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Focus Group Eye-Opener: What Users Want From Web-Based Library Services

Kiran Kaur

Unit of Library and Information Science, Faculty of Computer Science & Information Technology, University of Malaya, MALAYSIA

kiran@um.edu.my

There is substantial lack in research relating to the uptake of electronic information services offered via digital libraries. Research in digital libraries has mostly focused on areas such as design, architecture and functionality. Often referred to as the 'virtual', 'electronic' or digital' library, the academic libraries have experimented with technology innovations to provide seamless web-based library services to students and faculty members alike. Choi (2006), in his study on reference services in digital libraries, revealed that the availability of digital resources is not enough if not complimented by additional services to support other activities that occur during the information seeking process. Thus, this study is a description of how university students perceive digital library services, or the integration of digital library elements within the traditional or hybrid library services in academic libraries. These services were identified through a preliminary study that evaluated the digital services offered by twenty university libraries. Qualitative method of data collection using ten focus groups consisting of 81 postgraduate students was employed. Overall, the focus group discussions revealed many underlying issues that the users deemed important. These issues were rarely addressed by librarian mediated satisfaction surveys that are often employed to gauge customer feedback. Users almost unanimously request for more online help to assist in search for information and improve their information seeking skills. The results have implications for academic libraries providing digital services in a networked environment and recommendation made include providing better guidance to users, and solicit feedback to make evidence-based decisions on digital library service delivery.

Key words: Digital Library, academic library, web-based services, focus group interview