

Maria Grazia Melchionda

BP 100

Part 2

THE ROLE OF LIBRARIANS IN THE AGE OF THE INTERNET.

Critical account of strategies and sources used
in the literature review

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MA/MS Information Studies
Universities of Northumbria at Newcastle (UK) and Parma (I).

INTRODUCTION: THE TOPIC DEFINITION.

Reviewing the literature concerning the relations between the Internet and the librarian profession has proved to be a hard task. This consideration comes not only from an intrinsic difficulty of the object of study, but above all from the vast amount of literature published on the topic.

A tricky issue, referring to the broadness of the main subject, was the definition of the research topic: talking about the relations between the Internet and the librarian profession means also to refer to processes, functions, services, media and information resources: the library as a whole. Therefore, one of the most difficult step to take was the definition of the area of interest, in order to carry on a coherent literature review.

The focus thus has been put on the human side of the topic, on the perception and attitudes of librarians facing the impact of the Internet. Consequently, it has been possible to limit the search on the materials to that topic definition, with strategies as follows.

A first remark to this conduct must be made: unfortunately, who writes has realised only after some time that the definition of the topic had to be clearly made as a foundation of the task. As a matter of fact, the searching strategies that will be described later were really too general at the very beginning, with the result they gave too much “noise”.

SEARCH STRATEGIES

The first step taken, was checking out if bibliographies on the subject had been compiled, which could be used as a starting point.

For this purpose, a very first search in the OPACs of UNN and SBN was made, because of the accessibility of the interlibrary loan. As only one item was found, not even very recent, the examination was shifted to search other materials, in order from:

- OPACs and collective online catalogues;
- Indexing and abstracting databases
- Journals aggregators
- Internet resources.

As it was said above, the very first search strategies were maybe too general.

Searches with the terms:

- librarian* and Internet
- librarian* and “network* technolog*”

were made, and of course the materials found were really abounding. Following this first stage, searches were refined, adding terms like:

- librarian* and profession and Internet
- librarian* and role and Internet
- cybrarian* and Internet

which of course were defining the search.

After searching all the bibliographic sources available (see next section), the materials were all collected and examined.

Interlibrary loan and document delivery of the articles not available online in full text were made all along the making of the literature review. It must be said that in general all sources requested have revealed available, and this was not a point of trouble during the search.

SOURCES USED

As for the sources used, they were the most varied. All kind of bibliographic materials were taken into consideration, print as well as electronic and online sources.

Books: searches in the ready available OPACs for monographs were made. UNN interlibrary loan was most used for books written in English. The University of Padova Library System also revealed a good source of print material.

Indexing Databases: these were perhaps the sources the most referred to. As for information and library science, LISA (Library and Information Science Abstracts) and ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center) were intensively searched with the strategies explained above. INSPEC and CURRENT CONTENTS (multidisciplinary databases) were searched too, with good results.

Journal aggregators: they have been intensively used, most of all to retrieve articles found in the indexing databases. Independent word searches in full-text, or mixt, aggregators were conducted too, above all within EMERALD, EBSCO Social Science and INGENTA Journals. Clearly, often the results were overlapping to previously conducted searches.

Internet resources: search engines were used (Google, and the Librarians' Index to the Internet), which gave interesting results: librarians' and scholars' home pages and articles, conference proceedings and electronic journals not indexed were found in parallel to the more "official" bibliographic sources. The CURRENT CITES (an annotated bibliography of selected articles, books, and digital documents on information technology) database was searched, giving results not found in other databases.

SOURCES ANALYSIS

Once the first searches were made, it was time to start organizing and reading the materials found. First, some files were created, where the results from the indexing databases could be collected. The abstracts were examined, in order to decide which resources could be useful. Once the selection was made, a list of articles to read was prepared, and the articles retrieved via the full-text journal aggregators and the document delivery from libraries. At this subject, a very useful source for this literature review was the "Biblioteca dei servizi bibliografici" in Florence, a special library for librarianship and information studies, where a register user can ask for photocopies and interlibrary loans without paying fees.

Other interlibrary loans with UNN Distance Learning Services were activated for the books to read, and some photocopies of journal and books articles.

It must be said that, once the research was started, obviously more references were found while reading the sources selected, each time deciding which were interesting for the study or not.

The chosen materials were accurately read, notes and schemas were made from them, the most important concepts recorded and used.

A bunch of significant authors were identified, and their work more deeply collected and analysed.

From the first analysis, a list of main terms to work on was made:

Access to information
Access to materials
Change
Competencies
Computerized information storage and retrieval
Computerized information work
Hybrid / Digital / Virtual libraries
Information management
Innovativeness
Intermediaries
Job Skills
Reference Services
Search strategies
Technological Advancement
Training
User culture
User needs
User training

and after that, it was possible to define more clearly the research questions posed at the very beginning of the literature review.

Another problem was the redundancy of arguments and issues posed by authors: many authors were expressing more or less the same concepts, so it was necessary to categorize them under common denominators.

ORGANIZATION OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW.

After the literature was collected, plenty of reading was made before making clear the research questions. When the scopes and objects of the study to conduct had been refined, the research questions naturally led the searcher to build up and organize the review.

It was divided into four main sections, the first giving a general overview of the Internet to put the reader into the topic, the following three exploring and giving sense to the research questions, with an introduction and a brief conclusion resuming the main ideas leading the review.

The study grew on itself as it was carried out, with new ideas coming out as it was advancing.

References to authors' ideas were made in the text with the family name and the publication year, and the page number when they were punctual (put in inverted commas). It was decided to use footnotes each time there was something to add to the main text.

In the bibliography listed at the end, the reader can find the complete references to authors cited in the text, and also some more works which were read but not cited. It was decided not to list in the bibliography plenty of sources collected and annotated, but not really used in the text (for example those referring to issues already treated and employed).

All the references are given in a consistent style.

EVALUATION

The difficult task of organizing a subject which was slipping away from every side because of its complexity, dimensions, features and issues involved, has finally come to an end.

The impression is that sticking to the research questions has proved to be the only way to contain the task under control. Unfortunately, this awareness has revealed a little late, maybe too much strengths have been dissipated in general searches and collecting of materials not really sticking to the purposes.

But this was not even a waste of time: it has allowed the searcher to acquire familiarity with the bibliographic sources, and most of all to clarify to herself the focus of the work to do, and to define more clearly the field of study.

As for the sources used, they were the most appropriate to study the subject, even if it was necessary to apply strict evaluation criteria to Web sources which were found almost “by chance”: when this happened, careful controls were made on the author’s career or on the veracity of the citations and the materials presented.

Maria Grazia Melchionda
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