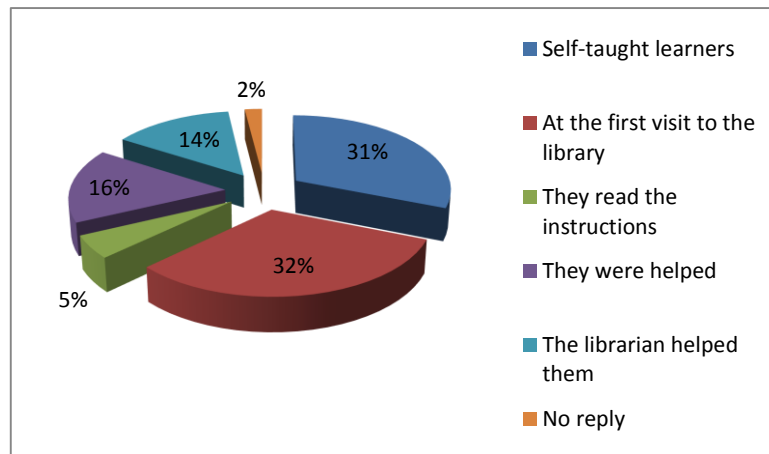
- those that **don't prefer** the printed information resources indicated:
 - Wasted time when trying to find the information needed
 - Difficult to find the necessary information
 - Some books have missing pages
 - You need to go to the library to consult them
 - Difficult to manipulate information
 - Lack of time for information searching
- those that **don't prefer** the electronic information resources indicated:
 - Difficulties sometimes in opening and reading these documents
 - The information is not always correct
 - Limited in number
 - They require a greater effort to focus on
 - They don't stimulate reading

Only 35% said that they had a difficulty with using the electronic information resources. Among the difficulties mentioned, there were: the electronic resources are not always available and they are not freely available, they are not familiar with these resources, they contain mistakes and incomplete information. 28% of users stated that they need the librarian's assistance for accessing electronic information resources.

When asked to specify the electronic information resources most frequently consulted by them, the survey participants answered: EBSCO, SCOPUS, Anelis, ProQuest, EU website, Internet, electronic journals, encyclopaedias.

Due to the low percentage of users that consult the electronic resources offered by the library and in order to find ways of increasing their use, we considered it very important to know how and from where the survey participants found out about electronic information resources. The answers are as follows: by themselves, at the library, on the Central Library's website, from librarians, colleagues, teaching staff, classes, the workplace.

As concerns the way in which users learned to consult electronic information resources, 31% stated that they were self-taught learners, 32% stated that they were trained at the first visit to the library, 5% read the instructions made available by the library, 16% stated that they were helped and 14% said that the librarian helped them when they asked.



An improved situation by comparison to the previous research could be noticed in regard to the users' participation in the training sessions organized by the library about the use of electronic resources. 63% of the respondents stated that they participated in such training sessions and 37% gave a negative answer. This explains the better results obtained when asked if they met difficulties in using the electronic resources. This indicates that, in the case of these users, the reason for the low usage of and preference for electronic resources is most likely related to the field of their specialization.

The participants' suggestions with regard to the electronic information resources and the use of the new technologies by the library in order to better meet their information needs included: more information about the electronic resources, more e-journals, more e-books, access to other databases, mobile access to the electronic resources, more computers in the reading room, better computers.

4. Conclusions

Based on the results obtained, a first remark is that users didn't understand quite well what electronic information resources are. Answers such as "the electronic resources are not always available" and "they are not freely available", given when they were asked about the difficulties met in using these resources, or the examples provided when they were asked to specify the electronic information resources they consult most frequently indicate the fact that they are not very familiar with these resources provided by the library and therefore they don't

use them to a very large extent. It is clear that, in recent years, Romanian libraries have focused more on informing users about the available electronic resources and have gotten more involved in their training on accessing them (as demonstrated by the results concerning the participation of users in training sessions - 63% in the case of this survey), but the results are far from being at the level of those from the Western countries. The existence of some compulsory courses on information literacy in all specialties and all study programmes (bachelor, master, PhD) – an idea we suggested and supported since 2008 in the Romanian info-documentary space – would significantly improve the situation and contribute to a change in the information practices of Romanian student users, meaning a higher orientation towards the use of electronic information resources. The specifics of the specialization of these users, which clearly influence their practices and preferences, should not be so large a share in respect of the type of resources accessed and preferred by users, as long as the libraries' offer of electronic resource is currently very diverse and covers all fields of study. The advantages offered by electronic resources were understood by Romanian users, however the percentage of those who have difficulties in accessing them is still high (35%), as well as of those who need the librarian's assistance to access the electronic resources (28%). Even if a small percentage of users (18%) come to the library to consult electronic documents, their answers suggest that better information and training on these resources, more e-journals and e-books, and, in our opinion, especially mobile access to these documents, would lead to a significant increase in the number of those who access them and in their abilities to use these electronic resources. The trend towards a more gradual adoption at an extended level of digital resources in their activities such as reading, studying, learning is however clear in the case of Romanian users, who are increasingly active in the digital environment and who increasingly interact with the library in the virtual space, i.e. through social networks.

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